
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: ASIAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

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The Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) conducted a plenary meeting in Sandakan, Sabah, at the end of November 1995. The major focus of the meeting was the completion of the revised AsRSG action plan -*Asian Rhinos: An Action Plan for Their Conservation*. Formal publication will occur before the IUCN General Assembly, which takes place in October 1996. A population and habitat viability assessment (PHVA) workshop for the Malaysian rhino was conducted just before the AsRSG meeting. A report will be published by July 1996.

Notable at the AsRSG meeting were reports of continued growth of the populations of *Rhinoceros unicornis* in both India and Nepal, although poachers pose a significant challenge in both countries. The situation for *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* is precarious and has continued to deteriorate despite intensified *in situ* efforts. Poaching pressure seems to have also increased for *Rhinoceros sondaicus* in Indonesia, despite considerable increase in protection activities. One *R. sondaicus* was lost in 1994, which is significant in such a small and intensively protected population. The situation for this species in Vietnam is uncertain. A major World Wildlife Fund project is being implemented for Nam Cat Tien National Park but the remnant rhino population lives outside this protected area and the project's plans for specific rhino activities are unclear.

The revised AsRSG action plan also contains much more explicit explanation of the programmes/projects and their costs, as a basis for pursuing a funding strategy for Asian rhino conservation.

The Global Environment Fund project to initiate implementation of the Conservation Strategy for Rhinoceros in Indonesia and Malaysia has now been in progress for a year. The first formal annual review will be conducted in May 1996. Training and deployment of more intensive anti-poaching teams in both nations, as well as improvement in the institutional capacity for co-ordination of rhino conservation, have progressed well. Less encouraging has been the discovery, while the anti-poaching teams have been working, of further decline of the Sumatran rhino population in some of the major areas which they inhabit, notably Kerinci Seblat National Park in Sumatra, Indonesia, and Endau Rompin State Park(s) in Peninsular Malaysia.

Progress continues on the development of managed breeding centres for Sumatran rhinos in native habitat, under more natural conditions. The expansion of the enclosures at Sungai Dusun in Peninsular Malaysia has been completed under the auspices of the AsRSG, with grants from and through the International Rhino Foundation. Rhinos will be released into the new areas soon. After some delays due to the unusually heavy and long rains in Sumatra this year, construction has finally commenced on the managed breeding centre, currently being designated a Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS), in Way Kambas National Park. It is expected that the first rhinos will be repatriated to the SRS from zoos in Indonesia by the end of July 1996.

The second issue of the new AsRSG newsletter *Asian Rhinos* was published in October 1995. The next issue will be published in June 1996.