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CONSERVATION CRISES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

EXAMPLE OF GARAMBA NATIONAL PARK DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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WWF/Garamba National Park Project

Summary

Throughout the developing world, the millions of dollars and huge and continuous effort invested nationally and internationally in conservation can all be lost when the civil unrest which often features in these countries takes precedence. The breakdown of law and order within a country and the looting of anti-poaching resources can lead to over-exploitation of wildlife resources with little or no control possible. The presence of civil unrest in neighbouring countries leads to increasing movement of arms and ammunition raising the strength of the poachers' side of the equation. Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (previously Zaïre) and situated on the border with Sudan is the example demonstrated here. The aid invested by the international conservation community in field conservation is often focused on building up resources in one area and training within a limited field of expertise. The Game Rangers Association of Africa proposes to synthesise a wide range of conservation law enforcement expertise in mobile teams that can train and support the local law enforcement agencies in their own unique field conditions, when conditions get too hot to handle alone and can perhaps allow them to benefit from a

centralised pool of equipment supply. The presence of such a training team would have been valuable in the past in Garamba as poaching increased from neighbouring Sudan, and will be vital now in bringing the guards to a level where they can hit back at the illegal exploitation sufficiently to save the park. We ask, however, could such a team be envisaged with an intervention as well as a training role to hold the fort and protect nationally and internationally valued natural resources in times of crisis? Could the possibility of such a unit be explored by the Game Rangers Association of Africa or International Ranger Federation, in conjunction with bodies such as the United Nations African Crisis Initiative, or with the International Green Cross?

Introduction

- ▶ The effects of war, both within countries and in neighbouring countries on the conservation of wildlife and natural resources are well known, particularly in developing nations. Within Africa: Uganda, Sudan, Mozambique, Angola, Somalia, Rwanda, Central Africa Republic and Zaïre are cases in point, where under such circumstances, the national wildlife agencies and their international donor partners are often powerless, or do not have the mandate, to resist the force of arms or events. The wildlife and natural resources suffer major over-exploitation for the benefit of a few against the long term loss to the nation and the world. Where such use is truly to provide food or firewood to starving people the question of priorities can be debated, yet other organisations exist to provide for this need and often the exploitation is for the benefit of

few individuals to the detriment of long term national resource and major international investment.

The current status of Garamba National Park is given, both as a case history to illustrate this with a discussion of broader needs, and as a cry for major, urgent intervention to help now.

Background

- ▶ Garamba National Park in the north east of the country, bordering on Sudan, is one of the four World Heritage Sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (ex-Zaire). All have been affected by the events of the recent Liberation War, but Garamba is most urgently and currently most seriously threatened.
- ▶ Garamba has the unique distinction of harbouring the last remaining wild population of northern white rhinos (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) in the world. It also has the only giraffes in the DRC, which are another unique indigenous sub-species, and has or had, one of the densest elephant populations (11,000 at 4.6/km² in 1995), again unique in their sub-specific mixing.
- ▶ Since 1984 Garamba National Park has largely been supported by a joint donors project, now led by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), which has invested over 2 million dollars. The project is a joint partnership with the national conservation division called the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN), previously IZCN.

- ▶ The logistical problems in running a project like this have always been enormous. Very little is available within the country. Fuel, vehicles, equipment and other supplies need to be trucked in from Kenya or further afield, while roads and bridges are such that large trucks are unable to reach Garamba. Law enforcement within the park is largely done on foot and for half of the year the grass is over 2 metres tall.

- ▶ For the first ten years the project was extremely successful with rhino and elephant populations doubling. However, with the increasing strength and firepower of poachers and now the effects of the Liberation War, the invaluable wildlife of Garamba are now very seriously threatened. The WWF/Garamba National Park Project is more than willing to help the new government protect this park and its wildlife before it is too late. However the enormity of the problem is too great to be dealt with by existing logistical and human resources.

Current status

- ▶ The immediate problem is poaching that is out of control and a lack of the logistics and suitably trained manpower and authority to deal with it.

- ▶ The poaching threat is not new. Since 1991 the presence of increasing amounts of automatic weapons and ammunition,

grenades and other heavy arms from the war in adjacent Sudan has led to increasing poaching for meat and more recently for ivory in Garamba National Park (Figs. 1& 2). This has three time necessitated military intervention or training by the Forces Armées Zairois (FAZ), which helped but did not succeed in overcoming the poaching, because it was often not the ideal approach to this type of bush warfare and the supply of ammunition to guards at other times was not always sufficient.

