

## News from Specialist Groups

### MAMMALS

#### African Elephant and Rhino

In his Chairman's Report, published in *Pachyderm*, the Group's newsletter, Dr David Cumming defines their function as that of 'providing good information on the status and trends of elephant and rhino populations in Africa and stimulating the research and analyses necessary to generate new ideas and new approaches to the problems'.

With the change of Chairman — David Cumming has taken over from Dr David Western — the Group's headquarters have moved from Nairobi to Harare, in Zimbabwe, where the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management has provided office space. The Foundation to Save African Endangered Wildlife, SAVE, has provided funds for a secretary and office expenses, and also equipped the office with microcomputers, printers and an electronic typewriter which can be linked to the microcomputer. Wildlife Conservation International has taken on the costs of publishing and distributing *Pachyderm*; WWF is funding the Group's newly appointed Scientific/Executive officer and some travel, which is also partly funded by UNEP through IUCN. All this must make the AERSG one of the best funded groups in the whole SSC.

The Scientific/Executive Officer who started work in October, is Raoul du Toit, a Zimbabwe citizen and graduate of the University of Zimbabwe with a Master's degree from Cape Town. His scientific work for the Group will include the taxonomy of black rhino subspecies; the genetics of isolated populations; the possibilities for cost-effective monitoring systems for Selous, Luangwa and Zambezi Valley; the legal and administrative aspects of ivory harvesting and trade in Central Africa; elephant populations and their conservation in West Africa.

The Group's current Action Plan has Field Priorities and Trade Priorities. The former cover:

forest elephant — census work;  
 black rhino — encouraging national strategies in Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Namibia;  
 examining the black rhino populations' subspecific status;  
 desert elephant and rhino — monitoring their status and urging conservation action;  
 Central African elephant and rhinos — promoting aerial census in the CAR and investigating the adequacy of the legal base for ivory control;  
 Selous Game Reserve, Luangwa and Garamba National Parks — full census of elephants and rhinos.

Trade priorities include the movement of rhino horn in Africa and surveys of the carving industries.

Items in the Action Plan now under way include a study of forest elephants in Gabon by Richard Barnes. Iain Douglas-Hamilton has completed an aerial census of the CAR which shows greatly depleted elephant populations and black rhino absent where they were formerly abundant.

Main articles in *Pachyderm* include a detailed account by Esmond Bradley Martin of Malawi's ivory carving industry and a report by C.A. Spinage on the elephants of Burkino-Faso (formerly Upper Volta), one of the world's poorest nations with a growing human population, but whose official policy is to preserve the remaining elephants — which, says the author, can only be done with outside financial help. On rhino poaching in Zimbabwe, Dick Pitman and Glen Tatham report that Zimbabwe's black rhinos, the second largest population in Africa and the only one to have increased in recent years, are being poached: 25 have been killed in a series of well-armed raids from Zambia, in every case the horn being removed and the carcass left to rot. The Government has reacted speedily with increased and extra police and other armed forces; arrests have been made, weapons confiscated and prison sentences imposed. But, say the authors, there has been no concerted effort to help Zimbabwean investigators in tracking down and arresting the Zambian links in the chain in spite of some very

high level diplomatic and other approaches — with rhino horn prices soaring over the \$10,000 per kg mark in its ultimate markets, high risks can bring high rewards; the key lies in money, manpower and international pressure on end users.'

## Antelopes

*Gnusletter* for May 1985 includes a summary of and excerpts from Mark Stanley Price's reports on the three species in Oman for the Group's Antelope Inventory: Arabian oryx *Oryx leucoryx*, — two herds released into the wild are still under continuous observation and doing well; — Arabian or mountain gazelle *Gazella gazella cora* — populations are at a satisfactory level on a local scale; and goitred gazelle or rhim *G. subgutturosa marica* — probably threatened, especially by oil exploration and associated roads etc through their habitat.

In China, says the Chairman, Richard D. Estes, 'prospects of finding out more about the biology and status of the Tibetan antelopes suddenly look brighter' with the arrival of Dr George Schaller, at the request of the People's Republic of China, to make a survey of the wildlife of this inaccessible country.

In Algeria K.de Smet, after a field trip to the south, where he found gazelle 'very common', casts doubt on the validity of the subspecies *G. dorcas massaesyla*. He urges that conservation measures should not wait any longer.

From Zambia Richard Jeffery reports good news about antelopes in the Kafue National Park — 'well established populations of yellow-backed and blue duikers and steinbok'; sable and roan antelopes and Lichtenstein's hartebeest all very common; and the commoner antelopes 'here in abundance'.

*Gnusletter* for September carries depressing news from Niger, culled from John Newby's letters, about Sahel antelopes. Thanks to over-hunting, dama gazelle, is a very threatened species, and the only relatively safe herds are those tucked away in atypical mountain country. Drought is pushing the animals into the agricultural belt, where they are soon hunted out.

In the May *Gnusletter* he wrote: 'Short of a miracle we will lose the scimitar-horned oryx in the next couple of years. There is even a chance it

has already gone'. In Chad the main oryx herds, if any remain, are smack-bang in the middle of the no-man's land that separates the Government forces from the Libyan-backed rebels'.

Addax numbers are 'very, very low ... I doubt whether we have more than 200 in the country ... All the animals I have seen this year were walking skeletons, starving to death'.

Of the dorcass gazelle he says 'the toll taken by hunters is staggering' and the local forestry officials are unable to do anything about it. All motivation has to come from offices like ours and we just don't have the money and staff for more than the odd raid. We need a permanent unit ... if we are even to break the surface on the hunting problems in this country'.

In Mozambique wildlife populations have crashed in the last two years and six antelope species are either extinct or facing extinction: roan, tsessebe, waterbuck, sable, hartebeest and Johnson's wildebeest.

In their report on Botswana, Doug and Jane Williamson 'find it very difficult not to be despondent about the future of the Kalahari'. They mention the possibility that migratory wildebeest will be completely cut off from fresh surface water, which could mean the Kalahari wildebeest would die out — 50,000 died in the vicinity of Lake Xau in 1983; gross overstocking of cattle; the continued spread of cattle-ranching along the edge of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve; illegal hunting on a large scale, mainly by pursuing animals with vehicles and grossly overshooting licences, and the virtual absence of law enforcement or conservation activities in the area.

They conclude: 'The poor status of conservation is principally due to a widespread lack of interest which permeates to the highest levels of government'.

## Bears

The Chairman, Charles Jonkel, writes that the Group met on August 17 in Edmonton, during the 4th ITC; a report will appear in the next *Newsletter*.

Other 'bear meetings' in 1985 included the East Asia Group's first Conference in August, organised by Dr Minoru Asaki, in Nikko-Shi,