

SUDAN, White Rhino - Proposed Shambe National Park (Project 1949)

The African Rhino Survey, carried out by WWF/IUCN and the New York Zoological Society (NYZS) identified the northern white rhinoceros (Ceratotherium simum cottoni) as being the most endangered sub-species of rhino in Africa. There are considerably less than 1,000 left in the wild and they only occur in southern Sudan and in one park in northern Zaire, apart from possibly a few at the eastern side of the Central African Republic. In February 1980 the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism of southern Sudan and Peter McClinton (FZS) with Kes Hillman and Ian Grimwood (WWF and IUCN) identified the Shambe area as the best place to ensure conservation of a viable population of these rhinos in Sudan, as well as conserving a unique habitat and a wide variety of other species, many in very large numbers.

The Shambe area, with its huge expanses of seasonally flooded grasslands, wooded savanna and the swamps that border the ancient Nile, has long been regarded as the best and most accessible for white rhinos in Sudan. Flights over that area in 1979 and 1980 indicated substantial numbers of them as well as elephants, Nubian giraffe, lechwe and roan. It has an old port on the River Nile and is therefore accessible at all seasons for development and later tourism. Dinka people and their cattle use part of the seasonally flooded grasslands there and the project proposal, drawn up to give the existing game reserve and surrounding area national park status and increased protection, was to some extent a compromise with their needs. It was therefore considered necessary to develop it only in conjunction with an investigation of the use of the proposed park and surrounding areas by the wildlife and people, to ensure that conservation had a future by being compatible with and advantageous to the human development and that the whole ecosystem was part of the conservation/management complex.

Kes Hillman and the then prospective warden for the area, P. Snyder, surveyed it on the ground in November 1980 and held discussions with the local game officers and village headmen. A detailed report was made to IUCN including recommendations for a modified approach to the conservation of the area and for conservation needs in southern Sudan. Poaching was found to be heavy, even by government officials, and the Wildlife Department was at an even greater disadvantage than many of the other officials there through lack of fuel, spare parts, equipment, training and hence motivation.

An aerial survey of 15,000 km² of the Shambe and surrounding area was carried out in April 1981 by Hillman, Snyder, Somerlatte (a lecturer at the University of Juba) and Tear, using a Cessna 185 belonging to African Wildlife Leadership Foundation, funded by WWF. The results reported indicated the severity and urgency of the poaching problem which had accelerated for rhinos over that dry season. Only dead rhinos were seen throughout. Live rhinos, however, are notoriously difficult to see from the air and there were reports of 25 seen in one day from the ground. There were also more than 800 elephants (Loxodonta africana), 21,000 tiang (Damaliscus corrugum tiang), 20,000 kob (Kobus kob leucotis), 3,600 buffalo (Synceros caffer), 7,000 reedbuck

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(Redunca redunca cottoni), 1,700 hartebeeste (Alcelophus buselephus lelwei), 1,500 of the rare roan antelope (Hippotragus equinus) and 1,370 of the endangered Nile lechwe (Kobus megaceros) as well as many others and 130,000 domestic stock. More than 50 rhinos, 250 elephants and 700 unidentified carcasses were estimated to have died; although some of those were of cattle, others were the result of legal hunting and possibly drought. It indicated not only the richness of the area, but the severity and urgency of the poaching problem.

As a result it was recommended that the primary objective of the main project should be the practical conservation of northern white rhinos in Sudan and that this might involve areas other than just Shambe, possibly the nearby proposed Mashra Reserve or Southern National Park. It was also noted that the project officer would need to be involved in and contribute to the overall conservation development of the country, since nothing would work in isolation. Some initial aid in the form of fuel for the vehicles, a motor bike and bicycles and establishment of a radio link, were agreed in return for which the Ministry agreed to increase patrols, carry out negotiations with the local people, clear airstrips and mark and control the boundaries.

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TANZANIA, Rhino and Elephant Survey in Selous Game Reserve (Project 1928)

Ground and aerial censuses are being conducted of all major animal species in Selous Game Reserve, with special emphasis on elephants and rhinos.

Censuses were carried out in March/April 1981 (wet season) and in September/October 1981 (dry season).

The aerial census employed two light aircraft (Cessna 182) and both the systematic reconnaissance flight and total counting methods were adopted. The ground method was carried out by foot transects, with the assistance of game rangers. Since this method has its limitations on the size of the area covered, only selected accessible areas were surveyed where there was no ambiguity over boundaries.

The general observation is that there is an increase in the numbers of some species, including elephants in some areas. It has also been established that there is still a good number of rhinos in Selous. However, more light will be thrown on the subject when the reports of the censuses are completed.

Tanzania Wildlife Division