

INTRODUCTION

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As most of you know, the status of the black rhino in the wild is in decline despite the heroic efforts of our colleagues, some of whom are here in the room with us. The numbers of black rhino in Zimbabwe have dropped dramatically in recent months, encouraged by poachers increasing in South Africa. Managers in Namibia and Kenya are bracing themselves for increasing poaching pressures. Efforts to maintain viable populations in captivity and in some instances, the intensively managed *in situ* populations, have been rather severely hampered by high rates of morbidity and mortality due to some syndromes that appear to be unique to the black rhino.

Over the last decade a significant research effort has focused on these problems, spear-headed by Eric Miller. What we have realized however, is that in many cases we have investigators that are focusing on small pieces of a very complex puzzle. Additionally, the various investigators often speak different technical languages, and they really had no forum for the interchange of ideas about what is going on with the black rhinos. We were able to convince some of the parties that funded this workshop, that if we could bring a significant number of the key individuals together, put them in a room together for several days, let them bang heads, and build some relationships, that we might be able to develop a new synthesis of where we are with respect to the puzzles of the diseases that affect black rhinos, and also where we need to go to hopefully overcome them. That is why we are all here. So let us get ready to think and talk and argue and debate and plan, and hopefully have a little fun in the process.

I'd like to first off all thank the organizations that have made this workshop possible: Earth Promise for administrating the projects and the grants; the Geraldine R Dodge Foundation and Purina Mills for financial support; Fossil Rim for allowing time and support to put this together, especially for my time and for my administrative assistants; and to White Oak Conservation Center for agreeing to host.

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The people that are here represent a wide range of experience with rhinos. We go from some of the wildlife vets from Africa who live and breath and sleep rhinos, through to some of our special advisors who have little or no direct experience with rhinos. We thought it was necessary to start with some basics to bring everybody to some common ground. That is why tonight we are going to focus on the basic overview of the biology and ecology of the black rhino and also a historical perspective of the disease problems.

A very important point is that the agenda was developed to give some structure to the proceedings. It is meant to be a guide only. The presentations are intended to be informal, by that we mean that we encourage, in fact, we demand that you ask questions, interject, digress, and basically prevent this from

becoming a series of lectures. We need to turn this into a forum for the interchange of ideas and hopefully come up with some new ideas by the time it is over.

And most importantly, we need to leave this workshop with some products. The three main products that we hope to come out of here with are: 1.) A new synthesis of what our understanding is of the primary diseases that affect black rhinos. A lot of new information has been generated the last year or two. We are finding more and more that some of these syndromes have some common threads. We hope to be able to put them together in some new ways. 2.) We need to develop an understanding of where we must go with our efforts to further understand and eventually overcome these problems. It is clear that in many cases for the foreseeable future that black rhino are going to have to be managed in intensively managed situations. We have to overcome these problems that are plaguing us. After we develop where we must go, we have to turn that into a bit of a skeleton of a master plan, and that is going to guide all of our black rhino health research. 3.) We have to develop a prioritized list of the projects we identify, which we will be able to use to secure some funding. Several funding sources have already been identified, but they are already demanding a prioritized plan. We have too many things to go after to be able to secure funding unless we have a plan.

Finally, as a personal comment, my job has been to get all of you here. Our success here depends on all of you taking things to the proper conclusion, and I hope you will be aggressive about all that.

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