

sequencing of the pathogen and identification of the infection's origin.

These post-infection surveys, compared to those undertaken previously in a healthy scenario, show that all populations are now empty or severely depleted, except at Fairy Walk and Corbet Spring, where the species remains. The Durrell team's analysis of the situation was that the epidemic would advance towards this last stronghold, with devastating consequences. In Dominica, a much larger island than Montserrat, the disease decimated all mountain chicken populations within a few months. Studies of the spread of chytrid in Australia, Panama and Costa Rica have shown that the disease can travel 28–100 km per year. Given the small size of the species' distribution range there was only a short time (at best a few weeks) to take action.

In the face of the rapid spread of this disease and in consultation with the Montserrat government, Durrell activated a plan to evacuate frogs from the affected area (see <http://blog.durrell.org> for more details of the operation). This part of the rescue programme was organized by a collaborative team from Durrell, ZSL and Parken Zoo in Stockholm. During the week of the 12 April, 12 Montserrat mountain chickens arrived safely at Durrell's headquarters in Jersey and have been placed in a bio-secure unit. Another 12 have gone to London Zoo and a further 26 to Parken Zoo. These animals will form the basis for a targeted breeding programme for the species, from which new founders will be taken to send back to Montserrat when the time is right.

Durrell has been working in Montserrat since the early 1990s supporting the Montserrat government in the protection of the island's biodiversity. The mountain chicken has been an important flagship species for Montserrat and Durrell, and every effort is being made to save the species from extinction.

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New website for the Rapid Response Facility

The Rapid Response Facility (RRF), the emergency small grants programme jointly operated by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, the United Nations Foundation, and Fauna & Flora International (FFI), recently launched a new website at <http://www.rapid-response.org>. This new site not only provides information about RRF funding but also tools and guidance for practitioners around the globe dealing with emergency conservation response, and an opportunity for those practitioners to interact with and learn from each other.

The RRF was created to provide rapid support to sites of high biodiversity value in times of acute threat, with a particular focus on natural World Heritage sites. Grants of up to USD 30,000 are available to a variety of grantees, such as statutory agencies responsible for site management, registered local, national or international non-governmental organizations, and the private sector (including local and multinational corporations).

The RRF relies on the support of local and international experts with detailed site-level knowledge to provide rapid external reviews of grant applications. This facilitates a transparent and informed grant governance process capable of processing applications in just 8 working days. To date, the RRF has awarded 16 grants in eight countries. The grantees have tackled crises ranging from the immediate restoration of essential conservation capacity following an earthquake or violent attack to combating cases of illegal road construction, encroachment and associated habitat loss.

At the request of several RRF grantees the new website features an interactive forum where past and current grantees, potential applicants and other interested parties can ask questions and share lessons learned. This forum represents an important step in the RRF's efforts to share knowledge across organizations and sectors to improve the speed and efficacy of emergency conservation response.

In addition, <http://www.rapid-response.org> houses various resources that have been developed as part of FFI's exploration of the value of cross-sectoral partnerships in post-conflict and post-disaster situations. This work, funded by the United States Agency for International Development, has resulted in a set of tools and case studies designed to be of use for both conservation and development practitioners. Several of these tools—including a checklist on issues to consider when launching a cross-sectoral partnership—are already available on the new RRF website and others will be added in due course.

For those interested in approaching the RRF for emergency funding, the site also provides information on application procedures, funding criteria, and past RRF funding decisions. The RRF Secretariat is available to answer any questions and can be contacted at rrf@fauna-flora.org

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Surge in rhino poaching stirs conservationists into action...

In 2007 the rhinos of Kaziranga National Park suffered their worst poaching for 10 years. From 1997 to 2006 fewer than six greater one-horned rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* were poached on average each year in and around the Park. But in 2007 this rose to 20. This important Park holds the largest population of rhinos in Asia. Located in the state of Assam in

north-east India, Kaziranga has 1,855 greater one-horned rhinos and is a vital stronghold for this species.

