

**GARAMBA NATIONAL PARK PROJECT
CONSERVATION OF THE NORTHERN WHITE RHINOCEROS
IN GARAMBA NATIONAL PARK, ZAIRE**

WWF Project ZR0009, (1984)

July - December 1996, with annual overview for 1996

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Executive Summary

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this phase of the project is the conservation of the northern white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) in the ecosystem of Garamba National Park, Zaire.

The broad objectives are :

- ▶ To work with the Institut Zaïrois pour la Conservation de la Nature (IZCN) staff to develop and maintain the conservation of the National Park and protected areas, with focus of the rhinos
- ▶ To provide financial, logistical and technical support to carrying out law enforcement and all the ancillary park management activities necessary to facilitate it.
- ▶ To develop and maintain monitoring of the rhinos, law enforcement and ecosystem and to feed-back results for guiding, measuring the effect of and where necessary modifying strategy of conservation.

This phase, beginning in July 1996 started with a re-focusing of objectives and methods based on a combination of the recommendations of the WWF mission in April, the practical feasibilities and the budget limitations. WWF (UK) has been running a fund raising campaign in England, focused on the "adopting" of individual rhinos. This has been very successful so far, and together with equal support from WWF (Germany) and a major increase in the IZCN personnel support from the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), has resulted in a doubling of the budget to \$ 438,834. This is still only half what would be required however to achieve the ideals laid out by the WWF mission. On this basis a detailed workplan with indicators and time scale was drawn up in September and has since been modified in view of changing events in Zaire. A copy is included in Annexe.

OVERVIEW OF EVENTS DURING THE YEAR AND CURRENT SITUATION

Poaching and anti-poaching

At the end of 1995 and early 1996 there had been the following

changes in poaching:

- ▶ Poaching spread further south overlapping with the edge of the rhino area
- ▶ Poaching gangs increased in size
- ▶ There was an involvement of armed local military, and a drive for commercial rather than meat exploitation

To deal with this:

- ▶ The anti-poaching strategy was revised to improve the effectiveness and coverage of the forces
- ▶ Requests for high level intervention led to better control of local military and provision of ammunition
- ▶ A training and joint action session was held with 413 Battalion commanded from Watsa

This resulted in reducing the poaching again in the second half of the year. There were 53 armed contacts with poachers during the year, compared with 26 in 1995. Thirty four (64%) of these were in the first half of the year, associated initially with the increased poaching and then with the increased action with the military. The distribution of contacts is mapped. Comparison with the distributions from 1995 and 1993 shows the movement of poaching further south. Towards the end of the year and in early 1997 there was a tendency for more poaching to come in from the west. This was also demonstrated by the distribution of fires set by poachers and poaching camps that was mapped from the rhino monitoring.

Three guards died during the year as a result of anti-poaching operations. Siro Vungwagba was mortally wounded in April and died shortly after reaching hospital. His funeral was a very moving affair, attended by the WWF mission who happened to be there at the time. Each guard in the guard of honour knew that it could easily have been one of them. Yet anti-poaching operations continued, and more training and joint operations with the military supported their actions and trained more young recruits. In October Gunika Takiani died instantly when his own grenade exploded during an exchange of fire with poachers. Kabadunga Balu, who was next to him, received shrapnel in the head and has since died in hospital.

Rhinos

Two rhinos were known to have been poached in February and March of 1996 respectively. These were identified as an adult male M5 *Bawesi* and a young adult female 3bF *Juillet*. The

latter was pregnant with a near term male calf. This was the first confirmed rhino poaching since the project started.

Two rhino calves were born during the year. *Mbolifué* (Gift from Heaven in Azande) was born in June to *Minzoto 4dF* who was then 6 years and 10 months old. In October a calf was born to her older sister *Noel 4cF* and it has been named *Kito* (wet season). This brings the number of known rhinos to 31, but four of these have not been seen for over a year and two young males *Solo* and *Mamu* used to occupy an area to the east where there have been poaching incursions. The current status of the rhinos is indicated on the accompanying table.

In March radio transmitters were inserted into the horns of 5 rhinos. This has greatly helped the monitoring of them and their associates and the guidance of anti-poaching patrols.

