

Specialist Group Reports

Asian Rhino Specialist Group

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All three of the species encompassed by this Group are characterized by small and fragmented populations: greater one-horned Asian rhino, 1,700 in about 10 reserves in Indian and Nepal; the Asian two-horned or Sumatran rhino, about 500-900 in perhaps 35 reserves and localities in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma); and the lesser one-horned Asian or Javan Rhino, 50-70 in only two localities, one in Java and the other in Vietnam. The primary causes of the reduction of these species are of course poaching and habitat degradation, this latter problem being of much greater significance for the Asian compared with the African species of rhino. Moreover, these species, especially the Sumatran and Javan, are now subject to small-population stochastic risks (environmental, demographic, and genetic) as well.

As a consequence, the Asian Rhino Action Plan (published in January 1990) has been predicated on principles of population viability analysis (PVA). The resulting strategy recommended for these rhino treats each species, and in the case of the Sumatran perhaps each of its subspecies, as a metapopulation. A metapopulation is a system of disjunct subpopulations that are managed as a biological unit. The action plan proposed objectives, based on the PVA, for overall size of the metapopulation as well as for the number and minimally desirable size of each of the subpopulations.

The Action Plan also incorporates both *ex situ* and *in-situ* programs and populations as integral components of the metapopulation strategy for each species.

The strategy for the Sumatran rhino eminently exemplifies the action plan. For wild populations, the action plan recommends concentration of efforts and resources on the subpopulations that are large and protectable enough to be viable for the long term (currently 7-9 of the 35 known subpopulations seem to qualify). Animals outside the viable populations may be candidates for the captive propagation programs.

The captive programs are progressing well. Currently there are 18 animals in captive programs being developed in Indonesia, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. All rhinos captured so far have been so-called doomed animals that are not part of acceptably large and protectable populations.

An intensive PVA workshop on the Javan, and to a lesser extent, Sumatran rhino was conducted in Indonesia in June under joint auspices of the ARSG and the CBSG.

The next meeting of the ARSG is intended for India in early 1991 in order to direct more attention to the greater one-horned Asian rhino, for which a PVA will probably be conducted.

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