- ▶ The events associated with the Liberation War have led to a loss of over 90% of the anti-poaching resources (Table 1), and a disarming of the guards, which in turn have led to major reduction in anti-poaching effort. While a collaborative effort between a few loyal park staff and the AFDL military stationed at the park has enabled some anti-poaching patrols to be carried out, patrol days have been reduced on average to 14% of the number in 1996 (Fig.4).
- ▶ As a result the poaching has greatly increased and progressed south through the park into the Rhino Sector. A survey in June 1997 revealed 49 poaching camps that had been occupied within the preceding two weeks and ten groups of poachers.(Fig.3) Most were close to the Garamba river. 29 elephants and 24 buffalos freshly killed were recorded, while over 16 hippos floated dead and belly up in the Garamba river. In August, 63 dead hippos were counted on one flight.
- ▶ 18 different rhinos were seen on a survey in June and probably more were present. On the basis of proportions seen on this type of survey it was estimated that possibly

around 24 were still there, compared with 27 to 31 at the end of 1996. One young male has been confirmed killed and almost certainly more have been killed. In August only three of the five rhinos that had been carrying radio transmitters in their horns could be found.

- ▶ The park was occupied by the liberation forces in February 1997. At that time park weapons were required to be surrendered. The guards can only be re-armed when they have followed the AFDL ideological and military training courses. By August this has still not happened. While it is excellent to ensure a new ideology in this new nation, the urgency of the need to combat the poaching before more rhinos and elephants are lost, coupled with the logistics of achieving the two month military training in this remote border area requires more speed and support than the normal course of events.

Table 1

The following table illustrates some of the losses Garamba has suffered between January and June 1997. It is too soon to do a final inventory as the military continue to help themselves to park equipment as and when they see fit.

BEFORE	AFTER
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Fuel stock - 12 months	Fuel stock - 1 month
Operational vehicles - 13	Operational vehicles - 2
Un-operational vehicles - 5	Un-operational vehicles - 5
Radio & relay system operational	Radio & relay system destroyed
Walkie talkies - 25	Walkie talkies - 2
Guards supplied with uniforms	Guards uniforms confiscated
Tents for guards	No tents
IZCN stock of arms & ammo.	ICCN arms & ammo confiscated
Vehicle spares in stock	Vehicle spares looted
Patrol rations in stock	Patrol rations lacking
Continuous regular patrolling	Very little patrolling
Men on patrol / month - 119	Men on patrol / month - 23
Patrol days / month - 147	Patrol days / month - 21
Missionary & Mercenary vehicles - 6 (hidden at park)	Missionary & Mercenary vehicles - 0

- ▶ Since the liberation, there have been a series of different Alliance military forces stationed at Nagero, generally about 75 at a time and a series of over 14 different Commanders. In the spirit of collaboration there have been several joint anti-poaching operations, with guards as guides, but as noted above this has not been sufficient to control the poaching and such a rapid turn-over makes effective collaboration difficult. Without radios, vehicles, fuel, rations and equipment it is impossible for the anti-poaching to be efficient. Most of the recent forces have been young, recently recruited and not as experienced at anti-poaching under fire as the park guards, although their use of heavy weapons has been very valuable. Many of the guards, especially those implicated in looting have not returned to work. Guards on patrol have to be supplied with rations. The military forces had their own rations until the end of May, but now this has become irregular to non-existent. Therefore, not only is there insufficient effective anti-poaching to combat the threat, but there is the extra burden to try to find, purchase and transport rations for 75 extra people. If the military do not receive rations and salaries, there is potential for considerable unrest. They will remain until the guards have had their training.

Proposed action for Garamba

It was clear in 1996 that the outside intervention of specialised game guard training was necessary to overcome the poaching and to guide and motivate the guards. Negotiations

began then with the GRA, and in January 1997, Jack Greeff of the GRA went with FAS to Garamba to do a training needs assessment. The mercenaries were in control of the park, and they were forced to remain at a camp out in the park, but an assessment was done and reported. (Greeff 1997, Training Needs Assessment, GNP, Zaire, Report).