Current Crisis

In October, November and early December, the unrest along the Great Lakes region of the eastern border developed. Initiated apparently by or through the Banyamulenge, Zaireans of Tutsi origin, and focusing at first on the problems associated with the largely Hutu refugee camps, it has developed into a full scale rebel force against the existing regime. Now called the "Alliance Democratique pour la Liberation du Congo-Zaire" (ADFL) and reputed, within Zaire, to be backed by the USA, they took Bukavu and Goma by November. They then proceeded to restore law and order and normal working conditions, but there is inevitably fear among the people of reprisals if the government forces return.

At the same time there was unrest along the Ugandan border between Ugandan rebels based in Zaire and Zairean rebels based in Uganda, with the Sudanese SPLA thrown in for good measure. This had resulted in closure of the Uganda border and a block on imports of heavy goods, notably fuel to the park. We were therefore operating within fuel use restrictions. In addition our fuel loads only get transported as far as a mission close to the border and we had been waiting for the dry season to transport it. This had to be set in motion immediately.

As the ADFL rebel forces began to move north and east, the Zairean military and officials began to flee towards Isiro and Kisangani. Many factions among these military deserters took by force any form of transport they could and looted and pillaged shops, homes and offices along the way. The MAF centre of operations in Nyankunde was hit early on and the AIM centre in Bunia had to go into "hiding". After considerable

discussion, and temporary movements, every single Protestant missionary and most of the Catholics pulled out by early December. Virtually all their places have since been looted and with them went the infrastructure of services that had run this corner of Zaire - air transport, communications and mail, food supplies medical facilities and schooling. Having the advantage of the project plane, we stayed on at the park a bit longer having developed a base of operations out in the park, removed most of the vehicles to less obvious places and hidden a few things. We however left two days earlier for Christmas than planned, on the advice of the Conservateur, as a few of the fleeing armed military headed towards and through the park.

On January 16th Fraser returned to the park as promised, but flying direct to a base out in the park. The facilities of the head-quarters: airstrips, stores, accommodation, and trained personnel are being used by government linked forces. This gives some degree of protection for the continuation of conservation activities, but may also act as an attraction for conflict.

The planning and development activities for some time have focussed on building up the internal capacity of the park and the motivation of the personnel, to keep up the work of conservation even in times of crisis. It was also proposed that as far as possible, project personnel would try to keep providing logistical and aerial support and motivation from time to time as feasible, by flying direct into the park. The value of the aircraft in enabling this to happen is inestimable. This was the basis of Fraser's visit in January. We hope to return for a short time soon. He was also working with the Game Rangers Association to carry out a training needs assessment. If it is possible to follow this up with a short intensive training session of the right kind, it will be an excellent means of helping the guards to keep protecting the rhinos. Inevitably the pressures are increasing, since the Sudanese probably anticipate profiting from the unrest within Zaire, and it is all too easy for military to also make use of the situation if they are not tightly disciplined. At present anti-poaching is continuing, but the forces benefitted greatly from the presence of Fraser, the aircraft and a visiting anti-poaching training expert.

PROGRESS OF ACTIVITIES

The following Monthly Activity Summaries outline the work that

has been carried out during the year:.

Anti-poaching and Poaching Monitoring

The Table summarises anti-poaching results related to contacts for the year.

- ▶ There were 53 contacts, compared with 26 in 1995, more than double.
- ▶ From 1995 to 1996 man.days rose from 14,783 to 19,657, an increase of 33%, and patrol days from to
- ▶ The difference between the rise in results and that in effort indicates that there was a real increase in poaching, not merely an increase in effort, but it was not a doubling. The increase in effort was actually in response to the changes in poaching and involved employment and training of new recruits and military involvement in training and joint action.
- ▶ This action resulted in a reduction in poaching indices by the second half of the year. There were 3.6 contacts per month in the second half of the year compared with 5.7 in the first.
- ▶ A similar pattern is seen examining the relationship between contacts and patrol days since 1993, in half yearly intervals. These divisions relate broadly to the periods of short and long grass. During the short grass season in the first half of the year, patrolling is easier, it is easier to see indices at a distance and it is easier to see animals to poach. Alternatively, in the long grass period it is easier for poachers to remain undetected and therefore safer to poach.