

Rhino and elephant security group resuscitated

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After a protracted period of inactivity, the Rhino and Elephant Security Group (RESG) of southern Africa was resuscitated at an RESG meeting held in Windhoek, Namibia, 14–15 June 2001. The meeting was made possible through funding provided by the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation and the efforts of Simon Pillinger and Lovemore Mungwashu. RESG delegates attended from conservation agencies in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The South African Police Services' Endangered Species Protection Unit, Namibia's Protected Resources Unit, Interpol (sub-region for southern Africa), and the Botswana Defence Force were also represented. Invited observers included the AfRSG Scientific Officer, the coordinator for the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation, representatives of TRAFFIC East and Southern Africa, and Kenya Wildlife Service's national rhino coordinator. Nine AfRSG members were present.

The main objective of the meeting was to develop clear and focused terms of reference and a *modus operandi* for the group. Because of time constraints, Simon Pillinger requested the AfRSG Scientific Officer to prepare illustrative terms of reference for the group. The preparation was accomplished in consultation with conservation colleagues experienced in wildlife law enforcement and investigation. Although this document was intended only to be illustrative it catalysed discussion, assisting delegates to develop and agree on new terms of reference from scratch in just one day. Apart from setting out a vision, overall goal and objective for RESG, the group's *modus operandi* was set out. Nine focus areas were identified by RESG—each of which needed to be addressed to meet the overall goal. These were

- law enforcement
- intelligence
- procedures for effective investigation and prosecution and for minimizing illegal international trade
- security and management of rhino horn and ivory stocks
- coordination, networking and information exchange

- training and capacity building
- positive public involvement, awareness and education
- international and regional conventions
- sustainability, functioning and support of RESG

Specific goals and activities were set for each of these nine key focus areas. The group's new terms of reference provide clearer focus and should help RESG make a significant contribution to rhino and elephant security as well as ensuring it will complement the work of other existing rhino groups. The new RESG terms of reference will also be a useful document when soliciting future funds from donor agencies.

The type and the level of membership were discussed. RESG members also elected Lovemore Mungwashu (Zimbabwe Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management) as RESG Chairman, and Rusty Hustler (South Africa's North West Parks and Tourism Board) as Vice Chairman. Peter Ratema (South African National Parks) agreed to assist the Chair when needed.

A number of presentations were also given at the meeting. TRAFFIC's Simon Milledge discussed the improvement of rhino horn stockpile management including registration, marking and tracking systems. Rod Potter from KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife discussed the use of transponders to mark horns. He outlined his courses dealing with scene of crime, field investigation and collection of evidence as related to unnatural deaths of rhinos and elephants. These courses provide training to reduce the chances of destroying valuable evidence, ensure the chain of evidence is collected in such a way as to be acceptable in court, maximize the information that can be gained from the crime scene, and ensure that no time is wasted when a crime scene is detected. A number of participants from range states expressed interest in crime-scene training. Members were informed that the SADC rhino programme has approved the development of manuals for scene-of-crime training and the offering of regional courses in crime-scene techniques. Unfortunately, funding release problems by

the Italian donors have delayed the implementation of this project. AfRSG's Richard Emslie presented the results of horn fingerprinting to date, listing outstanding problems and mentioning the steps being taken to solve these problems. Samantha Watts and Simon Pillinger of KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife demonstrated the Intelli-

gence database that has been developed by KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife and how it is used. Their presentation elicited great interest from members. It is hoped that the system will find wider application among range state participants.

Workshop on biological management of black rhino

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All current national strategies on black rhino conservation aim to increase numbers as rapidly as possible, setting minimum metapopulation growth targets to an average of at least 5% per annum. However, in recent years several 'Key' and 'Important' black rhino populations in South Africa and other major range states have been performing below this minimum target level. In some cases recommended biological management strategies have not been fully implemented.

Suboptimal growth is a problem for a number of reasons. Because of the effects of compounded growth, small differences in growth rate matter a lot. The slow growth rate brought about by poaching has resulted in markedly fewer rhinos. For example, in South Africa, lower growth rates over the last five years have resulted in approximately 250 fewer black rhinos than anticipated if previous metapopulation growth rates had been maintained. The time it takes to reach conservation goals also markedly increases as growth rates decline. It will take South Africa's *Diceros bicornis minor* metapopulation 70 years to reach the goal of 2000 animals at 1% growth per annum compared with only 11 years at 7%. Rapid growth also enhances the ability to withstand poaching outbreaks, and the loss of genetic heterozygosity is minimized when metapopulations increase through breeding at a rapid rate. Long-lived, large, K-selected species like rhinos can also overshoot the carrying capacity of an area for a period, thus potentially damaging its 'vegetation capital', which is another reason for keeping densities below carrying capacity.

Given this background, the SADC Rhino Management Group (RMG) found this an opportune time to re-evaluate and examine existing guidelines on biological management and theoretical performance

models in the light of experience and RMG monitoring over the last 12 years. The RMG therefore organized a technical workshop on biological management of the black rhino to debate the successes, failures and alternative strategies of biological management and to review how best to maintain rapid metapopulation performance. The workshop took place 24–26 July 2001 at Giants Castle Game Reserve in the Ukhahlamba-Drakensberg Park, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Delegates who attended from all the 'Big 4' black rhino range states of South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Kenya, were experts in a broad range of areas—from field managers of rhino areas to theoretical ecologists.

The workshop reviewed factors affecting the population growth of black rhinos. They examined case histories, population dynamics, harvesting theory, and existing and alternative approaches to achieving and maintaining rapid population growth. Participants also discussed monitoring of rhino population performance and resources available (carrying capacity issues) for rhino populations. Key indicators that would aid decision-making were identified. The workshop recognized that biological management has to be proactive, rather than responding only when monitoring detects a problem (which, sadly, is often too late).

Participants developed guidelines for enhancing metapopulation growth of black rhino populations. In reviewing harvesting, the workshop considered the size, nature (age and sex), frequency and location of the rhinos to be removed, as well as reconciling the needs of both donor and recipient areas. The principle of keeping densities at a productive and safe level (not letting populations approach or exceed ecological carrying capacity [ECC]) was upheld. However, a particularly