

[1st DRAFT for circulation and comment]

A CONTINENTAL STRATEGY FOR THE CONSERVATION OF BLACK RHINO

developed and recommended by

THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT AND RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP
of the
IUCN Species Survival Commission

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OBJECTIVES

The primary goal is to ensure the survival of black rhino in significant, biologically viable populations in their natural habitats in Africa.

A secondary objective, that of insuring against the possible failure of the first goal, is to develop a captive breeding programme for black rhino both within Africa and on other continents.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The strategy is for adoption by -

National governments in Africa (producer countries)
Other governments (particularly consumer countries)
Non-governmental organisations
Funding agencies
Trade conventions (e.g. CITES)

STRATEGY

The strategy has been subdivided into a number of main categories -

- A - Field strategy: those actions which have a direct effect on the survival of rhinos in their natural habitats.
- B - Socio-economic strategy: the engagement of the local peoples and the promotion of a value for rhino in areas where significant rhino populations still exist.
- C - Information strategy: the promotion of a general awareness of the magnitude of the crisis amongst the public at local, national and international levels.
- D - Trade measures: actions aimed at reducing the trade in rhino horn through law enforcement and through substitution of the product.
- E - Fund raising and priorities for allocation of funds.
- F - A captive breeding programme.
- G - Research required to enhance rhino survival.
- H - The promotion of tourism.

Each category is now expanded in the following sections.

A - FIELD STRATEGY

If black rhino cannot be conserved within the countries where they occur then they will go extinct in the wild. It is strongly emphasised that all other parts of this strategy are secondary to the key objective of protecting wild rhino and their natural habitats. The problem is almost entirely an internal matter in the countries concerned and the most effective assistance is likely to be the strengthening of the national agencies responsible for protection. It is a misconception that measures taken at an international level such as trade bans and propaganda campaigns can achieve the same goal - they can only act in a supporting role.

A-1 Ground coverage and anti-poaching operations

This is regarded as the highest priority. If rhino cannot be protected against illegal hunting in the field, there is little hope for their survival. The magnitude of the threat can be seen from the present operations in Zimbabwe where the last remaining large population of black rhino is being systematically pursued by professional gangs from neighbouring countries. These hunters are not deterred by the loss of their companions' lives and are prepared to enter into full scale armed combat to achieve their objective.

At a national level there is need for sufficient well-motivated staff with adequate equipment to meet the challenge. At a continental level there is need for development in the following areas -

- Extension: In all warfare victory is only achieved by superior force or by outwitting the enemy. New methods have to be developed and any advances in techniques should be adopted and, if possible, extended by all countries involved.
- Co-operation: Neighbouring countries need to co-operate in the extradition of criminals and should consider permitting "hot-pursuit" operations whereby law enforcement officers have the right to follow poachers across international boundaries. A strike force composed of staff from two or more countries could enjoy such freedom of movement (proposed by the Organisation for the Conservation of Central African Fauna (OCCAF) which was formed between Sudan, Cameroun, Gabon, Congo and CAR in March 1984).
- Integrity: There is a need for all persons dealing with the law enforcement aspects of rhino conservation, including both those in the field and those in positions of authority in the police, the customs and the courts, to be of the highest possible integrity. The efforts of successful anti-poaching can be totally undermined by corruption in government agencies.

A-2 Intelligence organisation

It is not sufficient to apprehend only the illegal hunter in the field. The organisers and middle-men of poaching rackets may be the greater threat, since field operators can be hired and replaced fairly cheaply. Success in dealing with all levels of poaching operations requires the establishment of a reliable information gathering service and good detective work. Whilst many countries successfully operate their own internal networks, there is a lack of information at the regional and continental levels. At the last meeting of the AERSG in September 1985 at the Victoria Falls it was proposed that an "Interpol"-type organisation should be established in Africa to fill this need. This has not yet been done.

A-3 Relocation of animals

Where rhino populations are situated in vulnerable areas, consideration should be given to moving some or all of the animals to protected areas where they will be safer. Both Kenya and Zimbabwe are pursuing such a policy at the moment. In Kenya small isolated pockets of rhino are being moved to well protected parks and private farms, and in Zimbabwe rhino are being captured from large vulnerable populations and distributed more widely throughout the country, particularly away from border areas.

A-4 Strengthening official agencies

There is a general need throughout the continent for government wildlife agencies to be better funded and staffed. With the debt crisis in Africa there has been a tendency to reduce the budgets of less powerful ministries and environmental agencies have suffered particularly badly in this process. The long term costs of neglecting conservation will far outweigh the short term gains obtained by cutting budgets at this stage in the continent's history.

