

Specialist Group exchange

Asian Rhino SG

Meeting in India reviews best conservation approaches

A meeting of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group (AsRSG), held in Kaziranga National Park, Assam, India, from 10–12 February 2010, was attended by about 50 conservationists from eight countries, including delegates from government and NGOs. The meeting discussed the status of three species of Asian Rhinos – the Greater One Horned Rhino, the Sumatran Rhino and the Javan Rhino.

Various threat assessments were carried out to review the conservation approaches needed to enhance the populations and habitats of these three species in their respective ranges. Out of the three Asian Rhino species, the Javan Rhino is the most Critically Endangered with about 40 to 50 rhinos living in the wilderness of Indonesia and Vietnam, while Sumatran rhinos have been declining rapidly in past decades. The Greater One Horned Rhino has been doing fine in Assam, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh within India, but it faces poaching challenges in Nepal due to the socio-political unrest there.

During the meeting, the following members of the AsRSG were appointed as country co-ordinators: Abdul Hamid Ahmad – Malaysia; Bhupen N Talukdar – India; Shantraj Jnewali – Nepal; and Widodo Ramono – Indonesia. The meeting also established several working groups: the Population

Working Group with co-chairs: Adhi Rahmat S Hariyadi and Shantraj Jnewali; the Habitat Management Group with co-chairs Naresh Subedi and Widodo Ramono; the Human Rhino Conflict Group with co-chairs Rinjen Shrestha and Amit Kumar Sharma; and, the Legal and Policy Group with co-chairs Ritesh Bhattacharjee and Ram Prasad Lamsal.

Bibhab Kumar Talukdar

Chair, Asian Rhino Specialist Group

Bat SG

Field work concludes extinction of the Christmas Island Pipistrelle

Bat Specialist Group member Lindy Lumsden and her team have documented a precipitous decline in the Christmas Island Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus murrayi*), and after several years of advocating for the establishment of a captive breeding programme, they were able to return to the island in August 2009 to attempt the capture of the few remaining individuals.

Unfortunately, only a single individual was detectable and it evaded capture in mist nets and harp traps, before it eventually disappeared. It was last heard on 26 August 2009. Long-term detector monitoring had indicated that this was the last area on the island where the species remained. Lindy and her team reluctantly concluded that the species had become extinct.

Detector monitoring has continued, however no further calls have been recorded. The reason remains speculative, but predation on roosting bats by introduced predators, including giant centipedes, or some form of disease, are both possibilities.

Paul A. Racey and Rodrigo A. Medellín

Co-chairs, Bat Specialist Group

Bison SG – Europe

Goal to increase population size reached

The main goals for European bison conservation are to increase the population size, save the gene pool and improve management methods. The first goal has been successfully fulfilled. In the last ten years, the total population of the species has increased by 40% and now exceeds 4,000 individuals. This success can be attributed to many presentations, discussions and field trips by members of our Specialist Group, as well as the growing interest of people and private landowners to be involved.

The process of saving genetic variability also requires good co-operation among bison population managers. There are more than 250 herds with different status, size and ownership, so implementation of conservation programmes is complicated but improves every year. Almost 40% of bison are kept in



Asian Rhino SG meeting in Kaziranga National Park, India. © SECTION 07



Christmas Island Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus murrayi*), © Lindy Lumsden