

# CONSERVATION

## Nepal's Rhinos and Tigers are Poisoned by Poachers

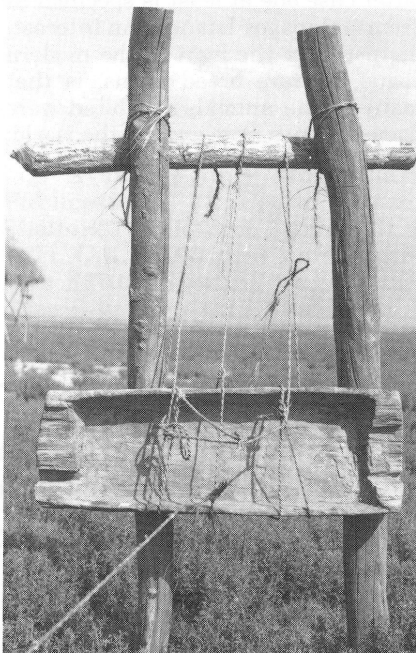
by Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne

Nepal, despite being one of the poorest countries in Asia, has been one of the most successful at conserving its rhinos and tigers. Nearly all the 400 or so greater one-horned rhinos in Nepal inhabit the Royal Chitwan National Park. Chitwan and the surrounding area is home also to perhaps half Nepal's Bengal tiger population (about 170 animals). The King has a personal interest in conservation, particularly for the rhino, which is of religious importance in Hinduism. Thus, Chitwan was until recently heavily protected by the Forest Department's guards and by the army, a total of nearly 900 men.

During the late 1980s, there was growing political unrest, culminating in early 1990 in riots and a partial breakdown in law and order. The King's power diminished, and an interim government took over with less interest in conservation. As a result, the number of men patrolling Chitwan was reduced and new poachers took advantage of the situation. Two of Nepal's largest and most spectacular animals — the rhino and the tiger — came under threat.

In the past, tigers were occasionally poisoned when they became a nuisance to the local farmers by attacking cattle. A farmer would put poison in the carcase of a dead cow to kill the offending tiger. During 1988 and 1989, however, over 10% of Chitwan's tiger population was poisoned, but not because they were killing cattle. Poachers, for the first time, were taking the bones to sell for about \$130

per kilo to traders to send through Tibet to China, where they are consumed as a medicine to help rheumatism. In 1990, 25 carcasses were found in Chitwan of tigers and their cubs which had been poisoned.



*Rhinos often come out of Chitwan National Park at night to eat the farmers' crops. The farmers erect 'noise-makers' to scare the animals away: the string is pulled, which claps the board. (Photo: Esmond Bradley Martin)*

Rhino poaching has also increased during this politically unstable time in Nepal. In 1990, seven rhinos were killed, four by eating poisoned food, the first time this method of poaching has been used on the rhino. When rhinos wander out of Chitwan Park to graze on crops nearby, the local farmers put poison in a maize cob or

pumpkin which the rhino eats. The rhino can take five hours to die and may wander back into the Park where the body is discovered. Nearly all the horns from these killed animals were found by the poachers, who hacked them off to sell for about \$10,000 a kilo. They sell for about double this wholesale in Taiwan. Although other products from the rhino are valuable (the skin sells for over \$2,000 a kilo retail in Bangkok), poachers do not have the time to take anything else, for fear of being caught.

The Park officials are extremely worried about this acceleration in poaching. They feel under-manned and under-equipped to combat these criminals. Also, and perhaps most regrettably, their once very effective intelligence-gathering system has been dissolved, because the staff could not conform with the complicated official system of payment, and consequently were not spending the allocated money. It is generally agreed that an intelligence network is the most cost-effective and efficient way of catching and preventing poachers. For example, in 1973, when rhino poaching was last a threat in Chitwan, the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society of London donated several hundred pounds to pay to informers: 17 poachers were caught and the poaching problem was then resolved. The International Trust for Nature Conservation, in England, gave \$67 in January 1991 to pay four men to collect information on tiger poaching in local villages: this immediately led to several arrests, and has provided a deterrent to would-be poachers during this critical period.

However, \$3,000 is now needed to fund a full intelligence network and to pay informers for the next three years. This is a small sum when one considers that if a pair of greater one-horned rhinos were to be sold from Chitwan to a zoo (as recently

occurred to Singapore Zoo), they would be worth about \$250,000. From the economics argument alone, \$3,000 to protect the 400 rhinos in Chitwan is minuscule. A donor is urgently sought by the Park staff to enable a network to be re-established which can save rhinos' and tigers' lives at this precarious time. This assistance would be very well deserved when one considers Nepal's excellent track record in protecting these animals.

Apart from the 1,500 or so greater one-horned rhinos in Assam, India, these animals in Chitwan are the only sizable population left of this species in the world, and they need all the help they can get.