Where government agencies have been incapable of "saving" rhino for the above reasons, there has been a tendency for non-governmental organisations to take on the task in many countries. This is seldom a satisfactory solution and usually ends up in conflict. The primary need is to strengthen the official agency responsible for conservation - not to supplant it with outsiders who are dependent on donated funds.

B - SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRATEGY

Few rural communities who live in areas where black rhino occur are aware of the full value of the animals. Where the peasant is involved in illegal hunting he seldom realises more than a fraction of the true market value of the product. Where rhinos earn revenue from tourism, little of this percolates back to the peasant farmer. If safari hunting of rhino were to take place, it would generally be government coffers which would reap the benefit. The conservation of black rhino has become the arena of an elitist westernised group of actors as far as the peasant is concerned. There is an urgent need to alter this state of affairs.

B-1 Cultural value

It is fundamentally wrong to assume that the rural peasant would not respond to arguments to conserve rhino as part of his cultural heritage if the time and trouble were taken to make him more fully aware of the crisis facing the species. There is a need to use the full power of political persuasion, the news media and rural extension staff to achieve this objective.

B-2 Financial value

Rural populations frequently bear the costs of living cheek-by-jowl with wildlife but see little financial return for their compliance with laws regarding hunting. Usually, revenues derived from remote areas disappear in unrelated development elsewhere in the country. This could be changed with the appropriate institutions to ensure that the benefits of wildlife were returned directly to local communities.

It would be desirable to return a large part of the revenue derived from tourism in certain protected areas to the resident populations in the surrounding areas. Whilst this does not relate specifically to rhino, it does promote a value for wildlife in general and a reason for acceptance of protected areas.

At present black rhino are not hunted legally in any African countries. If they were, the value of the trophy fee would be very high indeed. In countries such as Zimbabwe where the rural communities have begun to attach a value to most species of game taken by international sport hunters, the rhino, regrettably, is regarded as more or less worthless because it cannot be legitimately exploited. In these circumstances, the argument for permitting a sustainable quota of black rhino from unprotected areas is very strong. The trophy fees would far exceed any income which local residents could expect from subsistence agriculture and could act as a powerful incentive for conservation of the species. It would, however, be vital that this money was earned directly by the peoples concerned.

C - INFORMATION STRATEGY

This section deals with the promotion of a general awareness of the threat to black rhino amongst governments and the public at local, national and international levels.

C-1 Political commitment

There is a need for all governments to show a high level of commitment to the conservation of black rhino. This should not be limited solely to countries which still have rhino populations: it should include those countries which have traditionally been major consumers of rhino horn and all countries which have the potential to affect the trade in rhino products. In Africa, this commitment should extend beyond the individual nation states to regional and continental organisations (e.g. SADCC, OAU).

The present official stance in Zimbabwe is an example of ultimate commitment. Illegal hunters of rhino may be killed in the field if they resist arrest.

C-2 Publicity and lobbying

There is a general need for the news media to publicise widely the current situation regarding black rhino (Newsweek recently focussed attention on the subject with a main feature article). The encouragement of international understanding and support should not simply be for the purposes of fund-raising: by disseminating good technical information there is less likelihood of misdirected conservation efforts which could in the end be counterproductive.

Active lobbying by concerned individuals and non-governmental organisations has proved to be a very powerful tool for achieving conservation objectives. It is important that such persons or groups should act only in appropriate situations and should be possessed of the best technical information before acting. The sovereign right of African states to manage their own resources should be fully recognised and no actions should be taken without due sensitivity to the damaging results which can arise through diplomatic blunders. Above all, actions must be consistent with national policies designed to enhance the value of rhino for rural populations in Africa. There is a real danger of actions which commit authorities to conservation steps which are not easy to reverse and foreclose options for the future. For example, should it one day be considered that the best options for the conservation of rhino lie in permitting limited hunting and pursuing a controlled trade of rhino products, it may be too embarrassing for African governments to backtrack on their declared policies and adopt such options.

The AERSG's position in matters relating to activist lobbying has been clearly defined. The Group is primarily a technical body whose role is to provide good scientific data on the current status of rhino and recommend sound management policies. In general, it does not participate in the lobbying sphere.

C-3 Diplomatic offensives

A feature of illegal rhino hunting in Africa is that it is commonly carried out by nationals of one country who raid across international boundaries into another country. Even when the identities of the individuals concerned are known, there are considerable difficulties in carrying out the procedures for extradition of criminals. The situation is more difficult when the authorities in the neighbouring country are uncooperative. A possible strategy to combat this is the exposure of the offending country in an international forum such as the United Nations by the government of the country which has suffered.

