

S. 2011, Jan 1986
no 6

Sumatran Rhino Plans

Plans to establish a captive-breeding unit of the highly endangered Sumatran rhino, one of the Twelve Most Endangered Mammals selected by SSC at Madrid in November 1984 (see *Newsletter* No 5 page 19), were agreed at a meeting of 'all interested parties' convened by the Captive Breeding Specialist Group in Singapore in September 1984.

These involved the capture and transfer of four pairs of rhinos from Sabah to form a breeding unit in US zoos, the rhinos to remain the property of Sabah, and to be taken from areas where they are scattered and threatened. Those in relatively safe areas would not be involved. However, the Sabah Government has so far refused to allow any rhinos to be exported.

In a letter to the 'New Straits Times' Mohammed Khan, Chairman of the SSC Asian Rhino Group, pointed out that:

1. The situation in Sabah is critical. Five years ago it was estimated that there were about 30 rhino left in Sabah. Since this estimate was made about half this number *are known* to have fallen to poachers, six within the last eighteen months. This population is perilously close to the point from which it may never be able to recover, and the time available to save it may be measured in months. The Game Branch of the Sabah Forest Department just does not have the physical capacity to protect the remaining animals.
2. The immediate costs of protecting and capturing the remaining isolated animals for a captive breeding project will run to two million dollars, which would be extremely difficult if not impossible to raise locally. (Impossible within the time constraints).
3. It is imperative that in any capture attempt the best available expertise in the world should be involved. The loss of even one animal is to be regarded as tragic.

The proposal by the American Zoos (AAZPA) is the only proposal to meet the above requirements immediately. This includes Mr Tony Parkinson, who is



Captured by the Malayan Game Department for captive breeding

generally recognised as the best and most experienced wild animal trapper in the world, especially where sensitive, delicate and endangered species are concerned.

The agreement specifically provides for the young born in captivity to be available for return to the wild in Sabah when there are suitable reserves and guards.

Another outcome of the Singapore meeting is that the Indonesian Government has agreed to allow John Aspinall to export Sumatran rhinos from Indonesia for captive breeding at Howletts Zoo in England.

Gorillas and Human Diseases

A serious health hazard for the world's few surviving mountain gorillas, says Michael Woodford, is revealed by a post-mortem at Ruhengeri Hospital, in Rwanda, of a silverback male gorilla, estimated to be 38-42 years old, which showed him to be heavily parasitized by the human hookworm *Necator americanus*. This is a common debilitating parasite of Africans; but non-Africans also suffer from it and are 10 times more susceptible to it. In the last 15 years gorilla habitat has been increasingly invaded by humans, not only African herdsmen, wood gatherers, and game guards, but also by scientific workers and now tourists from overseas. Africans when they go into the gorilla areas, often take children, who may carry poliomyelitis, measles and mumps; the last two are only spread in close contact, but tuberculosis, to which primates are especially prone, is common among Rwandans.