

Asian Rhino Specialist Group

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Triennial Report

The Asian Rhino Specialist Group (which designates itself the AsRSG to distinguish its acronym from the African Rhino Specialist Group which AsRSG designates the AfRSG) has been active for the last 10 years but with an increase during the 1991-1993 Triennium as the conservation crisis for these species intensifies.

The major activities and accomplishments of the AsRSG during the triennium include:

1991

A follow-up workshop to a PHVA workshop for Javan rhino in 1989 is conducted in Bogor, Indonesia. The workshop was co-sponsored by the AsRSG and PHPA to develop the Indonesian Rhino Conservation Strategy Workshop.

1992

The first Program Officer is appointed for AsRSG with financial support from the International Rhino Foundation (IRF).

The AsRSG Program Officer represented the AsRSG and the IUCN/SSC at the preparatory UNEP Rhino Conference.

As a result of that Conference, the AsRSG initiated the development of a Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project for \$2 million to assist implementation of the conservation strategy for rhinos in Indonesia and Malaysia.

1993

The AsRSG Program Officer assists with Preparation of Rhino Conservation Action Plans for Malaysia and Indonesia through a grant from UNEP.

The AsRSG participates in the full UNEP Rhino Conservation Conferences in Nairobi, Kenya.

In preparation for and as a product of this UNEP Rhino Conference, the AsRSG develops a continuing process of compiling overviews of priority actions and required funds for Asian Rhino Conservation through the national rhino conservation action plans. This process will be the basis of a strategic funding plan developed by the AsRSG.

AsRSG continues to help with development of the GEF Project and Grant of \$2 million on southeast Asian rhinos.

A full meeting of the AsRSG is conducted at Jaldapara, West Bengal, India.

Representatives from 10 countries including the 4 major range states for Asian rhinos participated in these sessions: India, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore, Kenya, United States, United Kingdom, Switzerland. Unfortunately, representatives from Myanmar and Vietnam were unable in the end to attend. Major objectives of these sessions were to:

1. Review the status of all 3 species of Asian rhinos and confirm the latest estimates of numbers in the wild.
2. Assess the activities and accomplishments of the AsRSG over the last 6 years and develop priorities and directions for the next 3 years.
3. Revise the AsRSG Action Plan which was originally developed in 1987.
4. Recommend Changes in AsRSG Structure and Function for the 1994-1996 Triennium.
5. Prepare a First Draft of Southeast Asian Rhino GEF Project Program Document which will provide U.S. \$2 million for rhino conservation in Indonesia and Malaysia over the next 2 years.
6. Commence formulation of a Strategic Funding Plan for Asian Rhino Conservation.

Table 1. Asian Rhino Conservation Major Range States

Current Rhino Populations				
	<i>Rhinoceros unicornis</i>	<i>Rhinoceros sondaicus</i>	<i>Dicerorhinus sumatrensis</i>	Total
India	1,318-1,586			1,318-1,586
Nepal	415-440			415-440
Indonesia		~ 50	233-314	283-364
Malaysia			135-200	135-200
Vietnam		< 50	?	< 50
Laos			?	?
Thailand			10+?	10+?
Myanmar			10+?	10+?
Total	1,733-2,026	< 100	388-534	2,221-2,660

7. Initiate a population and habitat viability analysis PHVA process for *Rhinoceros unicornis*.

The AsRG provides technical and financial assistance with Population and Habitat Viability Analyses (PHVAs) for Sumatran rhino in Indonesia and Indian rhino in India.

The latest estimates of Asian rhino numbers are presented in Table 1. The most notable and unsettling fact from these figures is the revelation that numbers of the Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) have now declined to no more than, and probably fewer than, 500. Previous estimates had been 700-1,000. The decrease is attributable mostly to a 50% reduction in the numbers estimated for Sumatra in Indonesia. Although the Javan rhino is fewer in number and the African black rhino has perhaps decreased more precipitously over the last 10 years, the combination of low numbers

and decline rate may render the Sumatran rhino now the most critically endangered of all rhino species on the planet.

There is confirmation from the latest transect and photographic surveys in Ujung Kulon that numbers of the Javan rhino are approximately 50 as previous censuses and estimates had contended.

The Indian/Nepalese rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) remains the success story among Asian rhinos with the total population in India at about 1,450 and in Nepal at about 450. However, levels of poaching in both countries are significant and intensifying. In Assam, still the stronghold for this species, poaching in most of the protected areas for the species is estimated at around 5% per year. This level is approximately equivalent to the annual rates of population growth so that any further intensification will cause decline of the population.

Indeed, such decline has already occurred in at least two areas, with the population in Laokhwa being completely annihilated and the population in Manas reduced by at least 50%.

A major concern of the AsRSG is that the Asian rhino species do not receive their fair share of attention or resources from the international rhino conservation community. It was emphasized that despite the drastic decline in African black rhino over the last decade, the numbers of that species was probably still no lower than the total of all three Asian rhino species combined.

Traditionally the AsRSG, like other Specialist Groups, has concentrated on technical information and advice. In the future the AsRSG aspires to assume a more active role in advocacy and fund-raising for Asian rhino conservation. Toward this end, the AsRSG is initiating a newsletter to be published quarterly. The first issue is intended for the end of March 1993.

Objectives for the 1994-1996 IUCN Triennium include:

- Initiation of newsletter. It is intended that the first issue will be published by the end of June 1994.
- Revision of the AsRSG Action Plan. A draft will be prepared by May 1994 with publication of the final Plan expected by mid-August 1994. The Plan will still be based on maintenance or recovery to viable population levels in demographic and genetic terms.
- Activation of GEF Project for SE Asian Rhino. It is expected that funds will be available and activities initiated by September 1994.

- Development of a Strategic Funding Plan. As a first step toward development of a strategic funding plan, the AsRSG devoted time to improving definition of projects and estimation of their costs. The total cost estimated is approximately U.S. \$57,000,000 with \$35,000,000 required from external donors by the range states.
- Better publicity for the plight of Asian rhinos.
- Establishment of a Secretariat for the AsRSG. This process has largely been initiated with the appointment and operation of the Program Officer. The addition of the second program officer and initiation of the newsletter will advance this objective.

Anyone desiring further information on Asian rhino conservation or the work of the AsRSG is requested to contact the AsRSG program Officer, Dr. Tom Foose, International Rhino Foundation, 85 East Gay Street, Suite 603, Columbus, OH, 43215, U.S.A., Fax: 1-614-228-7210, Tel. 1-614-228-0402.

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