

Minutes of the first meeting of the Wild Life Status Evaluation Committee of the Indian Board for Wild Life held on 5.11.79 at Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi

AGENDA ITEM No. 1

Translocation of Rhinoceros from Kaziranga National Park

After the opening remarks, the Chairman introduced the first item of agenda regarding Translocation of Rhinoceros from Kaziranga National Park.

According to the Chief Conservator of Forests, the population of Rhinoceros in Kaziranga, as estimated by the local staff was 400 in 1962, and 960 at present. In addition to this, there are 400 to 500 Rhinos in areas like Manas and isolated pockets outside the Government Forests. The CCF Assam considered that the rhino numbers would soon be beyond the carrying capacity of Kaziranga National Park and systematic reduction of population by translocation was essential.

(a) Identification and assessment of alternative habitat of the rhinoceros

Possible alternative habitat suggested were Dudhwa National Park (U.P.) Jaldapara, (W.B.) Champaran (Bihar) Intanki in Nagaland and Lalighabri sanctuary of Arunachal Pradesh. In case of Jaldapara, there was a decline in population of Rhinos from 45 in 1972 to 23 in 1975 and 19 in 1979. Since the precise factors for the decline are not known, the committee decided against introducing any new populations in this area.

On a trial basis, it was decided that Dudhwa be selected first as an alternate habitat.

The committee felt that it was essential to carry out a comprehensive ecological study of the alternative habitats suggested, through a sub-committee, as a long time measure. The Committee decided to set up a sub-committee for the ecological assessment of the habitats consisting of the following members.

1. Dr. J.B. Sale (Chairman) FAO Expert Central Crocodile Breeding & Management Training Institute, Hyderabad.
2. Chief Conservator of Forests, Assam.
3. Director, Botanical Survey of India or his nominee.
4. Director, Zoological Survey of India or his nominee.
5. Shri V.B. Singh, Chief Wild Life Warden, Uttar Pradesh.
6. Shri Duleep Mathai, World Wild Life Fund, India.
7. Dr. J.H. Desai, Delhi Zoological Park, Delhi.

Terms of reference:

1. The sub-committee will make detailed studies on the ecological conditions of the areas where animals are to be introduced and suggest the suitability.
2. The sub-committee will also conduct population studies in the existing National Parks where population exceeds the carrying capacity and suggest suitable measures.
3. The sub-committee will also study the reaction of local species with reference to the introduction of a new species.
4. The sub-committee may co-opt any experts in the field that it considers useful and necessary.

(b) *Approximate numbers that might be translocated in phases to different suitable habitats.*

The Committee was of opinion that a minimum number of 10 Rhinoceros may be translocated to Dudhwa National Park on an experimental basis, and further translocation to other areas will be based on the studies of the introduction and the possible interaction with local species of

fauna. It was also suggested that a detailed report about the flora of Dudhwa National Park may be prepared by the Botanical Survey of India.

(c) What proportion of rhinos may be captured for sale to Zoological Parks within and outside the country, based on applications received and keeping in view captive breeding to wider genetic base.

It was brought to the notice of the committee that there was great demand for Rhinoceros from the Zoological gardens within India as well as foreign countries:

The Committee felt that export of rhinoceros should not be permitted in view of the provisions of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The Committee was of view that a limited number of animals may be spared for Zoological gardens within India, as may be decided by the sub-committee constituted above, strictly on merits of each case.

(d) To consider proposal of the Central Crocodile Breeding Management and Research Institute for organising translocation of rhinos with a view to imparting training in tranquilising and translocation and conducting the operations as safely and scientifically as possible in cooperation with the Chief Wildlife Wardens of the State concerned.

Dr. J.B. Sale of the Central Crocodile Breeding Management and Training Institute, Hyderabad, has sent a proposal for operations of Rhinoceros translocation during the current season. The trainees in Crocodile Breeding Management and Training Institute, Hyderabad will be able to take part in such operations and will enable the trainees in Central Crocodile Breeding Management and Training Institute receive training in translocation. In addition to this, local help from the Assam Forest Department will also be necessary for the successful completion of the operations. The Committee decided that the Rhinoceros from isolated areas outside the National Park can be translocated first on experimental basis to the Dudhwa National Park.

(e) To consider proposal received from Mr. Andrew Laurie for prior ecological studies of area where rhinos might be introduced.

In view of the decision taken by the committee to constitute a sub-committee proposed in (a) above, it was left to their discretion whether or not to utilise the service of Mr. Andrew Laurie for carrying out ecological studies of possible rhino habitats, and to report to the Wild Life Status Evaluation Committee if his services are needed.

(f) *Administrative arrangements and time schedule for the trans-location operations as suggested by Dr. J.B. Sale, FAO Advisor of the Central Crocodile Breeding and Management Institute.*

It was decided that the sub-committee constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. J.B. Sale will work out the schedule for the operations in consultation with the State Govts of Assam and Uttar Pradesh.