Miscellany

Wankie Sends S.O.S. For White Rhino

AFRICAN and international wildlife specialists meeting in Zimbabwe have called for urgent efforts to build up a breeding nucleus of Northern white rhinos to safeguard the animal from extinction in the wild.

The meeting was convened from 30 July to 7 August by the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), under the sponsorship of WWF. It estimated that fewer than 700 Northern white rhinos survive in the wild, with almost all in Sudan and Northern Zaire.

It suggested that a small breeding herd at the Dvur Kralove Zoo in Czechoslovakia and a group at San Diego in the United States, be built up to guard against extinction of this form of rhino. Meanwhile, protection of the wild survivors must be stepped up, the meeting declared.

The meeting heard that there are now nearly 3,000 of the other sub-species, the Southern white rhino, which was considered extinct until a few were found and protected in Natal. There are over 2,500 in South Africa and more than 300 in other countries in the region.

Dr. David Cumming, chief ecologist of Zimbabwe's Parks and Wildlife Department, who chaired the meeting, said that the success in saving the Southern white rhino showed that dedicated efforts now could certainly save the Northern form from extinction.

The meeting also reviewed that status of the African elephant. It was agreed that the population in areas in which accurate surveys have been conducted is approximately 600,000. The number of elephants occupying the remaining, unsurveyed elephant range is not known, but could be anything from a further 500,000 to over one million.

Top priority

Elephant specialists pointed out the difficulty of assessing numbers in tropical forests and recommended that a survey of the Central African Basin should have top priority, because the area is thought to contain a high proportion of Africa's elephants. The meeting also emphasised the need for urgent measures to save elephants in West Africa, where they survive in fragmented and beleagured populations, with the largest numbers in Ivory Coast and Liberia.

Dr. Cumming said: "There will inevitably be a continuing reduction in the number of Africa's elephants as a result of increasing human population and the demand for land. The key issue is to focus on conservation of elephants in a wide range of habitats throughout the continent. This is why we stressed the importance of the West Africa governments to what land and habitat should be conserved before their options are closed."

The meeting also reviewed the trade in ivory and rhino horn. It declared that the trade in horn should be halted if rhinos are to survive. Countries with stocks of horn were urged to examine whether these stocks should be destroyed. In the case of ivory, it was stressed that the trade must be controlled by universal adherence to, and implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora (CITES). Over 70 countries are now party to the Convention, but several countries involved in ivory trade, including major exporters like Congo, Sudan and Ivory Coast, have yet to join.

The meeting, which included scientists, wildlife managers and other specialists, drew up recommendations for elephant and rhino conservation measures based on the biological importance of the various populations and the areas they live in, their current conservation status, and existing and future economic and human population pressures.

"Although so much has to be done all over Africa, our meeting has identified a small set of priorities which require strong and immediate action," Dr. Cumming stated.

"There is no doubt that the Northern white rhino in Sudan and Zaire is in an extremely precarious position, but the black rhino is declining at an alarming rate, and the major focus for action is to arrest the trade in rhino horn, as well as to secure key black rhino populations in Tanzania and in the Luangwa Valley in Zambia."

Must Pay in Hard Cash

TOURISTS visiting Kenya will soon have to pay their hotel bills in foreign currency.

Announcing this new measure, the Minister for Tourism, Mr. Elijah Mwangale, explained that his Ministry was streamlining the whole system, and said the object was to "plug loopholes" through which Kenya was losing valuable foreign exchange. Tanzania and Uganda have already introduced this rule for all foreign visitors staying at tourist hotels.

The Minister also said that in an effort to monitor the number of foreign visitors in the country, officials from the Ministry of Tourism will be posted at each hotel in Nairobi during big conferences, so as to check on the number of delegates in residence and how long they stay so as to estimate the amount of foreign exchange which is spent. This data will be cross-checked with the figures supplied by the respective hotels.

Mr. Mwangale also announced Government's plans to construct a 300-bed hotel at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, and another hotel near the Kenyatta International Conference Centre in the capital. Plans for this hotel are still under consideration, but the Minister said it would provide between 400 and 800 beds, subject to completion of a feasibility study. He suggested that there was need for a "luxury" hotel in Nairobi of the five-star category.

Tea-break at the Wankie Elephant and Rhino Conference sees David Cummings, conference chairman, deep in discussion with Iain Douglas – Hamilton, chairman of the IUCN African elephant group.

