

RHINOCEROS TAXON ADVISORY GROUP

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Primary Goals

Considering the continuing crisis in rhino conservation, the primary goals of the AZA Rhinoceros Advisory Group (RAG) are:

1. Development of viable *ex situ* populations as:
 - a. Reservoirs of genetic and demographic material as potential reinforcement of populations in the wild;
 - b. Subjects for research to improve conservation management *in situ* as well as *ex situ*;
 - c. Ambassadors to stimulate public awareness and support, especially financial, for rhino conservation.
2. Toward achievement of Goal 1, improvement of captive husbandry and management through research in health, nutrition, behavior and reproduction.
3. Facilitation of and coordination among the SSP programs for all rhino species (in collaboration with the species coordinators and the management groups).
4. Assistance (financial, technical, and administrative) with selected *in situ* efforts for rhino with emphasis on those projects that are significant, feasible, and provide appropriate opportunities for application of the particular expertise that the captive conservation community can provide in terms of intensive management technology.
5. Partnership with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) particularly in pursuit of Goal 4.

Special Concerns

The conservation crisis for rhinoceros continues. There has been improvement on a number of fronts but continuing challenges on others. In Africa, most of the news is good. The southern white rhino have continued to increase and now are estimated at 8,400. Numbers of black rhino have continued their recovery and numbers are now estimated at 2,600, a 13% increase over their low point of 2,300 earlier in the decade. Nevertheless, the poaching threat is still serious. The bad news is the situation for northern white rhino remains precarious with 25 or fewer rhino surviving. The second civil war in three years has bedeviled conservation efforts in Garamba but there seems to some improvement on the horizon. The IRF with support from the RAG has become the lead NGO operating in Garamba. In Asia, the Sumatran rhino with fewer than 400 individuals remains under intense poaching pressure although the rhino protection units (RPUs), formed with IRF and IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG), facilitation seem to be ameliorating the situation. The American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) is providing funds to help support the RPUs. The managed breeding programs for Sumatran rhino at facilities in native habitat in Indonesia (Way Kambas National Park), Peninsula Malaysia (Sungai Dusun) and Sabah (Sepilok) continue. RPUs for Javan Rhino in Indonesia have also been established and are operating well. Poaching pressure on and habitat problems for the third species of Asian rhino, the India/Nepali (up to 2,500 in the wild), remains high and the possibility of a major decline remains real. The RAG, again in conjunction with the IRF and the IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG) are attempting to develop a major cooperative program with conservation authorities for this species in both India and Nepal.

The AZA Rhinoceros Advisory Group also remains concerned with the successful implementation and management of sustainable *ex situ* populations, especially considering the critical state of wild populations. All of the rhino SSP programs have deficiencies that are receiving attention. Major problems relate to husbandry, health, and reproduction of the animals as well as financial and physical resources. A demographic imperative also exists for both subspecies of white rhino in AZA institutions. To ameliorate the problem for the southern subspecies, the RAG and IRF have developed a cooperative program with South African National Parks which is providing surplus rhino as new founders to rejuvenate the SSP population and is receiving significant funds and at least one black rhino for *in situ* conservation efforts. The Sumatran rhino continues as the greatest challenge in rhino conservation both *ex situ* and *in situ*. All 3 (1.2) surviving individuals in the SSP population (from a maximum of 7) have been consolidated at the Cincinnati Zoo. The Cincinnati Zoo is continuing its program of reproductive research and management, which has produced some progress. The younger of the two females there has been pregnant four times in the last year, once for about three months; three pregnancies have failed for reasons yet unknown; but the fourth pregnancy continues at this time. Concurrently, efforts continue to develop managed breeding centers in native habitat in both Indonesia and Malaysia has progressed.

