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On Bibliographies and unpublished Reports

One of the tenets of science, essential to its universal and objective nature, is that results of experiments are reproducible and each step in an argument can be verified. Conservation surely is considered a branch of science. If an author finds it necessary to copy a fact or a conclusion from another source, it is customary to refer to that source, to avoid repetition and to allow the reader to verify that the passage is used accurately. When one examines a bibliography or a list of references, it is my firm belief that one should be able to go to a library and consult those sources. Of course, we have all experienced that it is never as easy as it should; one may have to visit multiple libraries or even write to the publishing authorities. However, diligent researchers should ultimately be able to verify the facts quoted from the items in the bibliography. It is an unfortunate tendency in papers relating to conservation issues to refer increasingly to documents, which are not available to the general public. In the latest number of *Pachyderm* at my disposal, for instance, there are eight papers on rhinoceros related subjects which include a list of references (115 items in total). When one analyses these references, one finds that 64 are publications (56%) as books, papers in journals or chapters in books. There are another 51 references (44%) to dissertations or theses (2), manuscripts (3) personal communications (10) and unpublished reports (37). I am sure that I am not the only one to experience that most of the items in the latter category of unpublished items are practically unobtainable: authors are unknown or have moved, and issuing bodies often do not make copies available. This has the unfortunate consequence that the data recorded as from these 51 sources are largely unverifiable, which defeats the purpose of quoting from them. There is no reason to argue against the production of internal reports and confidential papers, or to disallow the use of facts obtained privately. However,

authors should be aware that the contents of these unpublished papers cannot be verified, unless of course one belongs to that elitist inner circle which is allowed to examine them. Science claims to be egalitarian rather than elitist. Reports should as much as possible be prepared for publication, at least stating the most important results, to appear in journals and books, to allow general dispersal and growth of knowledge.

*Dr Kees Rookmaaker, PO Box 124,
North Riding 2162, South Africa*

Dear Editor,

Thank you very much for publishing the article on the community development projects in Nepal [*Pachyderm* 26, 88-99]. I fully endorse the observations and recommendations of the author. Community development outside the park boundaries is a most useful long-term investment, but as long as there is a demand for rhino horn and vast sums are being offered for it, the threat of poaching will continue to exist despite all the goodwill of the neighbouring people that may be created through such community effort. These endeavours will no doubt help reduce poaching, but it will not eradicate it and the moment you pull out the army and the protective staff which currently is one person per square kilometre in Chitwan and two persons per square kilometre in Bardia as the author has mentioned, I am quite convinced that poaching will increase. This situation applies not only to Nepal but also to India and we should not be prepared to take the risk. This is my frank and considered opinion and if you wish you could quote me. Good intentions are one thing and most welcome, but they cannot always stand in for temptation for lucre and one should not be starry-eyed.

*Dr M.K. Ranjitsinh, WWF India, 172-B
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

On Bibliographies and unpublished Reports

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