

Embargoed until 00:01GMT Tuesday, June 17, 2008

Rhinos on the rise in Africa but Northern white nears extinction

Gland, Switzerland, June 17, 2008 (IUCN) – African rhinos have reached record numbers for the first time in decades, but the Northern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) is on the brink of extinction.

The figures, compiled by the IUCN Species Survival Commission African Rhino Specialist Group, show there are now more than 21,000 African rhinos.

According to the results, the white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) has increased from 14,540 in 2005 to 17,480 in 2007. It is listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™, but one of its two subspecies, the Northern white rhino, is listed as Critically Endangered and is on the brink of extinction.

It is restricted in the wild to Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the only remaining population was reduced by poaching from 30 in April 2003 to only four confirmed animals by August 2006.

“Worryingly, recent fieldwork has so far failed to find any presence of these four remaining rhinos,” says Dr Martin Brooks, Chair of the IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group. “Unless animals are found during the intensive surveys that are planned under the direction of the African Parks Foundation, the subspecies may be doomed to extinction.”

In contrast, the other subspecies, the Southern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum simum*), is listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List and continues to increase in numbers and range.

Similarly, the population of African black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*), has increased from 3,730 in 2005 to 4,180 in 2007, although it still remains Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. In the last two years alone, numbers have risen by about 450 animals, with several new populations being founded or enhanced through translocation, such as in North Luangwa National Park, Zambia.

“This is fantastic news for the African black rhino,” says Dr Richard Emslie, Scientific Officer of the IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group. “However, these magnificent creatures are not out of the woods yet. They are still classed as Critically Endangered and face increasing threats of poaching and civil unrest. There is no room for complacency.”

The majority of African black rhino can be found in just four countries – Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia and Kenya but with increasing numbers in a number of other range states. All countries with breeding populations have recorded increases, except Zimbabwe, whose numbers are slightly down.

Poaching for rhino horn remains the rhino’s Achilles heel, and while under control in many countries it has been responsible for significant losses in both the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe.

“Even though protection from poaching is critical, effective rhino conservation must also include intensive monitoring and biological management to ensure annual growth rates of at least 5 % per year so that surplus rhinos are made available to create new populations,” says Dr Martin Brooks.

For more information contact:

- Sarah Halls, IUCN Media Relations Officer, t +41 22 999 0127 m +41 79 528 3486, e sarah.halls@iucn.org

- Lynette Lew, IUCN Species Communications Officer, t +41 22 999 0153, e lynette.lew@iucn.org

Photos are available from sarah.halls@iucn.org

Notes to editors

At its recent meeting at Lake Manyara, opened by Tanzania's Minister for National Resources and Tourism, Hon Madam Shamsa Mwangunga, and sponsored by US Fish and Wildlife Service, WWF's African Rhino Programme, and the Tanzanian Government, delegates from 14 countries were exposed to a wide variety of management strategies, programmes and techniques designed to improve rhino management. "One of the highlights", says Dr Brooks, "was the first ever introduction of a significant founder population of black rhino to community land in South Africa, made possible through the WWF/Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife's range expansion project, and hopefully this approach can be applied elsewhere to enhance rhino ownership by rural communities". Workshops were also held to identify conservation priorities and to address challenges relating to legal and illegal trade.

About IUCN

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, helps the world find pragmatic solutions to our most pressing environment and development challenges by supporting scientific research; managing field projects all over the world; and bringing governments, NGOs, the UN, international conventions and companies together to develop policy, laws and best practice.

IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network. IUCN is a democratic union with more than 1,000 government and NGO member organizations, and almost 11,000 volunteer scientists in more than 160 countries. IUCN's work is supported by over 1,000 professional staff in 60 offices and hundreds of partners in public, NGO and private sectors around the world.

www.iucn.org

About Species Survival Commission

The Species Survival Commission (SSC) is the largest of IUCN's six volunteer commissions with a global membership of 8,000 experts. SSC advises IUCN and its members on the wide range of technical and scientific aspects of species conservation and is dedicated to securing a future for biodiversity. SSC has significant input into the international agreements dealing with biodiversity conservation.

www.iucn.org/ssc

About IUCN Species Programme

The IUCN Species programme supports the activities of the IUCN Species Survival Commission and individual Specialist Groups, as well as implementing global species conservation initiatives. It is an integral part of the IUCN Secretariat and is managed from IUCN's international headquarters in Gland, Switzerland. The Species Programme includes a number of technical units covering Species Trade and Use, the Red List Unit, Freshwater Biodiversity Assessments Unit, (all located in Cambridge, UK), and the Global Biodiversity Assessment Unit (located in Washington DC, USA).

www.iucn.org/species