
African Rhino Specialist Group

A Brief Synopsis of Activities During 1997–1999 and Future Plans

African rhinos now collectively number over 11 000 for the first time since 1984, after black rhino numbers bottomed out at about 2,500 between 1992–1995. However the status of the northern white rhino and western black rhino remain absolutely critical at below 30 and 20 animals respectively.

Members of the African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) have contributed to the development of a number of national plans and strategies, and the Continental Action Plan has been completed and is due for publication in early 2000. Members attended the CITES COP.10 in Zimbabwe in 1997 and have been involved in the ongoing process of developing indicators for rhino conservation success; and a very successful AfRSG meeting was held in Namibia in April 1998 at which numerous issues were discussed and strategies developed.

Good progress is being made with the rhino horn fingerprinting project, where horn from as many as possible of the key and important African rhino populations is being analysed. A suite of techniques are being assessed to determine the most cost-effective approach for determining the source location of horn, which has application in law enforcement and any possible future legal trade: results are expected in January 2000. Another extremely exciting

initiative is the SADC rhino programme of which the specialist group is a consortium partner. Led by the SADC Wildlife Sector Technical Coordination Unit, this Italian funded programme will provide considerable support for rhino conservation in the southern African region over the next three years.

While committed to supporting all range states to stabilise their rhino populations and to achieve a growth rate of at least 5% per year, special attention will be focussed on Cameroon and D.R. of Congo where there is a critical need for survival plans to be developed and implemented, and also Tanzania and Kenya. We will also continue to review and rate rhino projects for priority status on request from major donors. In May 2000, our largest meeting yet (>50 participants) will be held in Lake Manyara National Park, Tanzania; after which a small specialist team will visit Ngorongoro Crater and the Selous Game Reserve at the invitation of the Wildlife Division.

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Martin Brooks, Chair