

Copies: Dr. J. Kavanagh
D. Kavanagh
Dr. J. Ledges
T. Kavanagh

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AROUND THE HORN

The Rhino Conservation Newsletter

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EDITORIAL

Elsewhere in this issue of AROUND THE HORN, we discuss the status of the Javan rhino. The discovery of the small Vietnam population should be an encouraging development. If ever there were a candidate for rescue and captive propagation, the Javan rhino is it. Two small populations - one nearly exterminated by war and poaching, the other inhabiting a reserve with an inadequate carrying capacity - are all that's left. Intensive management and international cooperation are required. The population viability analysis has been painstakingly thorough and all aspects fairly presented and discussed.

And yet there are those who remain unpersuaded...those who, unconvinced that captive propagation must often play an integral part in saving species, advocate that only strict protectionist measures will prove successful.

These populations need protection, rapid expansion and long-term management. The population biologists have many times, in many places, explained these basic principles to many people. The problem is not ignorance, at least not among field scientists. I suspect, rather, that the problem is one involving trust...a perception that zoos may not be as altruistically motivated as they seem.

Everyone agrees that zoos have evolved into institutions with considerably more redeeming value than they possessed in their earlier days. We support wildlife education, conservation programs, and research aimed at developing new techniques designed to assist in the management of small populations. We extol our newfound virtue. We demand to be taken seriously. We insist on recognition for our efforts. And then we periodically shoot ourselves in the foot!

Case in point. Following closely on the heels of the Javan rhino initiative comes word that the Los Angeles Zoo is withdrawing from the Sumatran Rhino Trust (SRT). When established, the SRT involved considerable investment and commitment from the signatories - the New York, Cincinnati, San Diego, and Los Angeles Zoos - and was expected to serve as a model for other cooperative efforts involving zoological parks. Make no mistake, the SRT was and is an ambitious project requiring real commitment. The management and staff of the Los Angeles Zoo have been heavily involved in conservation

endeavors for many years and must be devastated by the decision of the Greater Los Angeles Zoo Association (GLAZA) to terminate its support for the SRT.

To be sure, the move to withdraw will be justified as necessary to the financial security of the Zoo. By its action, GLAZA has demonstrated its inability to understand what is really at stake. Zoos are no more important than the education and conservation programs they support.

Captive breeding, education and in situ conservation programs are necessary to wildlife recovery efforts. Zoos can commit to participate or not. Those which commit will draw the best talent, the most support, and the greatest respect.

Robert W. Reece

INTERNATIONAL RHINO SYMPOSIUM PLANNED

An International Symposium on the Biology and Conservation of the Rhinoceros will be held at the San Diego Zoo May 9-11, 1991.

The program will include status and conservation plans in countries with wild rhino populations, analysis of trade in rhino products, recent findings in the genetics, behavior, ecology, reproductive biology and veterinary medicine of rhinos, captive breeding of rhinos, rhino artifacts, movies and myths, and Specialist Group meetings.

Speakers will be present from Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States.

For further information, contact Dr. Oliver Ryder, 1991 Rhino Conference, Zoological Society of San Diego, P.O. Box 551, San Diego, CA USA 92112-0551.