

India:

Moving rhinos to Manas

Indian Rhino Vision 2020 aims to increase the total rhino population in Assam from 2,000 to 3,000 by the year 2020 and, just as significantly, to ensure these rhinos are distributed over at least seven Protected Areas to provide long-term viability. This goal will be achieved through increased protection and translocations of rhinos from source populations in Kaziranga and Pabitora to target areas such as Manas National Park, which once had at least 100 rhinos.

Bibhab Kumar Talukdar
Co-Chair
IUCN SSC Asian Rhino
Specialist Group

Secretary General
Aaranyak

Asian Rhino Coordinator
International Rhino
Foundation

As reported in the last issue of *The Horn*, the first two rhinos (both male) were moved from Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary to Manas NP in April 2008. Problems with securing the tranquillising drugs have now been resolved and we were all set to move 18 more rhinos to Manas NP in November 2008, when we came up against an unexpected problem.

On 1 September, one of the rhinos strayed out of the Park and moved to about 50km, almost reaching another Protected Area called Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary. It took two weeks for Forest Dept staff and other concerned officials to bring the rhino back to Manas. The rhino is now in a boma with an electric fence, together with four female rhinos that had come from a rescue centre in Kaziranga NP two years ago.

The "escape" not only put the rhinos in danger, but also incurred costs of over US \$7,000 for the recapture. With this in mind, and considering that 18 more rhinos are due to be translocated into Manas in spring 2009, the only feasible option was for Manas NP authorities to erect an electric fence around the periphery (about 8.9km) of prime rhino habitat: comprising of grassland and bodies of water, adjacent to the existing small electric fence (see second map in the appendix). We also wanted to strengthen the effectiveness of the patrols of the fenced area, and to facilitate visits into Manas NP by local

communities to develop a sense of pride and responsibility for Manas and its endangered species, and in particular the rhino. This fence would have to be built before any more rhinos are translocated.

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To do this, we would need to build a patrol path alongside this fence that would allow passage by motorbikes, cycles, domestic elephants and occasionally by light vehicles. A small rivulet runs through the fenced area. We therefore needed to install cemented Hume pipes, which would allow the rivulet to flow under the fence and the patrol path, enable motorbikes and vehicles to pass over it, but prevent rhinos escaping along the path of the river by using a series of small-diameter Hume pipes.

The communities from eastern and central part of Manas NP will be selected in consultation with local NGOs and institutions. They will then be able to participate in orientation camps and field visits into the Manas NP to increase their enthusiasm for wildlife conservation and seek their active support and cooperation in re-building Manas NP.

A recce was carried out along the southern boundary and work has now started on fencing a 4-5 kilometre section. Fencing companies have been contacted, quotes received and the tender has been awarded. We hope that, by early April, the fence will be ready to serve its purpose.

The next phase of rhino translocations is due to take part this autumn. In this phase we plan to translocate about eight rhinos from Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary and another ten rhinos from Kaziranga NP into their new home in Manas NP. This time, we hope they'll stay put.



A Greater one-horned rhinoceros

Grants

Save the Rhino gave a grant of £2,000 to raise more funds. Stuttgart Zoo donated 10,000 Euros, of £7,900, and Chester Zoo, which now has Greater one-horned rhinos in its collection, awarded £7,000. This money will pay for the fence, patrol path, motorbikes and community visits to the Park. Our grateful thanks to our kinding funders and sponsors.