

News in Brief

RHINOS IN TEXAS

Five black rhinos which were bought from the Natal Parks Board, South Africa, were transported to Texas in March 1984 (See *Newsletter 3*). Three of these were taken by Game Coin to a ranch outside Brownsville. Their oldest female died reportedly from a tick disease acquired in South Africa. All three rhinos were found with ticks carried from South Africa and the ranch is under quarantine for a year. The remaining pair has been observed mating and the female is suspected to be pregnant.

The two rhinos received by the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife (AFEW) were brought to a ranch near Fort Worth. They proved to be immature which has set the breeding programme back for a year. These rhinos were checked for ticks, but in this case none was found.

In both cases the rhinos are being kept in secure paddocks since they must be kept under observation in case they become sick.

As Game Coin's intentions regarding its acquisition of more rhinos are at present uncertain, AFEW plans to ship more of its own. It hopes to take mature animals, three females and one male from South Africa or Zimbabwe. Shipment to the States should take place next August.

Rick Anderson
Vice President, AFEW

IUCN PROJECT UNDERWAY IN GARAMBA, ZAIRE

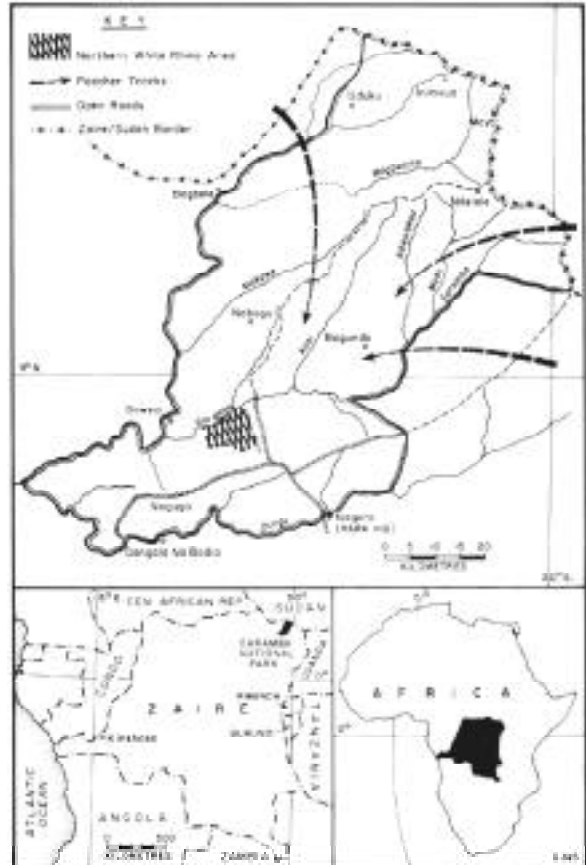
Since the brief report in the last *Newsletter* two more northern white rhinos have been found, bringing the total number of positively identified animals in Garamba to 13.

Also since the last publication, we now know that five rhinos have been poached since last year's survey. Park staff know about one, the other cases came to light after two poachers were arrested, who admitted to killing four rhinos, selling the horn locally for 1,4000 Zaires (about \$35).

Patrols are now going out into the park, and at least six poachers have been apprehended carrying automatic weapons. We feel as though we are now getting results. The rhino population, however, has declined some 30% in one year, and if we take a 10% decline over the next two years as deciding the end point before translocation, we will be too late. By the time we get down to catching the rhinos we might lose several more.

The recovery of the southern white rhinos was originally believed to be from about ten animals, but Brooks says, "Less than 100 survived in Zululand by 1900" (EWT's Pilanesberg Rhino Workshop Report February '84). Therefore we cannot use this as evidence of a white rhino population recovering from such small numbers as we are dealing with. We also face many more logistical problems. The habitat is long grass reaching five metres in places at the end of the rains, and the park is extremely difficult to administer. In the whole 5000 km² area there is only about 150 kms of passable road. On many occasions we cannot enter the park because of the difficulties involved in crossing the river (see map). There are two perennial rivers and this one is negotiated by ferry. The park has been totally neglected for 24 years since independence and no vehicles have crossed the Garamba River since then.

As the map shows, Garamba National Park juts into the Sudan. Any park on an international boundary faces added problems. There is easy access for Sudanese poachers and three well defined poachers tracks have been seen from the air. Illegal hunters can quickly escape across the border if they are detected before the Anti Poaching Unit has time to stop them.



Garamba National Park, Zaire

What is in the best interest of the few remaining northern white rhinos? The decision lies with the Zairean authorities, but the conservation advisers should speak with one voice. It is not good if one group recommends captive breeding whilst another group says survival in the wild is possible. If, as I hope, captive breeding is decided upon, preparations for capture, which will take a year (in order to build gates, pens, roads, river crossings and airstrips) should be started immediately. Plans are further complicated by the fact that capture can only take place between February and June.

I would finally like to point out that the project aims at rehabilitating Garamba and rhino conservation is part and parcel of that effort. To concentrate all efforts and funds on rhino conservation alone makes poor sense. What would there be to show for such a project? Possibly fewer rhinos anyway? They may be declining due to causes other than poaching. We would also be at square one with the same non-functional infrastructure. Garamba is an incredible park in many other ways and was nominated a world heritage site for more than just one reason.

Charles Mackie
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