A more extreme approach, again on a government-to-government basis, would be to press charges against the offending neighbour country in an International Court (The Hague). A general principle of environmental law in such cases is that "all states have an obligation to protect adjacent states against injurious acts by individuals within their jurisdiction". This is particularly applicable in the case of cross-border poachers. Zimbabwe could legitimately bring a suit against her neighbours for compensation of the order of about US\$8 million for losses sustained in black rhino (the value of the animals killed, had they been taken on organised safari hunting, and the abnormal costs of the protective measures which Zimbabwe is now forced to adopt).

C-4 Liaison with other scientific groups

As the plight of the Asian rhino is equally serious, there is a strong case for co-operation between the African Rhino Specialist Group and its Asian counterpart. Many common problems exist, particularly in the area of rhino horn trade.

D - TRADE MEASURES

The AERSG recognises that considerable effort has gone into curbing the trade in rhino products. Further, under the Convention in International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) rhino are listed on Appendix I in which category all trade is banned. Negotiations are critically poised at this moment in time to plug two important loopholes in the trade ban - namely, the illegal imports into Yemen and the entrepot function of Singapore. For these reasons, the Group would not recommend at this stage that there is any change in the policy towards trade in rhino products. It would be imprudent to nullify the efforts that so many persons have made towards eliminating the trade at this critical stage.

The Group is also aware, however, that there are few examples of successful trade bans on any wildlife products and that such bans may be fundamentally unsound, particularly with regard to wildlife products which could be legitimately exploited by the Developing Countries on a sustained basis for their own benefit. Some of the measures advocated in this section would conflict directly with those proposed in category B.

It is therefore recommended that the trade situation in rhino products is reviewed in the near future to examine the effectiveness of the present measures. Should it prove that no significant success is being achieved, alternative approaches might be considered such as those which are currently being used for trade in crocodile and leopard skins under the CITES convention.

D-1 Elimination of illegal trade

Efforts should be intensified immediately to stop the illegal trade in rhino horn. The trade measures need to be effective now, because the rate of disappearance of rhino is so high that any measures implemented in a few years' time will be too late.

There is a need to examine and attack all points along the trade route: that is, from the source of illegal horn in producer countries, through transit countries within the continent and outside Africa, to the end user points which are largely in the Middle East and Asia. This requires improved vigilance by police, customs and CITES Management Authorities with strong support from senior staff in Governments.

D-2 Elimination of legal trade

In several countries (non-members of CITES), rhino horn becomes a legal product for export once it has entered the country concerned (which has to be done illegally). There is a need to convince such countries that either they should become members of CITES or, at a minimum, they should prohibit trade in rhino products.

D-3 Abuse of diplomatic privilege

There is positive evidence that rhino horn is being moved in diplomatic baggage. This can only be prevented through strong directives issued by the diplomatic missions concerned.

D-4 Product substitutes

The use of substitutes for rhino products, particularly the horn, should be encouraged. A separate resolution covering this matter has been prepared by the Group.

E - FUND RAISING AND ALLOCATION OF FUNDS

E-1 Intensify fund raising

To protect the few remaining black rhino populations will require a high level of funding for the foreseeable future. The sums involved may well be beyond the capability of individual nation states, and there will inevitably be a need for support from international and local non-governmental funding bodies.

The need for continued assistance to ensure the survival of a species should raise the question of alternate strategies. Whilst public enthusiasm may well be stimulated for a short period, it is difficult to maintain a high sustained level of donations indefinitely.

An alternative strategy may be to sell sustainable quotas of rhino for sport hunting outside of National Parks and to use the funds so generated to protect rhino in the same immediate area. The value of a trophy fee for rhino is likely to exceed US\$25 000 and the sustainable offtake is at least 2 in every 100 animals. A sum of \$50 000 returned to the relatively small area occupied by 100 rhino would surpass the level of funding which could normally be expected from donor sources. The funds from areas where hunting is permissible could further be used to protect rhino in National Parks.

E-2 Allocation of funds

The AERSG has produced an analysis of priorities on a continental scale and expects to revise this in 1987. Such priorities would provide the guidelines for allocation of limited funds. There is a need to ensure that the priorities so established are widely circulated amongst funding bodies and technical agencies.

F - A CAPTIVE BREEDING PROGRAMME

The situation has to be faced that efforts to conserve the black rhino in large protected areas in Africa may fail. In this eventuality, it is vital to ensure that the species survives at least in captivity. There are several examples of species which went extinct in the wild but which were later restored to their natural habitats from captive-bred animals held in zoos (e.g. the Arabian oryx).

