

July 1970

Black Rhino in Zambia

A most interesting article by our Chief Wildlife Research Officer, W. F. H. Ansell appeared in a recent issue of *Oryx*, the Journal of the Fauna Preservation Society of London, dealing with the distribution of the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) in Zambia.

The main habitats now left to this species are the Kafue National Park and the Mumbwa areas (population 130, Uys 1967); Kasempa area (12, Carr 1953); Middle Zambezi Valley from the Kafue confluence to Feira (69-70, Morris 1968); the Luano and Lukusashi Valleys (60, Uys 1967); and Mweru Marsh Game Reserve (20, Simpelwe 1968); a total of approximately 300.

The main stronghold of the species, however, is the Luangwa Valley, with its associated game reserves and controlled hunting areas, totalling 16,780 sq. miles, where J. M. C. Uys (now our Chief Wildlife Warden) has estimated a total population of 885.

If a further 15 are taken as a figure for rhino outside the above areas, the total for the country as a whole is 1200, of which, as can be seen, more than two thirds are in Luangwa.

BREEDING

Little is known about breeding in the various areas, although the author quotes it as being satisfactory in Luangwa, less frequent in Kafue, reasonable in the Zambezi Valley and slow in Mweru Marsh.

There is a possibility of over-population in Luangwa, as shown by the number of deaths by fighting.

During the dry season some animals meet their death when they get stuck in the mud of drying out lagoons, whilst trying to reach the water in the middle.

Nothing has yet been planned for translocation of rhino for re-stocking denuded areas, but Luangwa would be the natural reservoir for such an operation, and suggested game reserves suitable for their re-introduction are Sumbu, Kasanka and Lavushi Manda.

PROTECTION

The species is completely protected in Zambia, with the exception of half a dozen annually for safari clients in the Luangwa Valley, the cost of a permit to the hunter being K400 (£233) per animal.

Uys estimates that about 50 are illegally poached each year, but in general the situation is under reasonable control; it certainly cannot compare with the heavy toll taken of the species in parts of East Africa by rhino horn poachers.

Ansell concludes with the following appraisal of the position to-day: "In Zambia's main wildlife areas, the rhinoceros situation is on the whole, satisfactory; with continued effective control by the Game Department there is no reason why rhinoceros should not continue to thrive in these places."

P.M.