
NOTES FROM THE AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

Conservation strategy for Cameroon's western black rhino, *Diceros bicornis longipes*

IUCN-SSC African Rhino Specialist Group, French Committee for IUCN-SSC, WWF

The western black rhino is the most critically endangered of all African rhinos. Time for its survival is running out, and without concerted action the subspecies is likely to go extinct in the near future. The scheduled high-level mission to Cameroon offers what is probably the last chance for the authorities, key stakeholders, rhino experts and potential donors to decide on funding and to implement an emergency strategy to save this subspecies from extinction.

Following discussions at the Lake Manyara IUCN-SSC African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) meeting in May 2000, the group recommended that the mission choose and develop an appropriate recovery strategy—one which should consider the donor funds available. The mission also urgently needs to develop an action plan for the recovery strategy with a timetable and defined roles and responsibilities for all the stakeholders. This strategy should be implemented as soon as possible.

In recent years, potential options for conserving the few remaining western black rhinos have been debated and examined in detail. Discussions at AfRSG's 2000 meeting in Lake Manyara, Tanzania, built upon these options and additional background work done by the French Committee of IUCN, WWF Cameroon and the AfRSG Secretariat. A working group at the May 2000 AfRSG meeting examined the biological, security, financial and logistic implications of different options in detail.

The technical opinion of the IUCN-SSC AfRSG is that given the current low numbers and scattered distribution of the remaining western black rhinos, a number of options proposed in the past can now be discounted. The African Rhino Specialist Group believes that the only options with a reasonable chance of success involve consolidating and intensively

protecting all remaining rhinos in one place in the wild. In time, as numbers build up, surplus animals can be translocated to set up additional populations. This translocation, however, will be many years in the future.

The background document prepared for the high-level mission to Cameroon examines the biological, security and cost implications of four potential options. It also provides comparative funding requirements to implement and run the various options over an initial five-year period.

The African Rhino Specialist Group strongly recommends consolidating the remaining rhinos within Cameroon as the best option. However, support for this idea depends on a number of conditions. Assuming that the Cameroon authorities will demonstrate a significant political will to conserve the few remaining rhinos, sufficient long-term funding will have to be secured to set up and run an effective fenced sanctuary or unfenced intensive protection zone. A number of fundamental security-related problems will have to be addressed. No option is likely to succeed in Cameroon if effective security measures are not implemented.

For security, AfRSG believes that conserving the remaining rhinos in a well-protected fenced sanctuary is preferable to consolidating the animals in an unfenced, intensive-protection zone. Building and running a very large sanctuary might be ideal, but it is also the most expensive option. As only a few rhinos are likely to be captured, AfRSG believes that the more practical and easier option to fund would be to start with a small sanctuary that can be expanded as rhino numbers increase.

If the funds are not available and insecurity persists, then no in-situ consolidation option is likely to

succeed in the short term. The African Rhino Specialist Group believes the preferred fallback option would be to move all the remaining animals to an ex-situ fenced sanctuary outside of Cameroon, where they could be looked after under temporary custodianship, as part of a negotiated bilateral agreement. This option would save the western black

rhinos and give Cameroon more time to raise funds and create the necessary conditions for in-situ rhino conservation that will succeed in future. Once the authorities will have met the required conditions and rhino numbers will have built up in the ex-situ sanctuary, the rhinos could be reintroduced back into Cameroon.

SADC regional program for rhino conservation

Richard H. Emslie

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Dr Rob Brett has been appointed SADC rhino program coordinator and has taken up his position in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Reviews of rhino conservation in SADC range states were undertaken from June to September 2000. A key part of these reviews was to identify and solicit

potential projects for funding by the SADC Regional Program for Rhino Conservation. At a meeting of the SADC rhino program consortium meeting scheduled for 9–10 October 2000, potential projects for funding were to be reviewed and program budgets and activity plans drawn up for the next six-month period.

African rhinos numbering 13,000 for first time since the mid-1980s

compiled by Richard H. Emslie

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White rhino

Southern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*) numbers have continued to increase to an estimated 10,377 in 1999, up from 8441 in 1997, 7532 in 1995 and 6784 in 1993.

Part of the big increase from 1997 to 1999 is because of the revised Kruger National Park figures that were based on a 15% aerial distance sampling estimate. To err on the side of caution, it was decided to take the lower 95% level as the Kruger population estimate.

All countries with wild white rhinos recorded increasing populations, with the exception of Zambia, which recorded a decline of one. Two white rhinos were seen alive in Mozambique, but whether they are

escapees from Kruger Park in South Africa is unknown.

South Africa remains by far the most important range state, with 94% of the wild population, amounting to 9754 white rhinos; while Zimbabwe (208), Kenya (164) and Namibia (163) conserve most of the remainder. Just over 22% (2319) of the continental total is now privately owned.

Northern white rhinos remain limited to Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo but have fared better in the second civil war. Surveys have confirmed at least 24 animals existing and quite possibly as many as 7 others. Subsequent information from Dr Kes Smith suggests the true population is towards the higher side of this range.