

Looking back over 50 issues of *Pachyderm*

Lucy Vigne

As the longest standing Editorial Board member, and early Editor of *Pachyderm*, let me look back at how it all started, and evolved from a newsletter of 15 pages to a high quality journal of over 100 pages, and my memories in those early days and to the present.

My involvement with the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group (AERSG) started in Nairobi in September 1983 when I met David Western (known to all as Jonah), its Chairman, on the third floor of Embassy House on Harambee Avenue. On the door of his small room was NYZS (New York Zoological Society), which he shared within the African Wildlife Foundation offices. Along the passage was another door labelled WWF/IUCN where Rob Malpas sat in another small room. He had just edited the first issue of the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group's Newsletter. He and Jonah both agreed they needed help with their additional workload, and I was asked to help with the next issue of the newsletter and to compile data from those in the field on the numbers and distribution of elephants and rhinos throughout the African continent, at a time when poaching was rife and little was understood about the level of poaching and trade routes for ivory and rhino horn.

I had just spent a couple of months travelling from Cairo through Egypt, Sudan and Uganda to Kenya, on trains, boats, lorries and on foot. I had seen massive herds of elephants escaping from poachers in south Sudan that darkened the skyline. Following quite a gruelling journey, I was delighted to be working for elephant and rhino conservation in the comfort of a carpeted office, surrounded by papers and desks and typewriters and the photocopying machine, enjoying the company of fellow zoologists! And after three months of voluntary work I was asked to stay on, being given the grand title by Jonah of Executive Officer for the AERSG, and I also became the Editor for the second issue of the AERSG Newsletter, which we established as a biannual publication (funds permitting).

I would walk across town to Kijabe Street to the typesetters, and each correction was typed with a 'golf ball' typewriter by an efficient typist and cut and pasted (literally) over the mistake on the page of text. It was thus easy to check corrections as one could see or feel them stuck onto the page. There was no fear of words or lines being dropped due to a computer error. The cut and paste man did a brilliant job with steady fingers under a bright anglepoise light, and cow gum by his side, and it was a pleasure to work with him. For the cover of the second issue I chose Gertie the rhino from Amboseli Game Reserve in southern Kenya who had been tragically poached but had had the longest of horns. For the third issue I chose for the cover rows of rhino skulls from 88 black rhinos (about 60 poached) lined up in South Luangwa Valley in 1983 and for the fourth Iain Douglas-Hamilton gave me an aerial photo taken in 1976 of large numbers of doomed elephants south of Murchison Falls in Uganda.

By then Jonah and I had decided that the name *Pachyderm* was a more succinct title for the newsletter, encompassing both elephants and rhinos in the dictionary definition. And so *Pachyderm* was born! It had been a 20-page newsletter, with every space occupied to the fullest, making pictures and graphs regrettably small, but everything was smaller in conservation then. In those days there were fewer staff, less bureaucracy and more compact offices with the main wildlife NGOs grouped together on one floor of Embassy House allowing daily discussions and exchange of ideas. And it was a dynamic time with field biologists working in Kenya and other African countries joining us for coffee in the large communal sitting area, exchanging stories, knowledge and experiences. We were all united in our wish to conserve and study wildlife, with elephants and rhinos dominating our thoughts in those days of heavy poaching.

It was time to move on by the fifth issue. David Cumming in Zimbabwe replaced David Western as Chairman of the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group. I was invited to continue there as Editor of *Pachyderm* and Executive Officer of the Group, but I had met my future husband and opted to stay on in Kenya, working instead on a WWF project to close down the international trade in rhino horn with the Vice

Chairman of the AESRG at that time, Esmond Martin. David Cumming and Raoul du Toit in Harare edited *Pachyderm* in Zimbabwe for the next several issues. David Cumming stepped down as Chairman of AERSG in December 1987 with David Western resuming the role, and the AERSG office moved back to Nairobi. Thus, by issue 11, the editorial board was in Nairobi once more, under Chris Gakahu. It was noted in that issue that *Pachyderm* produced ‘technical articles relevant to elephant and rhino conservation... for scientists and authorities actively concerned or involved in elephant and rhino conservation.’ It was noted also that those concerned with the future of elephants and rhinos came from diverse backgrounds and in order ‘to sustain and encourage this support we must keep them informed on issues concerning these animals.’ Thus *Pachyderm* was to be ‘restructured to reach a wider audience’ with future issues being less technical, covering broader elephant and rhino conservation issues.

