

Indonesia and will play an important role in conserving Indonesia's highly diverse and threatened biodiversity.

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Asian Rhino SG

Bringing parties together for rhino conservation

A meeting of AsRSG members based in South Asia, and managers of protected areas holding greater one-horned rhino in India and Nepal, was held in Nepal from 15–17 September 2008. The meeting's objectives were to encourage networking, particularly amongst those working in rhino-bearing protected areas (PA) in South Asia; to share experiences of the problems faced by small rhino populations (inbreeding depression and scarcity of habitat); to assess current threats and challenges in rhino conservation; to explore inter-state and trans-country cooperation on information sharing on rhino poaching as part of crisis management; and identification of key resource persons in the field of rhino research and conservation in South Asia.

It was agreed that a working group would be convened, with experts on habitat, population, trade investigation, veterinary and conflict mitigation issues. The AsRSG (South Asia) will also institute an award in memory of Dr Tirtha Man Maskey. This award will be effective from 2009 and will recognize meritorious service extended by frontline staff working in rhino areas of India and Nepal.

Further discussions were held on poaching and invasive species and emphasized the need for in-depth studies on ways and means to eradicate weeds from rhino habitats. Recommendations were made to rhino-bearing PA managers in India and Nepal to have rhino census at an interval of 3–5 years. For small populations of rhinos, it was proposed that intense ID-based monitoring should be implemented to monitor all individuals. The AsRSG (South Asia) will prepare a training module on greater one-horned rhino monitoring within one year.

A one-day workshop on Rhino Translocation Protocol was held at the College of Veterinary Science, Khanapara, Guwahati on 12 December 2008. The workshop was organized jointly by the IUCN/SSC, Asian Rhino Specialist Group, Wildlife Health Specialist Group and the College of Veterinary Science of Assam Agricultural University. The purpose of the workshop was to further professionalize the approach to translocation of rhinos under the Indian Rhino Vision 2020.

Due to continued challenges in procuring the tranquilizing drugs for use in rhino translocation from Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park to Manas National Park in Assam, the second phase of the rhino translocation was not possible during the winter months of 2008 and early 2009. Now the next phase of rhino translocation is being planned in November 2009 when about 18 rhinos will be translocated into Manas National Park.

A meeting of AsRSG members in Southeast Asia, along with the managers of Sumatran and Javan rhino-bearing areas of Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam, was held at Bogor, Indonesia on 2–3 March 2009. The meeting emphasized the need to take urgent measures to prevent the continued fragmentation and eventual extinction of Sumatran and Javan rhino, and urged range country government and non-governmental agencies and international donors to implement the Sabah, Indonesia and Vietnam rhino action plans.

It was noted that *in situ* conservation and protection of Sumatran and Javan Rhino, along with key habitats, is essential to ensure the

future of the species in the wild in its range countries. It was also recognized that where populations are seen to be declining, or there is an absence of breeding, a number of options need to be considered, e.g. breeding between range country populations and exchange programmes. AsRSG openly invites the international community to provide effective and united support, including funding, to assist these efforts, whilst the participants of the meeting pledged to ensure the long-term viability of the Sumatran and Javan rhino.

The much awaited *Guidelines for the in situ Re-introduction and Translocation of African and Asian Rhinoceros* is now available from the AfRSG, the AsRSG, and the Wildlife Health Specialist Group.

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Bat SG

Proposed cull of *Pteropus niger* in Mauritius

A week-long workshop was held in Mauritius in November 2008, to share experiences of conserving endemic fruit bats of the genus *Pteropus* on Western Indian Ocean islands. It also aimed to establish a regional group to continue exchange of information as well as providing an opportunity to explore the problems faced by lychee farmers on Mauritius (who complain of losing fruit to *P. niger*).

Some years ago, the government of Mauritius proposed to cull *P. niger* despite it being a protected species. The scientific community, headed by the Mauritian Wildlife Foundation, protested that the proposal was premature in advance of any study of the feeding ecology of the bats to determine the extent to which the bats were culpable of taking lychee fruits, in comparison with other fruit predators such as Indian Ring-necked Parakeets, Red-whiskered Bulbuls, Indian Mynahs and Black Rats.

A recently completed census estimated that there were 21,000 *P. niger* on Mauritius. This is not an excessive number considering that a closely related species *Pteropus*



Indian Rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*).
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