

MEGA CONFUSION OVER MEGA-META-MINI

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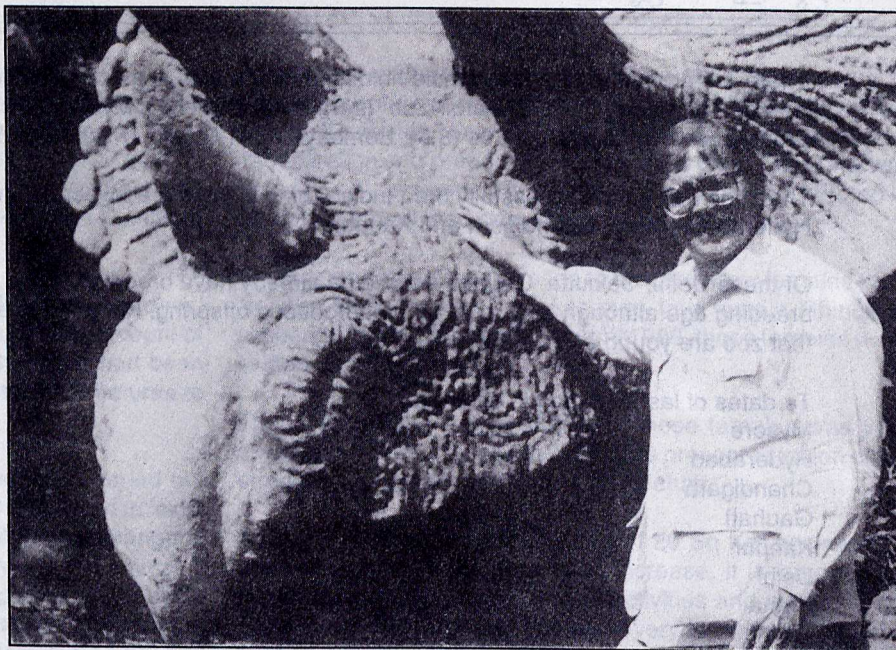
While editing

the Working Group Reports, some confusion over the term "meta-population" was noted. One of the groups used the term "mega-population" to mean a large population, such as the Kaziranga rhino. (Actually even the Kaziranga population of rhino is not "large", although it is the "largest" relative to the other rhino populations.) "Meta-population" was used to designate medium sized populations such as exist at Manas, and "small population" in reference to the truly minute populations such as at Gorumara.

Actually, the word "Mega" is not commonly used in relation to *populations* but rather, in other conservation contexts, such as to animals, like **"mega-vertebrates."** It is not a rigorously defined term but a rhino is one, whereas a rabbit is not. A **"charismatic mega vertebrate"** would be a large mammal which the general public is attracted, an animal for which they might give money to help save. More about money later.

Roughly any species whose average weight is greater than 100 pounds or 50 kg probably qualifies as a "mega-vertebrate" but for the smaller end of this range the animal should have lots of appeal or "charisma" to qualify!

Metapopulation : Now, a "Meta-population" is not a medium sized population but rather a system of small, more-or-less disjunct populations that are treated or managed interactively to some degree as if they were a larger single population. For example if the rhinos from Kaziranga were translocated to strengthen the populations at Jaldapara, Gorumara, Manas, Pobitara, etc. and to take pressure of numbers off Kaziranga habitat, you could say that all those populations were a "meta-population" being "managed interactively."



People who work with charismatic megavertebrates sometimes just get carried away completely. We call them Mega-lomaniacs.

Meta-population management then derives logically and usually entails movement of animals or their genetic material (mostly in the future) among the sub-populations of component populations of the metapopulation.

Small population :

A "small population" again is not, and probably cannot be, rigorously defined in a general sense to apply to all species and situations all the time. It depends on a number of factors, both in terms of program goals (level of demographic security and genetic diversity to be preserved, length of time it is to be preserved) and biological characteristics and circumstances of the species (generation time, growth rate, ratio of effective to actual population size which depends on sex ratios and family sizes). For the larger species, usually a population in the tens to low hundreds will qualify as a small population.

Some pseudo-conservation-biologists have actually attempted to define a small population : "A 'small population' is

one which can't maintain enough genetic variability or sustain enough dumb luck to survive. " We call such pseudo-c-b's as **mini-wits**.

Some other "mega-definitions" are;

Megazoo is a term that is applied to natural areas that have become sufficiently small and isolated that their wildlife populations (especially the megavertebrates) require intensive management (genetic and demographic) similar to what is used in captive situations.

Mega-dollars or mega-bucks are often used to describe the massive amounts of money needed for megazoo and metapopulation management.

Megalomania is often a useful term when describing people who work with charismatic megavertebrates. They just get carried away completely (see photo -- above).