

However, the battle to conserve Africa's wildlife and its flora will primarily be won in the field and it will primarily be won by well-trained, pragmatic and courageous individuals.

I am absolutely convinced of this. It is not all that different to military doctrine which asserts that while many services help to fight a war it is primarily the infantry who win it.

It is also encouraging to see items on your current agenda about field rangers. Given that they are usually the majority in any conservation force, there needs to be much more co-operation between

conservation agencies to evolve a really good personnel administration standard for them, better training and vastly improved field equipment. It is also necessary to ensure that all who join the field ranger force get equal treatment and conditions of service.

I feel uplifted by the way in which Clive Poultney and Jack Greeff are managing the Game Ranger Training Co-Ordination Group's activities.

This co-ordinated approach to wildlife security can only benefit conservation in the future. The time has arrived for all conservation agencies to focus on creating within their ranks a specific career path for staff involved in wildlife security. Game and field rangers must be left to do the job without having to attend to other unrelated tasks and unnecessary administration which dissipates their energy and resources. For wildlife security and hence conservation to succeed conservation agencies must endeavour to create specialist groups in their ranks to deal with security, information-gathering and other allied disciplines. The days of handing "Joe Soap" a rifle and ammunition, a pair of binoculars and a water bottle and telling him to go and look for poachers are over. This is a task that requires up-to-date technology, training and good motivation.

Poaching Escalates In Garamba National Park, Zaire

The twelve year civil war in Sudan, Africa's largest country, has destroyed much of Sudan's wildlife and now threatens to have a similar impact on neighbouring Zaire.

The threat of poaching in Garamba National Park - a 4 864 sq-km UNESCO World Heritage Site that is home to the last known northern white rhinoceros in the wild, as well as some 11 000 elephants and the only Zairian population of giraffes - increased significantly following the capture of Maridi by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in 1991, and the subsequent influx of refugees to Zaire.

The local field office of the UNHCR estimates that 60 000 refugees are in the area to the west of the park, with a further 20 000 to the east. Of these, 43 000 are in camps while the rest are scattered in the three reserves surrounding the park. Both the refugees and the local Zairians have access to arms and are able to live off the land and exploit it commercially. Bushmeat from the reserves and park is available for sale in the local markets.

The greatest threat, however, comes from across the border where rebel armies need food - armed with automatic weapons and hand grenades they poach animals from the park. Refugee registration, Sudanese identity documents and Sudanese money attest to the poachers' origins. Buffaloes are the main prey - their numbers have declined from around 53 000 in 1976 to 25 000

in 1995. Forty five elephants were found dead in 1995 and in January 1996 ivory from 20 elephants was recovered from Zairian and Sudanese poachers.

The threat to the northern white rhino is increasing as poaching moves south. An adult male rhino named "Bawesi" was killed by poachers in February and a pregnant 10-year-old female named "Juillet" was found dead at the end of March. Poachers hacked off the horns of both animals. Rhino horn is sold for up to US\$ 1 200 per kilogram in Yemen, where it is used to make dagger handles. WWF Director General Claude Martin has written to Zairian President Mobutu Sese Seko, asking him to intervene directly in the case.

While the guards of the Institut Zairois pour la Conservation de la Nature are doing a valiant job to combat poaching - often at great risk to their own lives - conservation aid is limited. The threat of poaching escalates with Zaire's ongoing national economic crisis and with the continuing war in Sudan.

Paradoxically, wildlife and the environment offer the greatest hope for revival and new development in this region.

Dr Jean-Pierre d'Huart, regional representative of the WWF East African Regional Programme Office says, "It is time for the international community to look closely at the impact of the civil war in Sudan on this unique ecosystem. If not, by the time the refugees return to their homeland, Zaire will have lost one of the jewels of its natural heritage".

