



1996-1997
Columbus Zoo
Conservation Report

Garamba.....

.....*Written by Harry Peachey, Headkeeper of Pachyderms*

In 1996, Columbus continued to provide support for the guards working at Garamba National Park in northeastern Zaire (now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo). Garamba National Park, one of four World Heritage Sites in Zaire, is home to the last surviving wild population of the northern white rhino. The financial support that the Zoo provides in conjunction with the International Rhino Foundation supplies the guards with a monthly "bonus". This small bonus constitutes the only wage the park guards have received for several years, due to the severe economic and political difficulties experienced by the government of Zaire.

In March of 1996, Harry Peachey, the Columbus Zoo's Headkeeper of Pachyderms, went to Zaire to participate in a project to place radio transmitters inside the horns of some of the northern white rhinos at Garamba. The horn transmitter project was initiated and undertaken by the Garamba National Park Project, which was conceived and is directed by Kes Hillman-Smith and Fraser Smith and the Institute Zairois pour la Conservation de la Nature (IZCN). The intent of the project was to enhance the ability of the GNNP and the park guards to monitor and protect the few remaining rhinos at Garamba. In the course of the project, transmitters were inserted into the horns of five rhinos. This increased the ability of the guards and project personnel to monitor not only the five animals with transmitters in place, but the rhinos that associate with those five animals on a regular basis, as well. As a result, 19 rhinos were seen with increased frequency over the course of the year.

Events in Zaire at the end of 1996 had a deleterious effect on the Garamba National Park Project, affecting the project in a number of ways ranging from acquisition of supplies to security of project personnel. However, as of the end of 1996, anti-poaching activities at the park had continued without significant interruption.



Photo by Harry Peachey

A rhino is prepped for insertion of a radio transmitter in its horn.

Rhino

*Article written by Harry Peachey
Headkeeper of Pachyderms*

Conservation in Kenya



Black rhinos in Kenya

Photo by Rick Irbeeg

The decimation of African rhino populations by poaching over the last twenty-five years is well-documented. Black rhinos in Kenya were particularly hard-hit during the period 1970-1985, when a population estimated at 20,000 in 1970 was reduced to less than 300 animals. Kenya's response to this crisis was wildly successful. Kenya's rhino conservation program is generally recognized as one of the more successful conservation programs in Africa.

A major component of Kenya's rhino conservation effort was the establishment of a rhino sanctuary program in 1984. As of May of 1996, Kenya's rhino sanctuaries were home to 434 black rhinos and 122 white rhinos. Population monitoring and census work is an important element in Kenya's rhino sanctuary program. The method currently used to census the rhino populations in Tsavo West and Tsavo East National Parks requires observation of watering holes at night. Field observers monitor and identify black rhinos as they visit the watering holes under cover of darkness. This method takes advantage of the species' tendency to lay dormant during the heat of the day and increase activity levels (including travel) at night. Unfortunately this method is also dependent on night vision technology for maximum efficiency and accuracy.

To assist with this important endeavor, The Columbus Zoo purchased three Hitek Talon NVPS-10 Night Vision Scopes to be donated to the Kenya Wildlife Service. In addition to rhino census work, these units can also be used by KWS's rhino conservation program for other purposes, including patrol work and behavioral observations. These units will also be used to census two free-ranging and previously uncensused rhino populations in Kenya.