FOREWORD

Rhinos are charismatic megavertebrates. Much of the charisma of rhinos derives from their rather prehistoric appearance. Rhinos evoke images of dinosaurs although rhinos and dinosaurs are not closely related. But clearly, rhinos have mystical, magical, and mythical qualities. There is even archaeological evidence that rhinos were the inspiration for the unicorn myth (and rhinos are closely related to horses). Unfortunately, this mystique has also been the cause of their decline in the course of human history.

Rhinos have had a glorious past. During its 50 million years on earth, the Rhino Family (Rhinocerotidae) has been a very abundant and diverse group of mammals, with species occupying many different kinds of ecological niches often associated with other kinds of animals today. For example, after the dinosaurs, the largest land animal that ever lived on the planet was a species of rhino that morphologically and ecologically resembled a giraffe on steroids.

Rhinos were more widely distributed in the past. Rhinos occurred not just in Africa and Asia, but also in Europe and North America. In fact, much of the evolution of rhinos occurred in North America, where long before the bison (a relatively recent immigrant) rhinos were perhaps the most common large mammal until they became extinct about 4 million years ago. It is unknown why rhinos became extinct in North America. But there is no mystery why rhinos are on the verge of extinction in Africa and Asia today. The cause is poaching for their horn and degradation of their habitat.

There are five species of rhino still extant on the planet: two in Africa (the Black and the White) and three in Asia (Greater One-Horned/Indian, Sumatran, and Javan). All three of the Asian species and the Black Rhino in Africa are critically endangered. The White Rhino is the only one of the rhino species that has recovered to viable levels, but even this status is conservation dependent in the very unstable part of world where the White Rhino occurs. Further, it is only the southern subspecies of White Rhino in that has recovered (in southern Africa); the Northern subspecies in central Africa is virtually extinct.

There are some great conservation success stories for the rhino. The Southern White Rhino was reduced to about 20-50 around 1900 through a combination of big game hunters and eradication to create room for livestock. Gallant South African wildlife conservationists so successfully protected the small nucleus that survived at the start of the 20th Century that the Southern White was able to explosively expand to over 11,000 by the beginning of this 21st Century. The Indian Rhino similarly recovered from the brink of extinction. There were only 40-50 Indian Rhinos in India around 1900. Today, there are about 2,000. These cases demonstrate that rhinos can recover if they are adequately protected.

However, success can be tenuous if conservation efforts are not sustained. In Nepal, the recent rampant poaching -- nearly 40% (250 of the 650 rhinos in that country) of the population has been lost in the last five years -- is a sad setback, because this population had been also been recovering, from about 100 in 1950 to 650 in 2000. Analogously, the Northern White Rhino in Garamba National Park had recovered from about 15 individuals

in 1983 to over double that number by 1990. Moreover, that number remained stable, even through the civil and regional wars in the eastern Congo until the waves of poachers from neighboring Sudan, with sophisticated weaponry and militaristic style, finally overpowered the ranger staff. These cases demonstrate how vulnerable the rhinos are.

The Black Rhino may also possibly become a success story. The species has been enjoying a significant recovery, but an uneven one. In 1970, there were an estimated 65,000 Black Rhinos throughout Africa. Massive poaching during the 1970s and 1980s reduced this number to a low point of about 2,400 in the early 1990s. Since, then the species has recovered to about 3,600, and the species is being reintroduced into some countries where it had been extirpated. Such range expansion is an important part of the conservation strategy for the Black and other Rhino species. However, this success is regionally variable as poaching remains a serious problem in Kenya and Zimbabwe, and the distinct subspecies of Black Rhino in Cameroon is on or over the verge of extinction.

The other two of the five extant species of rhino are the Javan and the Sumatran in South East Asia. Both species represent critical cases. The Javan Rhino, with perhaps only 60-70 individuals surviving, is the rarest of all rhino species but probably not the most endangered. That dubious distinction belongs to the Sumatran Rhino. About 300 survive in such small and fragmented populations that males and females often cannot locate each other for reproduction. Only immediate and intensive efforts will save these two species.

Rhinos once prospered and then perished in North America while surviving, albeit now precariously, in Africa and Asia. Ironically, North America once again has the opportunity to play a major role in rhino evolution by helping to prevent the extinction of the rhino species that have survived in Africa and Asia.

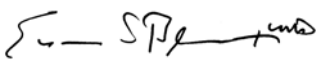
The captive propagation programs of the Species Survival Plan (SSP) of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) are one way North America is helping. More importantly, rhinos really need to survive and recover to viable levels in the wild. Hence, survival and recovery of rhinos in the wild is the goal of the North American Save the Rhinos Campaign.

North America is already doing much for conservation of rhino in the wild. However, much more needs to be done. About 30 of the approximately 80 AZA zoos with rhinos already contribute to in situ conservation of rhinos. About 50 do not. At the government level, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service administers the Rhino and Tiger Conservation Fund which provides significant help. Recently, corporations have also become involved. Indeed, the North American Save the Rhinos Campaign has been ignited by a major multi-year award from Ecko Unltd., a major urban clothing company. Zoos elsewhere in the world are also providing very significant help, especially in Europe, through the 2005-2006 Save the Rhinos Campaign and being conducted by the European Association of Zoos and Aquariums (EAZA) and supported by Save the Rhino International (SRI).

The North American campaign is being managed by the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) in close partnership with the AZA Rhinoceros Advisory Group and Species Survival Plan Program (RAG/SSP). This partnership has recently been reinforced by an MOU among IRF, RAG/SSP, and AZA. Moreover, the North American Campaign is

collaborating and coordinating very closely with the EAZA Campaign and SRI. Great appreciation is due to EAZA and SRI, and particularly Corinne Bos of the EAZA Executive Office, EAZA Rhino TAG Chair Nick Lindsay, EAZA Campaign Manager Renaud Fulconius and SRI Executive Director Cathy Dean for assistance to the North American Campaign.

One of the most recent rhinos to become extinct was the Woolly Rhino, which like the woolly mammoth, wandered the tundras of the last Ice Age. Like the woolly mammoth, the woolly rhino almost certainly became extinct about 10,000 years ago due to overexploitation from early human hunters. The woolly rhino is closely related to the Sumatran Rhino, which is also known as the Hairy Rhino, because under the right conditions this species develops a thick coat of long hair. It is too late for the Woolly Rhino. There is still time for the Hairy (Sumatran) and other four extant species of rhino. The North American Save the Rhinos Campaign is trying to ensure that all remaining rhino species survive and recover in the wild.



Evan Blumer
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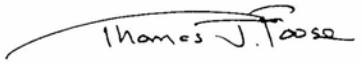

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