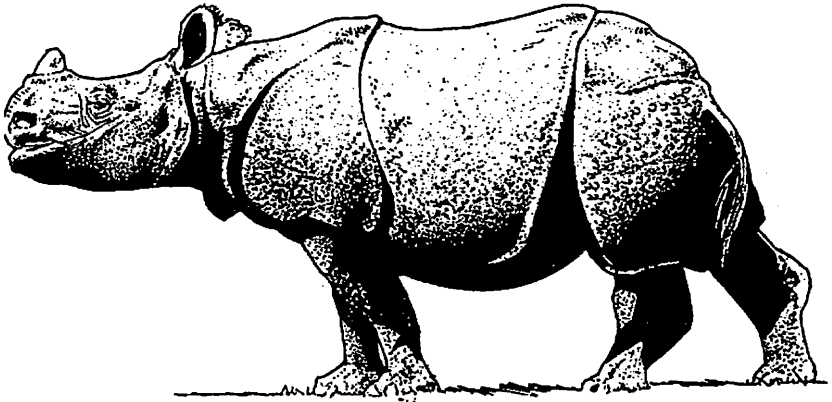

Asian Rhino Specialist Group

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The last three years have been extremely active and productive, yet also exasperating, for the AsRSG. The exasperation derives from the continuing, and in two cases (the Sumatran and Javan rhino) intensifying, crisis for Asian rhinoceroses. The Sumatran rhino in particular has continued to decline despite increased efforts at its conservation. Numbers of the Sumatran rhino appear to have declined by as much as 50% over the last five years, and there are now only about 300 believed to survive. Although still not as low in numbers as the Javan rhino (where fewer than 100 survive), poaching is more intense on the Sumatran. As a consequence, AsRSG considers the Sumatran the most endangered of all rhinos, and perhaps of all large terrestrial mammals.

Poaching pressure does continue on the Javan, and with only two widely separated localities (Java and Vietnam) occupied, the situation for this species is also critical. The only exception to the grim situation for rhinoceroses in Asia is for the Indian rhino. Populations continue to increase in both India and Nepal. There are serious challenges from poachers in both countries, with at least two

populations decimated in Assam during the triennium. However, on the whole, poaching has been reduced over the last two years, and efforts by the Indian and Nepalese wildlife managers have been a boon for other Asian rhino range states. Keys to success in both India and Nepal have been increased expenditures and staff per square kilometer of protected area and the development of information networks to apprehend and convict poachers.

Among the activities and achievements of the AsRSG in responding to this crisis are:

- The AsRSG Action Plan, *Asian Rhinos: An Action Plan for Their Conservation* (originally published in 1989), has been revised and will be published by the end of 1996. The new Action Plan provides even more specific proposals and projects for Asian rhino conservation, as well as delineates more accurately than ever the overall picture of programmatic and financial needs for Asian rhino conservation on a continent-wide basis.

- Two full meetings of the AsRSG have occurred at the geographic extremes of the range states: in 1993 at Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary in West Bengal, India, and in 1995 at Sandakan, Sabah, Malaysia.
- Membership has increased to include even more representatives of range states. Particularly notable has been the increased involvement of India and Nepal in AsRSG activities; in prior triennia, AsRSG activities were largely restricted to southeast Asia. The appointment of two Deputy Chairs, one for the Indian sub-continent and one for southeast Asia, has enhanced this development.
- With membership including all the highest-level managers of rhinos in the range states, the AsRSG has become integrally involved in the decision and policy processes for rhino conservation in Asia. AsRSG has assumed a more active role as advocates and agents, rather than just advisers, as in the past.
- In this regard, AsRSG facilitated procurement and is coordinating implementation of a major GEF (Global Environment Facility) project through the United Nations Development Programme for conservation of Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia and Malaysia.
- Beyond the GEF project, AsRSG has been active and successful in helping to secure other funding for Asian rhino conservation. In this regard, a special relationship has developed between the AsRSG and the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), which provides program office services for the AsRSG and has supported a number of AsRSG projects.
- An AsRSG newsletter, *Asian Rhinos*, has commenced publication twice a year.
- AsRSG has assisted with population and habitat viability assessment (PHVA) workshops for Sumatran rhinos in Indonesia and Malaysia, and for Indian rhinos in Nepal.
- AsRSG has initiated a number of special assessments and reports for particular problems in rhino conservation. The first of these is on the Javan rhino in Ujung Kulon National Park.
- AsRSG has catalyzed adaptive modification of the previous conservation strategy for Sumatran rhinos. These modifications recognize the lack of success of the captive program, but continuing to believe that intensive management must be part of the strategy, have reoriented efforts toward development of managed breeding centers in native habitat. These centers are being designated sanctuaries, although they differ somewhat from the African type of sanctuary in that the Sumatran rhino version is still attempting to manage mate choice. Sumatran rhino sanctuaries are under development in Indonesia at Way Kambas National Park, and in Malaysia at Sungai Dusun and Krau Wildlife Reserves in Peninsula and Sepilok and Tabin Wildlife Reserves in Sabah.
- AsRSG has increased communication and cooperation with the African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG).
- AsRSG has also interacted considerably with the United Nations Environment Programme, especially its Elephant and Rhinoceros Conservation Facility, and the United Nations Development Programme.
- An objective yet to be achieved is to recruit AsRSG program officers that are range state nationals.

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