

2. CONSERVATION STATUS & TAXONOMY (G. Guldenschuh)

The historic distribution of the Indian or Greater one-horned rhino *Rhinoceros unicornis* Linné, 1758, covered the huge floodplains of the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra on the Indian subcontinent (Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Assam, Bangladesh, Myanmar). Today, their remaining population is restricted to two little areas in the northeast of their former range, one in southern Nepal, one in Assam. The Nepalese (western) population has an estimated number of 652 individuals of which about 600 live in the Chitwan Valley National Park. The Indian (eastern) population counts about 1'868 individuals of which about 1'649 live in the Kaziranga National Park, giving a total of 2'520 animals in the wild in the year 1999 (Foose, van Strien & Rookmaaker, 2000).

The very restricted ranges of distribution, the loss of habitat, the genetic bottleneck the species has gone through (only less than 100 animals survived the century-long massacre) and the still relatively small size of the slowly recovering population make the Indian rhinos still very vulnerable to inbreeding problems and epidemic diseases. Also poaching is an ongoing vital threat: the losses to poaching between 1986 and 1995 are an estimated 450 in India and 50 in Nepal (Foose & van Strien, 1997).

The worldwide living captive population of the Indian rhino in the year 2000 counts 137 animals (72.65) in 50 institutions. 39 specimens come from the wild, 98 (56.42 = 72 %) are zoo born (Wirz-Hlavacek, 2001).