

Patrolling the Game Parks

Extracts from the first newsletter of Zambia's Save the Rhino Trust

WE are all aware that the best way to deal with poaching is to get two or three task forces into the field. The main reason for the *Save the Rhino Trust* is to raise funds for this purpose. However as you will see from this newsletter we have not just sat back and waited for funds to materialize.

We have received reports on four extensive patrols made deep into the national parks and adjoining game management areas. These patrols have found 21 recently killed rhino carcasses and 50 elephant carcasses. Much of the poaching is being carried out in a big way by gangs who enter the area, kill or maim the elephant or rhino and leave the dead animals with the tusks/horns intact for collection later. Meat is not the important factor — showing that it is not small-time subsistence poaching by local villagers but big commercial business.

During these four patrols the anti-poaching unit has been responsible for the recovery of 39 elephant tusks, and two rhino horns. Twenty-four arrests have been made and seven firearms have been confiscated.

At the same time security checks at border posts and road blocks have been stepped up. In one swoop 71 rhino horns were seized.

Meanwhile Honorary Wildlife Rangers (unpaid volunteers) in conjunction with the wildlife Department have also been achieving good results. During 1979 one Honorary ranger based in Chipata was responsible for the recovery of more than 100 tusks and 18 rhino horns and made over 200 arrests.

Penalties too light

Most sentences imposed in our courts are certainly not a deterrent to poaching. As a result of some of the Unit's arrests, hunters and procurers are being fined in the region of K550 each (about \$680) but in all cases so far firearms are being returned to the owners. For example a hunter pleaded guilty to the charge of killing 15 elephants and one rhino for his employer in the national park. They were fined K500 and K660 respectively and the 12 bore shotgun and .375 rifle were returned to them. Five of the 30 tusks they had poached were not recovered. These five tusks would fetch about K1,500, so they will still be better off by K2,000 once the ivory is sold and their

ALL three Asian species of rhino are endangered. Nowhere is there a large continuous population. This fragmentation puts surviving populations at greater risk — both from man-made disturbance and from the heightened chance of genetic degeneration and failing reproduction.

fines paid.

Honorary rangers in the Choma district have been very active during the year and have secured 165 convictions for poaching offences — the average fine has been K47 (or \$58).

As a result of representation by the Society and WWF, the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources has now banned all hunting of rhino in Zambia. We would like to congratulate the Minister, Mr. Clement Mwananshiku, on his recent press conference in Holland in which he left the world in no doubt about his policy. In fact the rhino has been on the list of protected game animals since 1972 and since then rhino-hunting licences have been issued at the discretion of the Minister only. This has amounted to about 15 rhino being legally killed per year and would constitute a rational policy of wildlife utilisation if poaching were under control. This, of course, is not the case.

Sumatran rhinoceros — *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*

Population: under 300

The Sumatran rhino is a forest dweller adapted to mountainous areas. For intrinsic behavioural reasons it has the lowest population density of any rhino — one per 4,000 hectares. Habitat protection must therefore be scaled accordingly.

In peninsular Malaysia a few Sumatran rhinos still exist in Taman Negara National Park, in Sungai Dasun game reserve and in Endau Rompin, a proposed national park. Deforestation has so reduced numbers that in some cases there may no longer be a viable breeding population. A core area of Endau Rompin, previously part of the rhino range, was logged in 1977/78. A census in March 1979 found that rhinos now avoided this area — and there were no signs of breeding. In Sabah (Borneo) rhino tracks have been reported and a survey is needed.

In Thailand expanding human popula-

tion, armed poachers, political unrest and trade in rhino parts have combined to reduce the Sumatran rhino population to perhaps no more than 10 animals scattered throughout five different regions. Only immediate and intensive conservation measures can hope to avert extinction.

In Sumatra (Indonesia) the Gunung Leuser complex of reserves is known to have a viable rhino population, Kerinci-Seblat, a forest area of about 1,000,000 hectares in central Sumatra, might be of similar importance. A survey here is urgent.

