



## MARCH 2006

### NEWS FROM THE FIELD

#### Project C: Re-establishment of black rhino

##### North Luangwa Rhino Project

*Hugo van der Westhuizen (Technical Advisor, NLCP)*

Our rains were late in the Luangwa Valley this year, and although it remains a concern, Northern Zambia never really gets as dry as some of the other Southern African countries.

Our Black Rhino baby, who is now eight months old, is doing well. After identifying the baby as a male we launched a competition with the local schools to come up with an appropriate name. The name that was decided on is Buyuntanshi, which means, "Progress". We also keep our fingers crossed to have a further two babies this year from the other two cows.

The local community also named the other five rhinos and the names are:

Kanabesa, which means Chief - he is currently the dominant bull

Londokeni, which means "We are back", and is the younger bull

Natwange, who is the mother to Buyuntanshi, - her name meaning "Celebration"

Twatemwa, which means "Happy", and probably the next cow to give birth

Mapalo, which means "Blessing", - the youngest female

Our monitoring scouts are doing a great job, especially taking into account that they have never seen a rhino before the arrival of the five animals in 2003. Julius Chinkumba and Clinton Chamwenga, (photo sent separately), were the two scouts that reported the tiny baby tracks about seven months ago. These scouts are based with their families at Mano camp, about 30 km away from the sanctuary and they come down to be based with the rhinos for a ten day period, after which they are replaced by the next group. At any given time there is a monitoring patrol inside the sanctuary, three security patrols on the outside, two fence maintenance teams on the fence and a team on the observation post overlooking the sanctuary. Then, within the rest of the Park a further 40 patrols per month are deployed. These patrols consist of five scouts each and go out for ten days at a time. This protection is not only for the rhino but also for the rest of the Park as well as a buffer zone of about 15 km in the Game Management Areas surrounding the Park.

About two months ago I joined the Monitoring scouts on a patrol to see what sex the new calf was. Up to then we didn't want to disturb the cow and calf. We tracked them, and after about three hours on their spoor we found them browsing. We then took off our shoes and came up quietly to them. Usually when rhino are browsing and the wind is in your favor one can really get very close. As a rule we would never go too close, but in this instance I wanted to make sure I can see the baby clearly to determine what sex it was. At one stage the calf started to fall behind his mother and because I wanted to walk when the mother was walking to reduce my noise, I came up to a few meters of the calf. All of a sudden he saw me. You can just imagine what went through his tiny

rhino brain seeing his first human being. He then jumped around and ran as fast as his little legs could carry him ran back to his mother. It was completely as if he was trying to tell his mother that there is a very ugly looking creature behind him in the bush. And with her indifferent behaviour one could imagine her replying.... "SHUT UP SON, STOP DREAMING, AND EAT YOUR FOOD!!!" And just went on with her browsing.

I was hoping that by now we could have reported that our population has gone up with a further 15 animals, but unfortunately that has not yet happened. All preparations have been made on the ground here to receive them, (40 km of fence, 17 boma's and 26 new rhino scouts trained), and basically all agreements have been signed with only one more Ministerial consent to be given. We are still hoping that the opportunity will arise for us to receive these animals this year, and we will keep you up to date as the negotiations proceed.

Till next time – greetings from the staff and rhinos of North Luangwa!

### **Project J: Indian Rhino Vision 2020**

*Tariq Aziz (WWF-India) & Tom Foose (IRF)*

#### **1. Base Map of Manas developed for IRV 2020**

WWF India and IRF have developed high quality maps for Manas National Park as part of the IRV 2020 Programme. The maps are based on the LISS III satellite images of 2005. These maps are going to be crucial for understanding the habitat in Manas and the changes that have occurred in the last ten years. The maps will facilitate better management of the park and will assist in developing strategies for identifying problems and their solutions. Already the map has been used to identify the site for the initial release of translocated rhinos (delineated by the red polygon on the map). Moreover, the map is being used to rehabilitate the security infrastructure of the Park by helping to determine priorities and plans for the location, number, and type (i.e. some with watchtowers and some without, known as Assam type) of guard camps in the Park. Using these priorities, construction has commenced on the first two camps at Kahibari and Dhanbeel Nala.

