
CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

Martin Brooks

Natal Parks Board P0 Box 662 Pietermaritzburg 3200, South Africa

1998 AFRSG MEETING

Thanks to generous sponsorship from WWF, Mount Etjo Safari Lodge and Budget Rent-A-Car, the AfRSG was able to hold its fourth meeting in Namibia from 12 to 19 April 1998. Despite the clash of dates with the Easter holidays, the meeting was well attended by 30 members and invited delegates from 11 countries. In addition to the presentation of the usual detailed country reports and technical papers, and the holding of six workshops, delegates were also exposed to aspects of the Namibian rhino conservation programme in the field in three rhino areas.

AFRICAN RHINO NUMBERS REACH 11,000 IN THE WILD

The latest continental statistics compiled at the meeting reveal that African rhino have now increased to 11,000 in the wild. After having been stable since 1992, black rhino numbers have increased from 1,995 to 2,600 by 1997. The increase in white rhino numbers in the wild continues, and by 1997 the species numbered 8,400. About a quarter of Africa's white rhino are now privately owned and managed. Despite these positive trends, the last remaining northern white rhino in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the western black rhino in Cameroon remain in a precarious position.

NORTHERN WHITE RHINO

Two surveys were undertaken in April and June 1998 which indicated that most of the last remaining northern white rhino survived the liberation war in ex-Zaire which overthrew ex-President Mobutu. Both surveys indicated that at least 25 animals remain. However, the security situation in Garamba remains a concern, as poachers have now moved well into the rhino's core area and large numbers of elephant and buffalo have been poached since 1995. The recent civil war in the country further threatens the remaining rhino and conservation efforts in the Park.

WESTERN BLACK RHINO

The threat facing the last known remaining western black rhino (*D.b. longipes*) in Cameroon continues to increase with two black rhinos known to have been poached since February 1996, and a further ten no longer seen or reported from their home range. Current data indicates that there are only ten to a possible 18 animals remaining, scattered in small isolated groups of one to four rhino over an area of 3,200km² within a 25,000km² range. This situation is undesirable both demographically and genetically. However, any consolidation of remaining animals would be logistically difficult, expensive, and could increase the risk of the animals being poached unless adequate security was put in place. A workshop at the April AfRSG meeting recommended the development of a specific rhino project to develop a Government of Cameroon recovery plan through the President, with WWF/FAC as counterparts who could provide initial funding. Greatly increased government commitment to rhino conservation was seen as essential for success. Short term recommendations include obtaining high level political support, the appointment of a high level steering committee and recruitment of additional anti-poaching staff, the establishment of two protection zones to protect breeding rhino, increased intelligence gathering, and continued monitoring. Much will depend on necessary changes within the government ministry (MINEFF) to allow effective anti-poaching efforts, and on continued support from the existing GEF savannah project.

POACHING DOWN

Based on the country reports at the AfRSG meeting, it appears that levels of poaching are generally down, although undercover wildlife investigators indicate there is still considerable interest in poaching rhino and/or dealing in rhino horn. It is hoped that the increasing imposition of severe sentences in some range States, such as a 20-year jail term in Namibia and ten years in South Africa, may act as a deterrent.

AFRSG SPONSORS

In addition to the generous sponsorship which allowed us to hold the 1998 AfRSG meeting in Namibia, WWF has kindly allocated funds to sponsor an edition of *Pachyderm* as well as enable the undertaking of the horn finger printing project. WWF South Africa also continues to provide support to the Chairman. Thanks also to the

UK Department of the Environment for providing bridging funds to support the employment of the Scientific Officer up till the end of June 1998, and to the International Rhino Foundation for their support of the Scientific Officer for three months from October 1998. However, securing long term funding for the Scientific Officer's position continues to be a problem.

RAPPORT DU PRESIDENT: GROUPE DES SPECIALISTES DES RHINOS AFRICAINS

Martin Brooks

P0 Box 13053, Cascades 3202, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

REUNION DU GSRAF DE 1998

Grâce au généreux support du WWF, de Mount Etjo Safari Lodge et de Budget Rent-A-Car, le GSRAf a pu tenir sa quatrième réunion en Namibie, du 12 au 19 avril 1998. Malgré la correspondance des dates avec les vacances de Pâques, la réunion a vu la participation de 30 membres et des délégués invités de 11 pays. En plus de la présentation des rapports nationaux détaillés et des articles techniques habituels, et la réunion de six ateliers, on a aussi présenté aux délégués les différents aspects du programme namibien de conservation des rhinos sur le terrain, dans trois zones à rhinos.

LE NOMBRE DES RHINOS AFRICAINS EN LIBERTE ATTEINT 11.000

Les dernières statistiques rassemblées au moment de la réunion, pour le continent tout entier, révèle que les rhinos africains ont augmenté dans la nature et comptent plus de 11.000 individus. Après être restés stables depuis 1992, les rhinos noirs sont passés de 1.995 à près de 2.600 en 1997. L'augmentation du nombre de rhinos blancs dans la nature continue et, en 1997, l'espèce comptait 8.400 animaux. Près d'un quart des rhinos blancs d'Afrique appartiennent et sont gérés par des particuliers. Malgré ces tendances positives, la dernière population de rhinos blancs du Nord en République Démocratique du Congo et les rhinos noirs de l'Ouest, au Cameroun restent en situation précaire.

RHINO BLANC DU NORD

On a entrepris deux recherches en avril et en juin 1998 qui ont montré que la plupart des derniers rhinos blancs du Nord ont survécu à la guerre de libération qui a renversé l'ex-Président Mobutu. Les deux études ont indiqué qu'il reste au moins 25 animaux. Mais la sécurité à la Garamba reste précaire car les braconniers ont pénétré maintenant bien à l'intérieur de la zone centrale des rhinos, et de grands nombres d'éléphants et de buffles ont été braconnés depuis 1995. La dernière guerre civile qui se déroule dans le pays menace une fois de plus les derniers rhinos et les efforts de conservation dans le Parc.

RHINO NOIR DE L'OUEST

La menace qui pèse sur les derniers rhinos noirs de l'Ouest connus (*D.b. longipes*), au Cameroun, continue à augmenter car on sait que deux rhinos ont été braconnés depuis février 1996 et qu'on a perdu la trace de dix autres dans leur habitat. Les données actuelles indiquent qu'il en reste seulement entre 10 et, au maximum, 18, éparpillés en petits groupes isolés de un à quatre animaux dans une zone de 3.200km² incluse dans un territoire de 25.000km². Cette situation est déplorable tant du point de vue démographique que génétique. Pourtant, toute consolidation du statut des rhinos restants serait logistiquement difficile, coûteuse et pourrait accroître le risque de voir ces animaux braconnés à moins de mettre en place des mesures de sécurité appropriées. Un des