

unknown. Before the 1987 survey, no black rhinos were present on private land. Since 1990, however, groups of five black rhinos have been auctioned annually by the Natal Parks Board to selected bidders.

These populations are increasing and active management of the earlier founder populations will soon become necessary in order to remove mature bulls and rectify skewed sex ratios. This would also prevent mortalities caused by breeding-related aggression.

These factors, as well as the build-up to the next CITES meeting in 1997 - where the listing of rhinos and trading in rhino products are sure to be discussed - have necessitated a new survey to establish the present status of rhinos on private land. The African Rhino Owners Association (AROA) has initiated and undertaken to obtain sponsorship for the 1996 survey.

The aims of the survey are to contribute to rhino conservation through the establishment of rhino management guidelines, to gauge the opinion of rhino owners on responsible utilisation of both black and white rhinos, and to provide official nature conservation authorities, IUCN Rhino Specialist Group and the South African CITES authority, with accurate information.

The Mazda Wildlife Fund has kindly provided a vehicle for the duration of the project and the Rhino & Elephant Foundation, Lapalala Wilderness, the Natal Game Marketing Association, WWF and Thabo Tholo have made generous contributions to AROA for the survey.

Daan Bujs of the African Wildlife Management Unit of the ARC - Range and Forage Institute will again supervise the project, with the help of Theo Papenfus, a B.Sc. Honours graduate in wildlife management, who will conduct the field work. The institute will also provide the infrastructure and computer facilities necessary for this important survey.

## Bid To Save Africa's Northern White Rhino From Extinction

The fate of Africa's northern white rhinoceros, *Ceratotherium simum cottoni*, hangs in the balance as it is on the very brink of extinction. According to Dr Martin Brooks, Chairman of the IUCN's African Rhino Specialist Group, there are less than 40 surviving northern white rhino left on earth. Garamba National Park in Zaire is home to the last remaining wild population of which there are only 29. Dr Brooks, the Natal Parks Board Head of Scientific Services, chaired a workshop towards the end of 1995 in Florida, USA, where major stakeholders met to develop a conservation strategy to improve the chances of survival of the sub-species.

As an outcome of the three-day workshop, conservation authorities in Zaire agreed in principle to work closely with the specialist group in planning for a second wild population of northern white rhino elsewhere in Africa.

A further nine northern white rhino are held in captivity at the Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic, and four at the San Diego Zoo in California. However, these are not currently breeding. Both zoos have committed themselves to assisting in plans to save the sub-species from extinction. Two females will be flown back from the US to join the nucleus group in the Czech Republic. These animals are to be moved into a more free-ranging situation where conditions will hopefully stimulate breeding. The critical population status of the northern white rhinoceros echoes that of its southern counterpart 100 years ago. Due to successful conservation efforts of the Natal Parks Board, Africa's southern white rhino, *Ceratotherium simum simum*, now numbers close on 7 500 in the wild from less than 30 in 1895. Of these, approximately 7 100 are in South Africa.

## Would-Be Poachers No Match For NPB

Following a tip-off the Natal Parks Boards crack anti-poaching team apprehended and arrested two would-be rhino poachers in the Umfolozi Section of the Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park on 23 March. An AK47 rifle, magazine, 15 rounds of ammunition and an axe were seized at the scene of the incident.

Charges were laid against the two individuals for unauthorised entry into the reserve; entering parts of the reserve not open to

the public; possession of undeclared weapons in the reserve and attempting to hunt animals in the reserve. A court case is pending.

Tony Conway, Chief Conservator Zululand, expressed satisfaction with the successful apprehension of the poachers without any rhino losses. It is now extremely difficult for poachers to enter our parks and poach with any success, he said.

The Natal Parks Boards Anti Poaching Unit works closely in conjunction with the SAPS's Endangered Species Protection Unit (ESPU), the Internal Stability Unit (ISU) and the SAPS Dog Unit who were put on standby at the time of the incident.