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# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

## ASIAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

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The AsRSG conducted the first of its new system of regional meetings at Kaziranga National Park the week of 21 to 27 February, 1999. The host of the meeting was the Forest Department of Assam, and Manju Barua and his staff at Wild Grass Lodge greatly facilitated the logistics of the sessions. Over 70 persons attended various portions of the meetings, including: the Assam Minister of State for Forests, Aminul Islam; the Chief Secretary of the Government of Assam, AK Bora; other top level officials of the Assam Forest Department, particularly the wildlife officers, including Principal Chief Conservator of Forests P Lahan who is also the Principal Range State Representative for India on AsRSG; SK Sen, who coordinated the meeting for the Forest Department; S Doley, the Chief Conservator of Forests for Wildlife; directors or heads of all the major rhino areas in Assam, especially Kaziranga; BS Bonal, who was the local host for the meeting; representatives of West Bengal (AK Raha) and Uttar Pradesh (SP Sinha); Narayan Paudel representing the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in Nepal; representatives of local NGOs, including Anwamddin Choudury of the Rhino Foundation of Northeast India and now also the Deputy Secretary of the Forest Department; R Emslie, Scientific Officer of the African Rhino Specialist Group; AsRSG member EB Martin who has been the most active non-range-state AsRSG member for this region; SC Dey, the Deputy Chair of the AsRSG for India and Nepal; the Chair, Mohd Khan; Programme Officers T Foose and N van Strien of the AsRSG; and representatives of some past and potential external donors, eg., EIA (D Banks), IRF (T Foose), SOS Rhino (N Schaffer), North American Zoos (M Dee). The main objectives and topics for the meeting were to review and revise action plans for *Rhinoceros unicornis* in India and Nepal and to develop a viable (adequate and sustainable) funding strategy for implementation.

Points of agreement and recommendations from the meeting include:

1. The primary funding priority for rhino conservation is *in situ* activities, especially anti-poaching and habitat management combined with eco-development.
2. Rhino conservation success achieved in India and Nepal has been possible due to the extraordinary dedication and commitment of the field staff. The service conditions for these field staff, who are the guardians of this species as part of the world's wildlife heritage, need to be adequately upgraded to be commensurate with their selfless struggle.
3. The intelligence gathering systems for rhino conservation in India and Nepal are inadequate. External funds should be used to support intelligence gathering until an effective government-supported system can be developed.
4. The meeting reaffirmed that the minimum viable population of *Rhinoceros unicornis* in the wild is 2,500 rhinos in at least 10 populations with a minimum of 100 rhino each, with the optimal level being a total wild population of 5,000 individuals.
5. To develop more recognition and support for rhino conservation, the AsRSG recommends that the Government of India establish a **Project Rhino**, similar to Project Tiger and Project Elephant.
6. The Government of India and Nepal are providing considerable funds to conserve rhinos and their habitat, and these efforts have been very successful for *in situ* rhino conservation. However, because of the human demographic pressures in both of these countries, to carry this success forward into the next millennium government efforts for both India and Nepal should be augmented with significant funds from international/external sources.
7. The AsRSG should have more interfaces with the *Rhinoceros unicornis* range state governments, so that rhino conservation receives continuing and increasing support.
8. The AsRSG will sponsor a technical management advisory group comprising representatives from all major rhino areas in India and Nepal, which will be a first step towards achieving objective seven above.

Financial support for the meeting was provided by the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), WWFNetherlands, WWF-US, and WWF-UK. Some unutilised funds from the meeting budget are being applied to support a census of the rhino in Kaziranga, Orang, and Pabitora, where full counts have not been conducted since 1993.

Elsewhere, the rhino protection units (RPU) for Javan rhino in Ujung Kulon were activated in November 1998. AsRSG and IRF finalised a formal MOU with WWF-Indonesia Programme for joint support of the RPU in Indonesia. AsRSG and IRF organised and funded a meeting in early February 1999 at Sungai Dusun of managers from the four facilities with Sumatran rhinos in managed breeding situations:

Sungai Dusun (Peninsula Malaysia), the SRS at Way Kambas (Indonesia), Sepilok Rhino Breeding Centre (Sabah), and the Cincinnati Zoo (USA). In conjunction with this session, a team of reproductive specialists from the United States, Canada, Malaysia, and Indonesia conducted an assessment of the programmes and an examination of many individual rhinos in the Sumatran rhino managed breeding centres at Way Kambas and Sungai Dusun. As a result of the assessments, the group that convened at Sungai Dusun formulated new recommendations for each of the 17 Sumatran rhinos (five males and 12 females) in managed breeding situations in an effort to maximise the probability of reproduction. At this time, four of the 12 females have mated and results of pregnancy tests should be available soon.

## RAPPORT DU PRESIDENT: GROUPE DES SPECIALISTES DES RHINOS D'ASIE

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Le GSRAs a tenu la première de ses réunions selon le nouveau système de réunions régionales au Parc National de Kaziranga, du 21 au 27 février 1999. Elle était accueillie par le Département des Forêts de l'Assam, et Manju Barua et son personnel ont grandement facilité la logistique des sessions au Wild Grass Lodge. Plus de 70 personnes ont assisté à différentes parties des réunions, y compris le Ministre d'Etat pour les Forêts d'Assam, Aminul Islam; le Secrétaire général du Gouvernement d'Assam, AK Bora; d'autres officiels du plus haut niveau du Département des Forêts de l'Assam, particulièrement les responsables de la faune, y compris le Conservateur Principal des Forêts, P. Lahan, qui est aussi le Représentant principal pour l'Inde des Etats de l'aire de répartition, dans le GSRAs; SK. Sen, qui a coordonné la réunion pour le Département des Forêts; S. Doley, le Conservateur en chef des Forêts pour la Faune; les directeurs ou les chefs de toutes les aires principales pour les rhinos en Assam, particulièrement, Kaziranga; BS. Bonal, qui fut l'hôte sur place de la réunion; des représentants du Bengale occidental (AK. Raha) et d'Uttar Pradesh (SP. Sinha); Narayan Paudel qui représentait le Département des

Parcs Nationaux et de la Conservation de La Faune au Népal; des représentants des ONG locales, y compris Anwaruddin Choudhury de la Rhino Foundation du nord-est de l'Inde, qui est aussi le Secrétaire-adjoint du Département des Forêts; R. Emslie, Responsable scientifique du Groupe des Spécialistes des Rhinos d'Afrique; E.B.Martin qui est le membre du GSRAs qui a été le plus actif des membres du Groupe qui ne sont pas d'un Etat de l'aire de répartition de cette région; SC. Déy, le Président-adjoint du GSRAs pour l'Inde et le Népal; le Président, Mohd Khan; les Responsables de Programme, T. Foose et N. van Strien, du GSRAs; et des représentants de certains donateurs passés ou potentiels comme EIA (D.Banks), IRF (T.Foose), SOS Rhino (N.Schaffer) et les zoos nordaméricains (M.Dee). Les objectifs et les sujets principaux de la réunion étaient d'examiner et de réviser les plans d'action pour *Rhinoceros unicornis* en Inde et au Népal et de mettre au point une stratégie de financement viable pour sa réalisation.

Les points d'accord et les recommandations pour la réunion étaient