*[Postscript: On 10th May 1991, the Royal Nepali Army arrested 24 poachers equipped with 22 muzzle-loaders inside the Royal Chitwan National Park; they were hunting sambar, chital, wild boar and sloth bear, mainly for meat, but would not have avoided a tiger that came out in the beat.]*

## I.Z.N. Back Numbers

Most back numbers of International Zoo News from No. 119 (March 1974 — Vol. 21, No. 2) onwards are still available. We are now offering these for sale at £0.75 (\$1.50) each post free. A list of past feature articles has been prepared, which will be sent to readers on request.

(The following issues are now out of print: 120, 121, 124, 125, 133, 138, 142, 147, 148, 153, 175, 189, 199, 210.)

N.B. This offer does not apply to Vols. 37 and 38 (1990 and 1991), to which the full subscription rates still apply.

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This tiger was poisoned by poachers in December 1990, and is being examined by a forestry department official at Tikauli, just outside Chitwan National Park. (Photo: Esmond Bradley Martin)

### Management Guidelines — New Series Launched

The Federation of Zoological Gardens of Great Britain and Ireland has issued the first two volumes of a planned new series of Management Guidelines for the Welfare of Zoo Animals. The Guidelines aim to provide a comprehensive, easy-to-use overview of the extensive data currently scattered throughout the literature or held unpublished in the records of individuals or institutions.

Each guideline is divided into three sections — biology and field data, management in captivity, and references and recommended reading. The first two volumes, on giraffes and ratites (ostrich, rhea, emu and cassowary), are available for £6.00 and £8.00 respectively (postage and packing within the U.K. included) from the Federation of Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park, London NW1 4RY. A General Introduction to the series has also been prepared, and will be included free of charge with the initial order for either of the above. Further guidelines, on cheetahs and tapirs, are currently in preparation.

We hope to publish full reviews of the first two volumes in a later issue of *I.Z.N.*

## ANNUAL REPORTS

### ALLWETTERZOO, MÜNSTER, GERMANY

#### Extracts from the Annual Report 1990

An especially pleasing breeding success and a first for Münster was the birth of a single black-and-white ruffed lemur; the zoo has a group of five of these animals, originating from Cologne and Rotterdam Zoos. In May Pallas, our 14-year-old Persian leopard, gave birth to a cub, but was found two days later lying ill outside the den. Emergency surgery revealed three dead cubs in the womb, and Pallas did not recover from the operation. The surviving cub was hand-reared and moved in September to Berlin Zoo to join two other bottle-raised cubs.

In October our seventh baby white rhino was born, not on this occasion to our proven breeding cow Natala, but to Emily, herself born in Münster in 1985. As with many first births, the calf, Emmi, seemed small and delicate, but her mother had plenty of milk and looked after her well. There are now six animals in our herd; last year a new building was constructed with stalls for night and winter use, and their enclosure has been enlarged by 50%.

Our white-naped cranes (*Grus vipio*) hatched their first chick in June in an enclosure of lush meadow vegetation. The parents cared for it well, and the paddock was double-fenced for additional protection. Numbers of this species in the wild have dropped to about 2,000; the zoo population is something over 200, but breeding in captivity is still infrequent. Münster is the fifth German zoo to breed these cranes, the others being Frankfurt,

Krefeld, Nuremberg and Walsrode.

The brush turkeys (*Alectura lathamii*) bred for the second time since 1988. These birds, like other members of the Megapod family, incubate their eggs not by body heat but in piles of rotting leaves. In the European climate, however, it is not easy for the birds to maintain a sufficiently high temperature, and the eggs generally need to be removed to an incubator.

Other animals successfully bred in the zoo during 1990 included seven black-footed penguins, seven Nile crocodiles (Münster's first), a red-footed tortoise, a Mississippi map turtle (*Graptemys kohni*) and three lesser spotted dogfish (*Scyliorhinus caniculus*).

From Mulhouse Zoo, France, we acquired a young female Poitou donkey as a mate for our male. The most precious new arrivals were two bongos born in Berlin in 1989. They are to live in the zoo's Africa Panorama, where these shy forest antelopes will find the peace and quiet they enjoy, and the shade they need on hot summer days. Bongos are very difficult to observe in the wild, and consequently may not be as rare as has been thought. The world zoo population is around 200; in Germany there are breeding groups in Berlin, Duisburg, Frankfurt and Stuttgart, with lone males in two other zoos.

We had been trying to breed black storks, but finally found that our 'pair' were in fact both females. After an unsuccessful attempt at a cooperative breeding scheme with Heidelberg Zoo, we have now finally obtained four birds bred in 1989 at Bad Rothenfelde Bird Park, and are hoping to succeed in breeding this species seldom seen