Traders from Dimapur in the state of Nagaland, which neighbours Assam, have been assisting Naga poachers from the Paite tribe, and other local people, with .303 rifles. The poachers recruit poor villagers from the area to act as their guides and to carry provisions, paying them in advance USD 42–625. The poachers, usually 3–5 strong, escape under cover of darkness, walking c. 85 km to avoid detection, to Dimapur. They then receive USD 6,250–10,400 per kg for the horn. It is not clear how or where the horn goes but it ends up somewhere in eastern Asia.

There were several reasons for the upsurge in poaching in 2007. An inexperienced senior officer was put in charge of supervising the Park Forest Guards. He took a long time to react to rhino poachers, who became increasingly successful in killing rhinos in quick succession. This had a direct impact on the discipline and morale of the Forest Guards who were confused as to how to react. In addition there were over 100 unfilled positions in Kaziranga, mostly frontline guards, and anti-poaching patrols were thus less effective. Compounding this, there was a shortage of fuel, limiting the movement of vehicles around the Park, and insufficient money was available to access intelligence by paying a sufficient number of informants.

NGOs and the media reacted in early 2008, criticizing the government and publicizing the crisis. This came to a head when a rhino that had been shot, and had her horn hacked off while still alive, was found and photographed while she bled to death over 36 hours. The Assam NGO, Aaranyak, sent the picture to contacts worldwide. Almost immediately, government action followed. The police arrested more than 10 rhino poachers and traders around Kaziranga. In May 2008 an effective and knowledgeable senior officer took over and reinstated strong leadership of the Forest Guards. Most of the Park staff vacancies were filled. To improve relations between the Forest Department and the local villagers, meetings for conservation awareness were held and a tourist restaurant was established to employ local people. NGOs added much needed funds for intelligence to boost the number of informers in the surrounding villages.

As a result of these improvements rhino poaching halved in Kaziranga in 2008, showing that the Assam Forest Department can work with NGOs to resolve a conservation crisis.

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... and return of the greater one-horned rhinoceros to Manas National Park

The greater one-horned rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* has made a successful comeback to Manas National Park in Assam, India, following the release of three orphaned rhinos from a boma in November 2008. These rhinos were less than 4 months of age when rescued from the annual floods of Kaziranga National Park.

The calves were hand-raised at the Centre for Wildlife Rehabilitation and Conservation (CWRC), a joint initiative of Wildlife Trust of India, International Fund for Animal Welfare, and Assam Forest Department. CWRC was established in 2002 to address wildlife emergencies that arise from calamities and conflicts in the state of Assam. Kaziranga National Park gets flooded almost every year, forcing animals to migrate to higher elevations during which many become stranded or injured because of conflict with people.

The first rhino calf was rescued in July 2002 and the other two were admitted to CWRC in July 2004. A rhino rehabilitation protocol was developed in 2005 during a consultation workshop involving expertise available on the black *Diceros bicornis* and white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* of Africa. The calves, all females, were hand-raised with human milk formula for 18 months before being weaned. Manas National Park was chosen as the release site as the rehabilitation programme would facilitate the re-introduction of the species. The first calf was moved to Manas National Park in February 2006, where it was held in a 5.7 ha twin segment boma. The other two calves were moved to the other segment of the boma in January 2007. In late 2007 the boma was extended by another 7.7 ha to provide adequate grazing space. Suitability for release was assessed by studying health and behaviour, and in November 2008 all three rhinos (5–6 years old) were released. A post-release monitoring programme using radio-telemetry is in progress and, as of April 2009, the rhinos have established two ranging areas.

Up to the mid 1990s Manas National Park held a healthy population of rhinos but they were wiped out during a period of civil unrest in the late 1990s. The civil unrest in Lower Assam ended in 2004 following political agreements that led to the formation of the independent and autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). Thanks to the efforts of BTC, this World Heritage Site and global biodiversity hotspot is on the road to recovery. Three more orphaned rhinos are being hand-raised at CWRC and will be released in Manas in the next 2 years.

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