F-1 Captive populations within Africa

A first step in this direction has occurred in Kenya where relict populations of black rhino are now being transferred to small, heavily protected areas. Several of these occur on private property. This action might also be appropriate in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

F-2 Captive populations outside Africa

A significant number of rhino are already present in zoos throughout the world and are breeding successfully. However, 95% of these animals are from a limited geographical range (i.e. Kenya and northern Tanzania) and the full range of black rhino genetic variability is unlikely to occur in this limited captive population. Breeding nuclei are urgently needed from the north-western extreme of the continental range (i.e. Cameroun) and the southern parts of the distribution (Zambia, Zimbabwe, Natal and Namibia).

The American Association Of Zoological Parks and Aquaria has offered to organise a captive breeding programme for black rhino with full scientific planning and monitoring. The project involves holding three separate populations, each of up to 50 animals, to be captured from the north-western part, the east African part, and the southern African part of the black rhino continental range.

This offer should not be treated lightly - it should be clearly understood that primary benefits will not be for the countries importing the rhino. There are already sufficient rhino overseas to satisfy the limited spectator market and few zoos are eager to obtain rhino because of the enormous costs involved in supporting them. The project would be undertaken in the long term interests of Africa.

G - RESEARCH

The research effort required for black rhino should be directed primarily at those studies which improve management and survival of the species.

G-1 Population surveys and monitoring

Of prime importance is the need for accurate information of the numbers of surviving rhino throughout their range. This involves both initial and ongoing surveys. At a continental level there is a need for dissemination of information on the best techniques for survey and for standardisation in methodology so that results are comparable from one country to the next and from one time to the next.

The status of rhino is now so critical that a large number of competing demands for funding can be expected to arise. Without good data on population numbers and trends it will be difficult to assess priorities or to take the appropriate action in time to save certain populations.

G-2 Taxonomy

There is some uncertainty regarding the validity of certain subspecies of black rhino. It is important to establish clearly the full range of variation in races and subspecies before a final set of conservation priorities can be drawn up.

G-3 Genetic variability in a large rhino population

With present trends, the opportunity to obtain information on the genetics of a large black rhino population is not likely to be available for very long. It is therefore most urgent that such a study is carried out as soon as possible on the Zambesi Valley population which is now probably the largest remaining in the world. The success of the following project (G-4) is very much dependent on information gathered from wild black rhino.

G-4 Genetics of small populations

In the many places rhino populations are being reduced to relatively low numbers and the question arises of the genetic viability of these small groups. This applies to small remnant populations in the wild, captive populations within Africa, and zoo populations outside Africa. A knowledge of the minimum viable population size and the rate at which new genes need to be introduced to small populations is important for planning translocation operations and for managing captive populations.

G-5 Studies of small populations

Apart from genetic issues, a range of problems can be expected to arise in small populations. There is a need to study factors affecting breeding success, the behaviour of confined animals, the required set of conditions for the welfare of captive animals and the diseases which affect black rhino. Of particular importance is a knowledge of carrying capacity for rhinos which are artificially confined to small areas of natural habitats in Africa.

G-6 General biological studies on free-ranging rhino

The present state of knowledge on rhino in the wild is far from extensive. As it appears likely that numbers will continue to dwindle, it is important that a number of "benchmark" studies on free-ranging rhino are carried out before the opportunity disappears. Such studies should examine population dynamics, home range, behaviour and, with particular reference to the preceding paragraph, typical "saturation" densities for rhino in African habitat types.

G-7 Response to harvesting

The response of black rhino populations to hunting offtakes has never been seriously examined - probably because it has not been considered a desirable management strategy. Apart from any sport hunting aspects, there is a need to understand how the species reacts to various harvesting regimes simply because cropping is the current management treatment being practised by illegal hunters.

H - PROMOTION OF TOURISM

This has been included as a separate category because it has the potential to affect most of the previous parts of the Strategy. The advantages expected to be gained are listed below:

- Increased tourism will assist the field strategy (Section A) in that the presence of a greater number of tourists will make it more difficult for illegal hunters to operate. Tourism further usually results in the development of access roads and an increased complement of staff in protected areas, all of which mitigate against the poacher.
 - The revenue from tourism enhances the value of rhino and increases the probability of achieving the objectives of the socio-economic strategy (Section B).
 - Tourism will result in increased public awareness of the plight of the rhino - which is the goal of the information strategy (Section C).
 - The increase in public awareness should lead to stronger support for the present trade controls to protect rhino (Section D).
 - As tourists grow to appreciate the value of black rhino the task of fund-raising (Section E) should become easier.
 - By the same arguments, captive breeding programmes (Section F) and research (Section G) should be receiving increasing support.
-