

JAVANS DISCOVERED IN VIETNAM

By Robert W. Reece

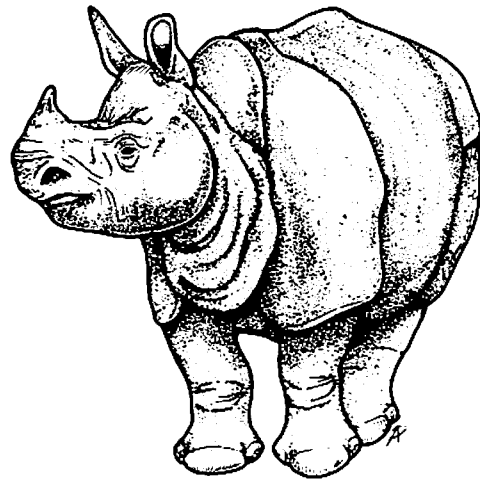
A recent discovery in south central Vietnam brings renewed hope for what many believe is the rarest of the large mammals. Dr. George Schaller, the Director of Wildlife Conservation International, announced in early 1989 that perhaps 10-15 Javan rhinos existed in an area along the Dong Nai River. Before this discovery, it was believed that the only remaining Javan rhinos (about 50) lived in Indonesia's Ujung Kulon reserve on the island of Java.

A population viability assessment (PVA) for the Javan rhino was conducted in Indonesia by the Captive Breeding Specialist Group and the Asian Rhino Specialist Group, in collaboration with the Indonesian Department of Conservation (PHPA). The results, published earlier this year, recommended that, in addition to strict protectionist measures in Ujung Kulon, some animals be removed from this population for captive propagation. For the Javan rhino to recover as a viable and evolving population in its former range, the PVA recommends a total number of about 2,000 animals distributed over 10-20 separate populations. At this point it is most important to expand and more widely distribute this remnant population as rapidly as possible to reduce the demographic risk and insure against further loss of genetic diversity. The specialist groups have identified potential sites and have formulated detailed strategies for developing the captive breeding and relocation aspects of the program, and there seems to be general agreement on the direction and scope of the effort.

The discovery of the Vietnam population has added a new dimension to the Javan program. As a result of the survey conducted in the provinces along the Dong Nai River, the

Vietnam government established a Rhinoceros Conservation Group. The government-backed group has already taken measures to afford stricter protection, educate the populace, and impose stiff penalties for the poaching of rhinos. New surveys are being considered to determine if a second remnant population exists and if existing reserves can be expanded. In addition, captive propagation is also being considered.

Unfortunately, the latest information out of Vietnam indicates that, since the original survey, at least two rhinos have been poached, further jeopardizing the future of this small population. In view of the losses suffered this past year, it would appear unlikely that the population can be sustained, let alone expanded, under the current conditions. A preliminary report by the Species Survival Commission has concluded that, in addition to strict protection measures, capture operations should begin immediately and that, at least initially, the animals be transported to Ban Ma Thuot, where a holding facility being constructed for kouprey could be used.



BLACK RHINO CONSERVATION PLAN ADOPTED

By Martin Brooks

A conservation plan to ensure the survival of the black rhino in South Africa, Namibia, and the states of Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana, and Ciskei was adopted earlier this year by all of the major conservation authorities and conservation funding organizations in the region. This action is particularly significant in view of the fact that the black rhino, which has suffered a dramatic decline from 65,000 to less than 3,500 since 1970 due to poaching, finds its last secure refuge in southern Africa where one-third of the world's remaining population is conserved.

While the species has generally been very well managed in the region, the black rhino populations have now acquired international significance, and the threat of poaching is increasing as the numbers dwindle elsewhere. Also, the populations are generally small and fragmented, raising the problem of genetic variability that can threaten survival in the long term.

The conservation plan already being implemented by the conservation authorities in Natal, KwaZulu, the Cape, Bophuthatswana, Namibia and the National Parks Board was adopted as a matter of urgency to direct conservation authorities toward common regional goals for each of the three black rhino subspecies present, and to ensure that the very best management techniques are applied.

The Rhino Management Group (RMG), comprising conservation managers from the conservation authorities with rhinos, as well as selected rhino experts, will keep the plan up to date. The present participating members are: Mr. Peter Conant, representing KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources; Mr. Tony Ferrar, representing Bophuthatswana National Parks; Dr. Anthony Hall-Martin, representing the National Parks Board; Dr. Eugene Joubert, representing the Department of Agriculture and Nature Conservation, Windhoek; Mr. Niel van Wyk, representing Cape Directorate of Nature and Environmental Conservation; The Honorable Richard Emslie and Mr. Peter Hitchins, rhino experts; and myself, serving as Chairman of the group and representing the Natal Parks Board.

The RMG's main role will be to facilitate the achievement of the conservation goals for the black rhinos by evaluating the effectiveness of current programs, developing new strategies, (See BLACK RHINO on Page 4)