

African Rhino Specialist Group

Martin Brooks

For the Triennium 1991-1993

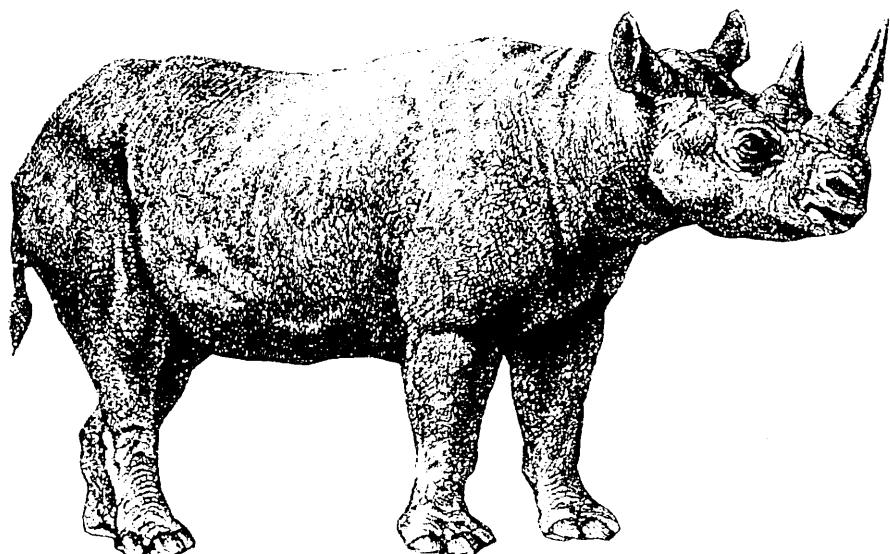
The decision taken in July 1991 to split IUCN's African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group into separate groups for elephants and rhinos has provided renewed focus on the more endangered rhinos and allowed a more vigorous assessment of their status and the formulation of action plans for their survival.

The newly constituted African Rhino Specialist Group (ARSG) comprised 25 members, seven of whom represented the range states of Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Given the continued decline of the endangered black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) and the critical status of the northern white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*), it was important to translate the Group's mission of promoting the conservation of Africa's rhinos into effective conservation management action. To achieve this, emphasis was placed on facilitating, or assisting with, the design of appropriate rhino conservation plans that could be used to raise the funding required for their implementation.

The first meeting of the ARSG was convened in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, in November 1992. Information and ideas were exchanged on a wide range of issues, ranging from captive breeding and genetics to a variety of fairly controversial alternative strategies, such as dehorning safaris, trophy hunting, and possible scenarios for legalizing trade.

The main aims of the meeting were to review the status and trends of the rhino populations in Africa and to identify the priority conservation projects requiring international support in advance of UNEP's Rhino Range States and Donors meeting.

The black rhinoceros, estimated at 65,000 in 1970, continued to decline from 3,450 to 2,475 between 1991 and 1992, with only five populations of more than 100 animals remaining. Fairly large, viable populations survived in South Africa (819), Namibia (489), Zimbabwe (425), Kenya (414), and Tanzania (127), with only South Africa and Namibia having experienced increases in recent years. The remaining range states had populations of only 50 or less. The northern white rhinoceros was



restricted in the wild to a single population of 31 animals in Zaire and a small, non-bred, captive population. The southern white rhinoceros (*C. s. simum*) continued to increase, largely due to sound conservation management in South Africa, where more than 90% of the population occurs. Overall numbers increased from about 4,600 in 1987 to 5,800.

In an effort to focus international attention on the populations most important for the survival of the six recognized subspecies of white and black rhinos, a rating system was developed to identify the key populations. This was based on population size, the significance of the population in conserving the relevant subspecies, and the likelihood of protection measures being effective. This resulted in the identification of 25 "key" populations (critically important) and a further 29 "important" populations (extremely valuable) (for details see *Pachyderm* 16). It was felt that if all else fails, the "key" populations must be given sufficient support to ensure their long-term survival.

The critical situation of Africa's rhinos and the limited extent of funds potentially available from the international community required the group to be very selective when identifying priority projects, but it was possible to identify 25 "priority" and 12 "important" projects from 10 range states, most of which went before UNEP's funding meeting for consideration.

Five projects were identified for special ARSG attention during 1993, and good progress was achieved through the involvement of Group members as indicated below.

- A conservation plan for the protection of the last remaining population of the West African black rhinoceros (*D. b. longipes*) in Cameroon was developed at a workshop in Garoua in June 1993, and some progress was made toward securing financial support for its implementation.
- A policy for the management of black rhino (*D. b. minor* and *D. b. michaeli*) in Tanzania was drawn up at a workshop held in Arusha in May 1993, and the foundations were laid for drafting a detailed management plan. International funds were provided for a rhino coordinator.

- International funding was secured for the employment of a scientific officer for the ARSG.
- A workshop to draft a handbook on survey techniques for African rhinos has been planned.
- A study on the economics of the trade in rhino products has been funded and is under way.

ARSG members also played a significant role at the Kenyan Rhino Metapopulation Workshop, held in Nairobi in November 1992, which assessed the established conservation strategy and recovery plan and provided recommendations.

An important milestone was UNEP's Rhino Range States and Donors meeting held in Nairobi in June 1993. The aim of the meeting was to bring together representatives of the range states and major donors in an attempt to secure additional funds. The procedure for identifying priority projects, developed by the ARSG, was adopted and appeared to assist the donor agencies and countries in their deliberations. Since then, many requests have been received for project details and copies of the slide presentation given by the ARSG chairman. Contacts made at this meeting resulted in funds being made available for a number of projects.

The next ARSG meeting, planned for May 1994 in Mombasa, Kenya, will assess the progress made with the many identified priority projects and the program aimed at eliminating the illegal trade in rhino horn; will consider the Group's role at the forthcoming CITES Conference of Parties; and will review the status of all the rhino populations in Africa. The employment of a scientific officer for the Group will provide more support for the range states, facilitate the development of additional action plans and management guidelines, and allow for the review of critical technical documents and issues.

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Species

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