

Democratic Republic of Congo

Rumble in the Jungle

Anyone who's read Douglas Adams's book, "Last chance to see", will remember his rather surreal experience of standing on top of one termite hill and looking through a pair of binoculars at another hill, hoping it would shape-shift into a rare northern white rhino.

The Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly known as Zaire) is home to the last known wild population of northern white rhinos, *Ceratotherium simum cottoni*. With only around 30 northern whites surviving, this sub-species is critically endangered. If rarity weren't enough of a problem, the rhinos and the Garamba eco-system have also been threatened by the side-effects of civil wars.

Rhino monitoring and patrolling has been severely impeded. The Sudan's civil war led to an influx of guns, military deserters and refugees. The 1997 Liberation War resulted in the disarming of guards in Garamba for a short time. Since 1998 there has been an unstable situation of rebel warlords, beginning with a Ugandan rebel-linked occupation. Although senior staff and technical advisors were forced to leave for a while, guards continued monitoring and patrolling. Amazingly, despite all the manmade hazards, an aerial survey conducted in April 2002 found a minimum 27 individuals.



Aerial surveys allow field managers to count individuals and better understand ranges and rhino locations in relation to poaching activities. They help deter poachers by being highly visible (and sometimes attracting hostile fire) and can also lead ground patrols to poacher camps.

April's intensive rhino survey (funded by SRI and IRF) was carried out by a stratified block count approach, using individual recognition, whereby high-density areas are re-surveyed after the first basic coverage. Ten blocks were surveyed, plus an area outside the park where two young rhinos had been living. 26

observations were made of 25 different individuals inside the park, while ground patrols found tracks of the two sub-adults in Kpangba, a thickly wooded area outside the park. One young female and her older juvenile who were not seen, but could easily have been missed, is of the age where she would be expected to have another calf. A calf not previously seen was identified in early September. It is therefore reasonable to expect that there are still 30 present.

In May 2001, a patrol found a rhino carcass that they estimated had been killed in February. The horns had been hacked off. That same month a consultant was offered a rhino horn for sale in Maridi, just across the border in Sudan. The following month, a transporter was offered a rhino horn in Kampala, Uganda. Encouragingly, during the April 2002 survey no recent signs of rhino poaching were found in the rhino sector.

Update 10 Sept 2002: "10 Guards have just returned from a two-week patrol. They had heavy contact with poachers in the south east of the park, not far from where 5 rhinos were spotted on an aerial survey last week. At this time of the year the long grass offers the best protection to the rhino." Poaching remains a real threat and continued support for Garamba is vital.

Dr Kes Hillman Smith
Project Coordinator
Garamba Rhino Project

