Field Program Updates

In each bi-monthly issue of the North American Save the Rhinos Campaign E-Newsletter, we will provide updates from the field and captivity regarding projects focused on the three focal species: the Black; the Indian; and the Sumatran rhinoceroses.

Black Rhino Update

Andrew Gell

Since March 2006, rhino management operations supported by IRF in Zimbabwe have involved the immobilizations - through drug-darting - of 40 black rhinos. Of these, four required treatment for snare injuries to the rhinos' legs, and three others were for veterinary interventions necessitated by fighting injuries or other health problems. Immobilizations also allowed the implantation of horn transmitters (which are used to facilitate the monitoring of rhinos in unsafe areas or in the post-translocation dispersion phase), dehorning of some rhinos, and for ear-notching, which also facilitates monitoring by allowing field staff to recognize individual animals.

The bad news since March is the loss of two black rhinos from the region of southern Zimbabwe in which IRF operates, but poaching pressure is actually worse in the central part of the country. Intensive operations to dehorn some rhinos and implant transmitters

in others are part of the overall response to this renewed pressure, and a search is now underway locally for teams of poachers who have been identified through investigatory work by the IRF/WWF rhino monitoring unit.

Good news over this same period is that the number of rhino births in southern Zimbabwe has significantly exceeded poaching losses. Conservancies in this region now contain 330 black rhinos. So, despite the major political, financial and logistical problems that can complicate the management of these populations, black rhino numbers in southern Zimbabwe are still growing faster than anywhere else in Africa.

There have also been encouraging developments in regional cooperation over rhino management. With funding from IRF, negotiations are now well underway for the translocation of a male black rhino from Zimbabwe to the Khama Rhino Sanctuary in Botswana. This is a test case for the translocation of additional rhinos from Zimbabwe to Botswana, which has been difficult to arrange because of Botswana's veterinary restrictions. Another positive move has been the agreement by wildlife management authorities in Zimbabwe and South Africa to proceed with a feasibility study for a proposed rhino intensive management facility in the Shashe-Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area. This facility will be designed to enable a phased reintroduction of zoo-bred black rhinos to protected areas of natural habitat in their native Africa.

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Indian Rhino Update

The exchange project of the Indian Rhino Program is progressing well. By the end of this year, three female rhinos from San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park are scheduled to be transferred to the quarantine facility at India's Delhi Zoo. Also included in the exchange will be three reticulated giraffes and three Burchell's zebras that have been collected from several U.S. zoos and private institutions. After the three female rhinos clear quarantine, two will be taken to the Sanjay Gandhi Biological Park in Patna, and one animal will remain at the Delhi Zoo. In exchange, two captive male rhinos from Patna and one from Delhi Zoo will be transported to the United States. All three males are young animals that are destined to play an important role in this international effort, which seeks to maximize genetic diversity and the global breeding potential of captive populations.

IRF's Indian conservation partners have been working very hard to accomplish all of the tasks required to start the relocation project of the Indian Rhino Program, which has been laid out in Indian Rhino Vision 2020. Assessments of areas destined for rhino reintroduction have been undertaken, and the issues highlighted in the assessment reports are now being addressed, including infrastructure needs within the parks designated for