Under current circumstances it is even more vital that the in situ training is carried out, coupled with motivating the guards to be able to repel the illegal hunting and occupation of the park and this must be in place before the end of the year and the grass burns off. Clearance from the Minister of the Environment is being actively sought and a financial and logistical support contribution has been requested from the South African Embassy in Kinshasa, while the balance of funds already exists within the Projet budget. (Projet Proposal: An anti-poaching training programme by the Game Rangers Association of Africa for guards in Garamba National Park, D.R.Congo.

This training programme forms a vital part of a broader series of priority actions have been proposed in an effort to save Garamba and the rhinos:

- ▶ **Military intervention.** This has been requested of the President of the Republic through the Minister of the Environment. Ideally it would include well trained and well armed men with full logistical support, including helicopters in order to be effective. In reality there may be other national priorities.

- ▶ **Guard training.** This is proposed for action by the Game Rangers Association of Africa, outlined in the project

Proposal cited above.

- ▶ **Government Agreement.** A revised agreement between WWF and the new government is necessary to allow a continuation of project operations and duty free import of materials to completely re-equip the park. In September, however, an interim validation of the old agreement was obtained.

- ▶ **Re-establishment of ICCN/Project authority over equipment.** While military stationed in the area continue to make free use of project/park equipment and spares it is no use bringing in more equipment or repairing existing out of service vehicles. Re-establishment of ICCN authority over the military in conservation issues needs to be assured from the highest level.

- ▶ **Provision of rations.** Rations are needed for guards to go out on patrol. They are also needed to support the occupying military to avoid them poaching their own meat, and such rations are needed in larger quantities than usual to support the training and possible strike force. Negotiations with the World Food Programme have resulted in the provision of 26.5 tonnes, which is on route and possible further long term supplies until the project again has a lorry and locally grown produce is available.

- ▶ **Re-equipment directly and urgently.** Since all equipment, vehicles and fuel for the anti-poaching operations and functioning of the park, have been taken, these need to be replaced, with at least the minimum essentials flown in to save time. A pre-requisite of this is for the authority of ICCN and project personnel to be established vis-a-vis the

military in order to ensure that equipment brought in is only used for conservation work.

- ▶ **Re-organisation of personnel.** An internal ICCN re-organisation is necessary to eliminate the personnel that looted or behaved traitorously towards the park, and to ensure that only trustworthy and motivated people continue the work of conservation under the new regime.

- ▶ **Long term project re-development.** Simultaneous with the emergency action is the need to begin re-developing the project for the long term in order to have the ability to maintain control of the park when it has been regained.

Wider Implications - A conservation crisis intervention force?

Garamba is one example of a protected area, where the mobile training force proposed by GRA would have been extremely valuable for specialised and effective training of the guards and for training of IZCN trainer. This unit should also be vital in the rehabilitation process.

However, had it been possible to take sufficiently effective action and maintain protection of the park by a politically non-aligned and acceptable conservation law enforcement intervention force, the problem would not be nearly so acute and rhinos might not have been lost.

In 1993 the International Green Cross was formed under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, with the stated objective to "facilitate the vigorous, timely and effective response to present and impending man-made environmental disasters". The

United Nations African Response Initiative is currently training African forces to take proactive measures in humanitarian crises.

We propose the idea of a force specialised in wildlife and natural resource conservation under a United Nations or other politically non-aligned and acceptable international umbrella that could be called upon to "hold the fort" and support the existing conservation agencies in internationally and nationally valued "protected areas" in times of man-made environmental crisis. The Game Rangers Association or the International Ranger Federation would be the ideal bodies to provide the specialised expertise. Investment in protected areas and the returns from such areas in times of peace are significant. Should we allow all to be lost in short term crises? If we really value natural resources, let us be realistic in what is needed to conserve them.

PRIORITY ACTIONS PROPOSED
FOR GARAMBA NATIONAL PARK

- ▶ Military intervention.

- ▶ Guard training.

- ▶ Government Agreement.

- ▶ Re-establishment of ICCN/Project authority over equipment.

- ▶ Provision of rations.

- ▶ Re-equipment directly and urgently.

- ▶ Re-organisation of personnel.

- ▶ Long term project re-development.