

Rhino Mayday 2011

This May, rhino experts from far and wide gathered to share their wealth of experience and provide updates on the current status of programmes in both Africa and Asia. Here's just a taste of what was discussed...

Jo Paulson | Events Manager

The problems outlined

Speakers talked of the problems currently faced by the world's rhinos. The poaching crisis pervaded many of the talks: for example, **Simon Tonge, Executive Director at Paignton Zoo**, described how in Nyamaneche in Zimbabwe, three of the area's five rhinos were poached, even though they were closely controlled and presumed safe. There was also discussion of some more country-specific issues.

John Gripper of Sebakwe Black Rhino Trust explained how the political unrest in Zimbabwe is negatively impacting black rhinos, whilst **Nick Lindsay of the Zoological Society of London** described

how the invasive plant species *Mikania micrantha* is choking grasslands in Nepal and thereby restricting the habitat available for rhinos. **Peter**

Hall of Hunter Hall Investments reiterated the problems of invasive species by highlighting how *Arenga palm* is reducing the available Javan rhino habitat in Ujung Kulon National Park.

In an interesting change of pace, **Mike Bruford from Cardiff University** talked about the controversy over what comprises a sub-species and the difficulties this causes for prioritising conservation. **Nevin Hunter from the Wildlife Licensing and Registration Service** and **Brian Stuart from the National Wildlife Crime Unit** then went on to highlight that the rhino poaching crisis isn't confined to Africa and Asia by showing that wildlife crime is happening on our doorstep. Brian explained that criminals in the UK are buying rhino horn from across the world as they see wildlife crime as a soft target and that, more often than not, these serious and organised crime groups are involved in other types of criminality.

Solutions?

Jasper Humphreys of Marjan Centre, King's College London, talked about the effectiveness of force in the context of

conservation in the short-term, but also highlighted that in the longer-term, powerful, effectively implemented legislation is required. There was also extensive discussion about dehorning and its benefits and limitations as a tool to decrease poaching. **Mark Jones from Care for the Wild International** discussed the sale of existing rhino horn stockpiles (and you can read more on this issue on page 24).

Some are working on building rhino populations. Colchester Zoo's *in situ* project in South Africa, Umphafa Private Nature Reserve, is welcoming grazing animals to build numbers before introducing predators, said **Rebecca Perry the Director of Conservation, Education and Research at Colchester Zoo**. Others are translocating rhinos to make viable populations and spread genetic variety, as we heard about from **Berry White, a boma trainer** who's worked on many of the recent high-profile rhino translocations.

Throughout, the importance of involving the community was



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Speakers on the day including John Gripper from the Sebakwe Black Rhino Trust (left) and Mark Jones from Care for the Wild International (top)



emphasized. **Maggie Esson, Education Programmes Manager at Chester Zoo**,

described how at Laikipia Wildlife Forum in Kenya, kids are taken out in a bus to see the wildlife living on their doorstep. **Nick Lindsay** explained that, as part of ZSL's work in Nepal, stories are told through theatre to get messages across to local people. **Felix Patton** spoke about making the Rhino Fund Uganda sustainable through engaging with the community, training guides to take the public into the field to track rhinos on foot, and building a lodge. He outlined other crucial ingredients, such as political commitment, long-term budgets, donor commitment, contingency funding and on-site expertise.

Talks from the day are available to download from www.savetherhino.org in the 'Previous Events' section.

Thanks

A massive thank you to everyone who spoke at Rhino Mayday 2011 and to the Zoological Society of London, which, once again, very kindly provided the venue free of charge.

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