Javan rhinoceros — *Rhinoceros sondaicus*

Population: c. 50

The Javan rhino is better adapted to the forested plains and hills than to the higher mountain ranges. For this reason it has everywhere been wiped out except in Ujong Kulon nature reserve, a semi-island on the western tip of Java. Here under close protection backed by IUCN/WWF, the species has during the last 10 years doubled in numbers to about 50.

But survival based upon a single population is precarious. Once rhino numbers have become too large for this reserve, a breeding nucleus should be transferred to a second area — preferably in Sumatra.

Great Indian rhinoceros — *Rhinoceros unicornis*

Population: 1,100-1,500

The Great Indian rhinoceros lives in fairly open country in India and Nepal. Confined to two largish populations and five smaller ones, local overcrowding is sometimes a problem as habitat is eroded by increased seasonal flooding caused by deforestation at higher altitudes. Kaziranga National Park is a case in point. A pilot translocation project could here help to relieve overcrowding.

Other dangers to these populations include contact with domestic buffaloes (bringing heightened risk of epidemics) and the loss of food supplies through the spread of two exotic plants, *Eichornia crassipes* and *Mikania scandens*. There is also a problem of poaching. Indian rhino horn is more highly prized than African because it is rarer. In early 1978 Bengal wholesalers were paying \$875 a kilo.

This brief account of the status of Asian rhinos is largely based upon the August 1979 report of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group. The report was prepared by Professor R. Schenkel and Dr. L. Schenkel.

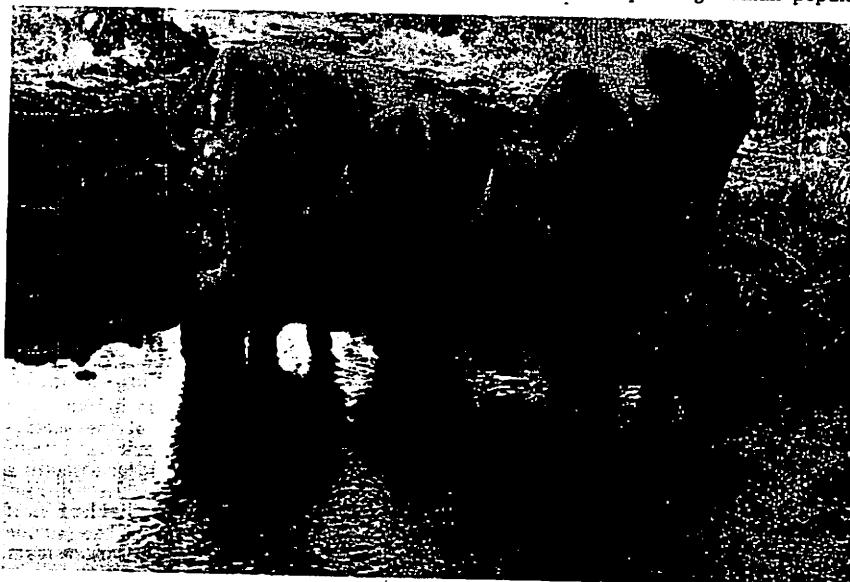
Civil war hits

Extracts from a letter to the Secretary General of CITES from the Ministry of Tourism, Chad

AS A DIRECT result of the civil war in Chad the country's ivory exports are excessive and mainly illegal. Unless this flow of ivory is rapidly halted the elephant population will disappear completely.

Situated in the main battle zone all national parks and reserves have been abandoned since February 1979 when the rebellion began. All wildlife species have been heavily poached by the contending forces and the local inhabitants.

Elephants have suffered the most. Several tons of ivory have been traded illegally — although certain people have managed to obtain "certificates of origin". There are no longer any controls as the



THE three survivors of Meru's white rhinos taking water.