

## News from Specialist Groups

### MAMMALS

#### African Elephant and Rhinos

Dr David Cumming, of the Zimbabwe Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management, has succeeded Dr David Western as Chairman of the Group.

*Pachyderm 4*, the Group's Newsletter, edited by Lucy Vigne, is a very meaty 20-page production. The retiring Chairman's Report reviews the Group's aims, activities and achievements since it was started in 1982. He reckons that they have managed 'to monitor regularly the numbers and distribution of elephants and rhinos and the trade in their products, and to assess the patterns and causes of change'. Elephants and rhinos, he says, are fast losing ground outside the protected areas, and 'more worrying still, they are also disappearing within their allocated realm: the 1.2m square kilometres of Africa enclosed within some 360 conservation areas'.

Estimates suggest that the 1983 ivory export 'may have reached 1000 tonnes, representing 90,000 or more dead elephants. This is almost twice the 5% annual off-take that the million or fewer elephant can sustain, and sufficient to halve the population in less than 10 years'.

However, rhinos have fared far worse: black rhinos down from c. 13,000 in 1980 to under 9000 in 1984, northern white from 700 to under 30 in the same time, and now (December 1984) to a confirmed 10-13 in Zaire's Garamba National Park. Only the southern whites have increased in recent years: from 3000 to 4000.

Wasteful commercial hunting is the main cause: 'and the close correspondence in the disappearance of both points to a common commercial trade'. Sound hunting methods could more than double the profitability to African governments and traders alike, and at the same time improve the status of the populations.

In another article, on Managing African Elephants for Ivory Production, Tom Pilgram and David Western discuss several strategies. The

ideal one is to allow only natural mortality; this combines the best protection against extermination and the greatest ivory production per elephant, but it would be almost impossible to enforce. The compromise they suggest is a combination of limited tusk numbers and limited minimum weights. The present situation is 'the worst' of those examined. It is in the best long-term interests of all involved in the ivory trade to replace it.

The Group's follow-up of the Wankie meeting's recommendations has had some success, a notable one being the banning of rhino horn imports by Singapore, which will soon sign CITES. On the difficult Garamba situation, where the last viable population of northern white rhinos is down to 10-13, the Group urged the necessity of captive breeding and the need for a high-level IUCN delegation to put this to President Mobutu of Zaire.

[This has now taken place and unfortunately the reply was that for political reasons it would be impossible to authorise the capture and removal abroad of any of Zaire's rhinos even for a captive breeding project. The President pledged himself to see that the situation in the Garamba and the status of the guards were greatly improved so that the rhinos could be properly guarded.]

In his parting words Dr Western is emphatic that the Group's task is 'to monitor status, pinpoint problems, recommend practical solutions, coordinate programmes and keep track of how successful they are'. He is equally emphatic that its task is not either conservation or political activism, which are the function of national and international agencies. This may be frustrating for members, he says 'but we cannot credibly do both'. If IUCN is unable to respond to urgent calls for action — and 'it took nearly five years to launch a conservation programme (for the northern white rhino) by which time numbers had dwindled from 700 to under 30' — the Group must approach other international and national organisations directly.

Other articles include a survey of Trends in Key African Elephant Populations by Iain Douglas-Hamilton (more secure in Zimbabwe, South Africa

and Botswana, but declining elsewhere); Rhino status in Namibia, Poaching in the CAR, and Rhinos in Captivity in which Brian Bertram describes the situation as 'very precarious', gives reasons and suggests what must be done. An account of the KREMU (Kenya Rangeland Ecological Monitoring Unit) activities gives the results of the 1983 surveys of both rhinos and elephants — elephants 23,534 compared with 43,979 in 1977 and rhinos 76 compared with 1646 in 1977.

## Antelopes

The Chairman, Dr Richard Estes, reports in the September 1984 *Gnusletter* that the antelope survey undertaken by the Group as its first major project is nearly completed. Reports have been received about the conservation status and trend of most of the readily seen species in over 80% of the African and Asian countries where antelopes occur. More antelopes are endangered in the Saharan region, together with the bordering Sahel, Sudanese and Somali arid zones, than anywhere else, and effective conservation measures are urgently needed.

In a report on the mountain nyala in Ethiopia's Bali National Park, Chris Hillman writes of seeing as many as 555 animals in one afternoon in an area of 17 sq km near the park headquarters — up from 183 at the end of the dry season. Nowhere else are they found in such numbers — the result, he says, of 12 years of protection and the exclusion of domestic animals.

In Botswana the Kalahari Ungulate Movement is recording only about 10% of the wildebeest numbers recorded last year. The veterinary fences coupled with the drought probably claimed 50,000 animals last year alone.

## Bats

In the September 1984 issue of *Bats*, the Chiroptera Group's newsletter, Elizabeth D. Pierson reports the 'surprise move' of the Queensland Government in removing four flying fox species from the protected lists. The species are already suffering 'a mass slaughter' (despite protection) under the mistaken belief of fruit-growing farmers that they rob orchards of fruit. In fact fruit plays a very minor role in their diet; they are primarily blossom feeders, and are major and essential pollinators of native forest trees. The threat now, she says, is of possible extinction.

## Canids

The Chairman, Dr David Macdonald, writes: 'We have continued active exploration of the practicalities of launching a project on the Simien foxes (jackals) of Ethiopia. Two options are emerging, although hurdles (largely financial) remain. We may be able to link the project with a lectureship in ecology at Addis Ababa University, and/or we may be able to organise a studentship for a postgraduate to work on the foxes. Either way, the costs (especially transport) of working in Ethiopia are proving difficult to overcome.

'A Group meeting will be held in Edmonton on August 17 during the Theriological Congress. We have received many offers of papers, especially from North American researchers, and the session promises to be fruitful. We aim to combine papers presented at this meeting with those of our earlier meeting and thereby push the Canid Conservation Dossier closer to formal publication'.

## Cats

In *Cat News* No. 2, Chairman Peter Jackson urges that the Conservation/Recovery plans Group members are preparing for their Conservation Strategy and Action Plan should be drawn up at the level of populations, 'because only at that level are the real problems and opportunities apparent'. Other main features to be covered include control of trade and management of large cats that are prone to become pests in areas surrounding reserves. Tigers, for example, which take livestock and occasionally humans, 'not only create anti-conservation sentiment among the communities involved, but arouse doubts in the minds of political leaders and the public — including potential donors'. Dr David Smith is drafting for the Group a Cat Conservation Manifesto, that incorporates basic guidelines for dealing with these problems.

Writing of Mrs Indira Gandhi and the deep shock felt at her death, the Chairman says, 'No other political leader has made such a major contribution to conservation of wild cats as she did in sponsoring Project Tiger and providing constant support and interest'. When WWF in 1972 offered \$1,000,000 for the tiger she responded immediately, established a Task Force and made Dr Karan Singh, one of her most dynamic cabinet ministers, responsible for Project Tiger when it was launched in April 1973. The Government invested large sums of money; the