

CONSERVATION

12M 41(5), July/Aug 1994

'Ex Vietnam Semper Aliquid Novi...'

Hard on the heels of the Vu Quang ox comes news of another new species discovered in the same area of Vietnam. Once again, the evidence comes in the form of skulls, horns and skin in the possession of local people (who have clearly known about the animal all along, so that - as so often in such cases - this is only a 'discovery' from a Western-oriented viewpoint). The new animal is described as a 'giant muntjac'; with an estimated weight of 40-50 kg, it is about half as large again as other muntjacs, and its antlers are twice as long. DNA analysis of skin samples suggests that this is not merely a new species, but distinct enough to be placed in its own monotypic genus. It has not yet been formally described and named.

Meanwhile, Vietnamese scientists have obtained the first live specimen of the Vu Quang ox, a female calf estimated to be between four and five months old. It was caught by a local hunter just outside the Vu Quang nature reserve, and is now being kept in a large enclosure for study. The calf weighs just over 40 lb (18 kg) and is two feet (60 cm) tall; it has yet to develop the sharp, straight horns characteristic of the species. It is described as having distinctive white markings on its face and hooves, large eyes, a short fluffy tail and a thin, dark stripe down the middle of its back.

Both species are assumed to be relatively rare, and are certainly at risk from local hunters, who in the second

half of 1993 alone reportedly killed three Vu Quang ox and up to 20 giant muntjacs. The Vietnamese government is doing its best to protect Vu Quang and, since the discovery of the 'ox' two years ago, has enlarged it from 16,000 ha to almost 60,000, and imposed hunting and logging bans.

Sumatran Rhinos' Plight Worsens

Fewer than 500 Sumatran rhinos are now believed to exist in very small and fragmented populations, mostly in Indonesia and Malaysia, with a few in Burma and perhaps Thailand. Previous estimates from 1984 had suggested that there were as many as 1,000 living in the wild. The latest figures were officially disclosed at a meeting of the IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group, and have emerged from more intensive surveys in Malaysia and Indonesia. The Sumatran is now being described as 'the most endangered rhinoceros', since the population of the Javan species, though numerically smaller, is well protected and has remained relatively stable for many years. The decline in the Sumatran species has occurred despite significant efforts on the part of both Malaysia and Indonesia to protect this dwindling species. While habitat loss is more of a problem for the Sumatran rhino than it is for most other rhino species, poaching is re-

sponsible for nearly all of the decline in its populations, which are now fragmented and isolated. The largest change in numbers has been in Indonesia, as revealed during a Population and Habitat Viability Analysis workshop conducted jointly by the Indonesian Department of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation and the Captive Breeding Specialist Group.

The plight of the Sumatran rhino reflects the dire status of the three species of Asian rhinos. Media attention has centred on the black rhino, which has declined by 97% in the last 20 years. However, there are still as many black rhinos in Africa as there are rhinos of all three Asian species combined. Conservation of Sumatran rhinos will require even greater effort and resources than before; unfortunately, the safeguard of captive breeding has not so far been successful. IUCN/SSC, WWF and the International Rhino Foundation are working closely with the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia on intensified protection for the species.

IUCN Bulletin Vol. 25, No. 2 (April-June 1994)

White Rhinos and Elephants in Zaïre...

A northern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) calf was born in 1993 in Garamba National Park, Zaïre, bringing the population to 31 individuals, a doubling in numbers since 1984. This is the only known viable population of the subspecies. An aerial census showed a continued increase in the elephant population to 8,883 ± 1,586 (an increase from 7,700

in 1983). The improvements are due to an aid project started in 1984 to rehabilitate the park and conserve the ecosystem. However, some 50,000 refugees from Sudan have settled nearby and arms are readily available in the area, causing an increase in poaching; so anti-poaching tactics are being revised and funds sought to up-grade them.

Species No. 20, pp. 30-32 (reported in *Oryx* Vol. 28, No. 2)

... and Elephants in China

A recent survey in the Dai Autonomous Prefecture of Xishuangbanna in the southern province of Yunnan, China, revealed that around 450 Asian elephants are still living in at least 64 locations and in all but one of the subreserves of the protected area network in Xishuangbanna, all east of the Lancang (Mekong) River. Land clearance for cultivation, commercial logging and rubber plantations are compressing the elephant range, and conflicts between humans and elephants are increasing. The Forestry Department is relocating villages outside protected areas and erecting electrified fences as elephant barriers.

Species No. 20, pp. 54-55 (reported in *Oryx* Vol. 28, No. 2)

A New Giant Panda Breeding Programme

Under current conditions, the giant panda will become extinct - both in