

In Zambia the Wildlife Conservation Society's monitoring of the Kafue lechwe (following the closing of the Kafue dam) shows a significant decline in numbers over the last seven years, and Richard Schuster, who studied their social behaviour and reproduction, found evidence at the end of 1982 of reduced mating seasonality, which he attributed to interference with the natural flood regime.

Another Group member, Indra Sharma, has studied the competition in the Indian Thar desert between wild herbivores and villagers' livestock, and concludes that nilgai, gazelles and especially blackbuck suffer malnutrition and contract diseases as a result of this. He reports progress on the anti-poaching front through collaboration between the Rajasthan Forest Department and Bishnoides community leaders, who protect wildlife on religious principle.

Asian Rhinos

Because neither the Indian nor the Nepali members could attend the meeting of the Asian Rhino Group in Kuala Lumpur in June/July last year, discussions were concentrated on the Javan and Sumatran rhinos and on the two countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, which still certainly harbour one or both species. The resulting Action Plan therefore is confined to these two in Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo/Kalimantan and Sumatra.

In Peninsular Malaysia Sumatran rhino numbers are estimated at 50-75 of which 20-25 are in Endau Rompin, which it is hoped the Johore State Government will soon declare a protected area. The second largest population is in Taman Negara, the national park where the estimate is 8-12. (Since the Group met the project to build a dam on the Tembeling river that would flood a large area of this national park has fortunately been abandoned).

The Action Plan calls for much survey work and monitoring in all Sumatran rhino areas, and the prevention of poaching. In Sabah the big threat is the fact that the Sabah Foundation has a logging concession for practically the whole Wilabukan rhino range, and it is urgent to try to save some of this and also to find patterns of logging to which the rhinos can adapt. The Plan also calls for surveys of some remote unsurveyed areas that might still harbour rhinos.

For the Javan rhino, still only known in one population of about 60 animals in the Ujung Kulon Reserve where recently at least five animals died of an epidemic disease, the first priority is to establish a second population in Wai Kambas, and to get the area, which also harbours elephant, tapir, tiger, several primates and sambar, declared a national park. A feasibility study is required. The Plan calls for continued monitoring of the Ujung Kulon population with special emphasis on reproduction, the production of a vegetation map of the park, a study of possible ecological competition (mainly in food) between rhino and banteng, and some vegetation management for the rhinos in selected areas.

Snakes

The Snake Specialist Group, chairman Rom Whitaker, held its first meeting in November 1982 at the Madras Snake Park. India dominated the regional focus of the meeting, quite appropriately as the heaviest exploitation of snakes has occurred there, but many of the recommendations are equally applicable to other countries, especially the protection of adequate habitat which was widely stressed. Through lack of data much less is known about which snake species are threatened and how to help them than about conspicuous reptiles such as crocodiles and sea turtles, and this points to the second need: for studies on status and biology.