By issue 12 the cover photo was in colour, the famous 1989 scene of Kenya’s first ivory burning, and it has remained in colour. The issues were also getting bigger with 50 pages of A4 size by issue 14. A shift occurred by issue 15. The AERSG members had been united by the fact that poaching pressures and trade were common ground for both elephant and rhino specialists to overcome together; but then the Group decided to split with the general expansion of issues concerning both elephants and rhinos. So it was that Holly Dublin became Chair (and remains so) of the African Elephant Specialist Group in Nairobi and Martin Brooks became Chair of the African Rhino Specialist Group in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Pachyderm continued to be produced in Nairobi for both Groups, with French included for the Chair reports, and for articles from French-speaking African countries, later with abstracts in French. The quality of paper (100 g) and printing were considered to be important to maintain a high quality publication, and this has remained so. To keep costs down, photos remained black and white within the publication, with all efforts made to keep them to a high standard.

By the 18th issue we had invited the Asian Rhino Specialist Group to join *Pachyderm*, to share conservation information in order to benefit the protection of the two African rhino and three Asian rhino species. Mohd Khan bin Momin Khan and Tom Foose were co-Chairs providing the first report for the AsRSG in *Pachyderm* 18. By issue 23 Nico van Strien joined in as a third co-Chair. Tragically Tom Foose died in May 2006 (his tribute in issue 40) followed by Nico van Strien in February 2008 (his tribute in issue 44) and Asian rhinos lost their greatest supporters at the time. Bibhab Khumar Talukdar took over as Chair from Assam, India, and he remains actively engaged in that role for *Pachyderm*.

Issue 18 was edited by Ruth Chungue who continued until issue 23 with Greg Overton taking over until issue 27 when Martina Hoft was Editor, followed by Helen van Houten (our most long-standing Editor) from issue 29 until issue 44. Corrine Archer then stood in for one issue, and since then *Pachyderm*’s Editor has been Bridget McGraw. But issue 50 will be her last as she, regrettably for *Pachyderm*, returns to the USA. We must thank her for all her effort and patience with the last few issues as changes and developments have been considerable to meet the expanding needs and challenges.

While we have welcomed in issue 49 a new Chair for the African Rhino Specialist Group, Mike Knight in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, who took over from our previous long-standing Chair, Martin Brooks, Holly Dublin faithfully remains Chair of the African Elephant Specialist Group. She and her office must be congratulated on the thankless task of somehow always just finding enough funds for one more issue of *Pachyderm*! We have saved costs substantially by going on line and reducing our print run to 300 copies for issue 49, but for this commemorative 50th issue we have splashed out with a print run of 500. A little income comes in from those wishing to buy hard copies, although most go out as complimentary copies to the three Specialist Group members and their associates.

From its humble beginnings as a one-man show, *Pachyderm* has grown in size with a large editorial board and a distribution to an ever-broadening readership, thanks to the Internet and the *Pachyderm* web site. While members of the three Specialist Groups continue to tackle the concerns of elephant and rhino poaching and conservation in Africa, along with rhinos in Asia, it is only the Asian Elephant Specialist Group that remains separate producing a publication called *Gajah*. Elephant and rhino poaching has surged recently—meeting the demand for ivory and rhino horn for many newly wealthy East Asians, coupled with the pressures of an increasing human population and conflict in elephant and rhino range states. The role of *Pachyderm* as a vehicle to disseminate information, provided by Group members and other experts in their fields to an ever growing audience, is thus as important and urgent as it was when *Pachyderm* started, in fact, even more so with rhino and elephant populations under increasing threat of survival in so many regions.

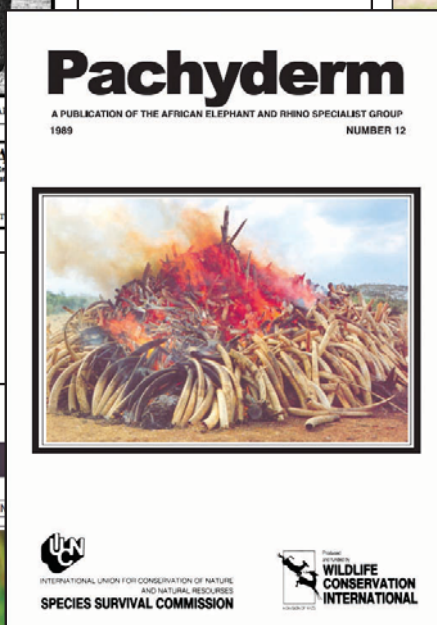


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Lucy Vigne looking at one of the six tame southern white rhinos in Meru National Park in Kenya in March 1984. On the right is one of the guards who looked after the rhinos on a 24-hour basis. They were all poached one night in 1989, and their horns were taken.

Pachyderm

SPECIAL 50th issue—*Pachyderm* past and present





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Pachyderm

Journal of the African Elephant, African Rhino
and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups

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