Progress Toward Goals

1. The 1998 AZA SSP Master Plan for Rhinoceros continues to be implemented. An update of the Master plan is intended for late 1999 or early 2000.
2. Further implementation of the AZA Regional Collection Plan for Rhino has occurred as several new institutions have added rhinos and others have converted species.
3. The eight major research projects which the RAG and IRF have been supporting have generated useful results. These projects comprise: one on health of black rhino: one on nutrition of all rhino: three on reproductive research on Sumatran rhino; two on reproductive research on African rhino but with extension to all rhino; one on improved health/husbandry data bases and tissue sample collections. These projects are continuing.
4. A new version of the Five-Year Research Master plan, first formulated in 1993, has been produced. Based upon the results of these research projects and the recommendations of the RAG Research Council, the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), in partnership with another organization, SOS-Rhino, will issue a new Request for Proposals (RFP) in 1999.
5. The RAG has provided letters of support for other research projects applying for funding from sources other than IRF.
6. In an effort to correct for the skew toward males in sex ratio of calves in the black rhino, the RAG facilitated an exchange of rhinos between the AZA SSP and the SSCJ in Japan: the SSP received a female and the SSCJ obtained two males. Dr. Evan Blumer of the Wilds and the RAG accompanied all rhino in transit.
7. The RAG, in collaboration with IRF, also facilitated the importation of 4.12 southern white rhino from the wild at Kruger National Park to rejuvenate this SSP population; 2.4 more will arrive in October 1999. In exchange, South African National Parks are receiving about \$375,000 for *in situ* conservation efforts.
8. There has been significant progress on several components of the Five-Year Plan's *in situ* programs, through partnership with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), i.e.:
 - a. Operation of *in situ* managed breeding programs for Sumatran rhino in Indonesia and Malaysia is proceeding well with a number of animals mating and some possibly pregnant.
 - b. Rhino protection units (RPUs) for Sumatran rhino and Javan rhino in Indonesia and Malaysia continue their effective work.
 - c. Continued and increased support and leadership for conservation of northern white rhino in Garamba.
9. The RAG/IRF Program Office has continued to work closely with the Office of International Affairs, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, on various projects involving implementation of the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund (RTFC) including:
 - a. Review of proposals submitted to USFWS for support under RTCF;
 - b. Receipt of grants for several projects, administered by the IRF (RPUs and SRS)
 - c. Attempts to persuade Congress to appropriate more funds for RTCF.
10. The website, established in conjunction with the IRF (at new address <http://www.rhinos-irf.org>) has continued to evolve and now has a listserve operational to facilitate communication among various rhino constituencies including the RAG.
11. The RAG Program Office has continued to provide technical services for the AZA Rhino Master plans, to maintain the AZA Rhino Regional Studbooks as well as the International Studbook for Sumatran Rhino, and to collaborate with the International Studbooks for African and Indian Rhinoceros and the other regional breeding programs for rhino.

Short-Term Goals for Coming Year

1. Continue with implementation of and produce an update for the AZA SSP Master Plan for Rhino.
2. Continue financial support and strategic guidance for management-oriented research on rhinos, especially in conjunction with the IRF and now also SOS-Rhino.
3. Continue and increase support, through IRF of programs for *in situ* conservation of rhinos;
4. Facilitate additional exchanges of rhino between SSP and other Regional Rhino Breeding Programs as well as managed populations in the wild.
5. Implement AZA mandated changes in structure and function of taxon advisory groups.

Data Table (current through 1 July 1999)

	Two Years Ago	One Year Ago	Current Year
# of meetings	0	2	2
# of studbooks under umbrella	4	4	4
# of SSPs under umbrella	4	4	4
# of new studbook petitions submitted	0	0	0
# of new studbooks approved	0	0	0
# of new SSP petitions submitted	0	0	0
# of new SSPs approved	0	0	0

Financial Report

Starting balance (1 July 1998)	\$33.26
Funds raised*	\$3,635.25
Funds expended*	\$2,555.92
Ending balance (1 July 1999)	\$1,079.33

*Much of the RAG's activities relative to *in situ* programs and research projects is in partnership with the IRF which from Sept. 1998 to Sept. 1999 is providing and/or administering approximately \$1,000,000 for rhino conservation.