#### **2. The Manas Centenary Celebrations**

A century is a long period in conservation. Manas National Park in India celebrated the completion of its hundredth year of existence between 12th and 16th December 2005., less than a year after Kaziranga National Park had its own centenary. Both Kaziranga and Manas are central protected areas for Assam's long-term action plan for conservation of *Rhinoceros unicornis* as part of **Indian Rhino Vision 2020**.

For too long Manas has been in the news for all the wrong reasons. For about 13 years until 2003, the park was in the grip of armed militants and poachers who hunted the wildlife. The Indian rhino was the worst hit. The species was extirpated from the park.

Manas is significant for a number of reasons. It is a national park, a tiger reserve, a biosphere reserve, an elephant reserve and a World Heritage Site – no other protected area in India can claim so many distinctions. And now it is also the site for the first translocation of rhinos under the **IRV 2020** programme on Rhino translocations within Assam.

Mainly drained by the river Manas, the park is home to a total of 55 mammals, 36 reptiles and over 300 species of birds. Manas harbors by far the greatest number (21) of India's Schedule one mammals of any protected area in the country. It is also the single most important site for the future survival of pygmy hog and hispid hare. Other Schedule one species include a host of birds, many reptiles and amphibians in addition to some plant species as well.

After the resolution of the ethnic problem a couple of years ago, Manas has started to limp back to normal after having borne the brunt of the unrest. The numerical significance of the centenary apart, the occasion has also coincided with a renewed interest in, and concern for, Manas. This is crucial for long-term survival of Manas. Another positive trend is that tourists – domestic as well as from abroad — are flocking Manas like never before. While the scars of the past are too deep to heal overnight, there has obviously been a new awakening that Manas is a priceless natural heritage that must be preserved for posterity. The centenary celebrations have sent out the message loud and clear – that a united effort from all concerned, the forest authorities, the locals, the NGOs, is the need of the hour, as Manas enters a critical phase of recuperation.

### **Project K: Rhino Protection Units for Javan & Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia**

Over the past months the RPU's in Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park have covered the whole park area transect-wise, to inspect the most remote areas of the Park. Most patrols take place in the most vulnerable areas, near roads and settlements, and in places where intelligence indicates that people may have entered. This carries the risk that patrols into other parts become too infrequent, encouraging poachers to try their luck there.

Fortunately no signs of poaching were found anywhere in the Park, and the fears that poachers could have gone in through the backdoor' are proven to be unfounded. Nevertheless this type of coverage is very useful to monitor wildlife and human activities in all areas of the park, and it will be continued in the future.

The RPU's had a significant role in the rescue and evacuation of two young female rhinos that got out of the park and were in acute danger of being hurt or killed. In September last year a rhino, later called Ratu, was rescued in a heavily populated area south of Way Kambas NP, and in November another rhino, called Rosa, was moved from Bukit Barisan Selatan NP, because she had lost all fear of humans and was venturing ever further out of the safety of the Park.

Both rhinos are now in the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas, and are doing very well. It is hoped that they will be fully mature in a year or so and will then be able to contribute significantly to the Global Sumatran Rhino Captive Breeding Program.

To honor everyone involved in the successful evacuation of Ratu and Rosa, a big party was organized in Way Kambas NP on 5 February. Everyone that assisted in the operations; villagers, local dignitaries, police, boy scouts, local NGOs, RPU's, SRS staff, National Park staff, staff of the Tiger and Elephant projects, etc were invited and awarded. The Secretary of the Director General for Forest Protection and Nature Conservation, and many other dignitaries were present to express their appreciation for the successful operations.

Individuals were presented with a signed certificate, organizations with framed pictures of the rhinos, individually signed by the Minister of Forestry, and a few key organizations were presented with digital cameras.

In between the speeches and the ceremonies the audience was entertained with traditional dances performed by groups from the surrounding communities. Especially the now famous Rhino Dance Group got a lot of attention, with their enthusiastic performance during the communal lunch.

The Ratu and Rosa festival' was a great success and has certainly helped to tighten the relations between the National Park and the local communities.