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# CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP

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## Northern White Rhino Conservation Workshop

The meeting to debate and review the conservation management options to enhance the survival of the northern white rhino will take place at White Oak Conservation Centre in Florida, USA, from 18 to 20 October 1995. Apart from organising the meeting, African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) members are responsible for putting together background documentation for the workshop.

This meeting will bring all the key stakeholders together to debate alternative strategies. It is hoped that the product of these discussions will be a conservation strategy and a plan of action for the subspecies. The participation of a high-level delegation from the Government of Zaire, together with key players from the captive community, will facilitate the implementation of any plan to come from the meeting.

I look forward to reporting on further progress on this issue in my next Chairman's report.

## 1996 AIRSG meeting

The third meeting of the AfRSG is scheduled to take place at Itala Game Reserve in KwaZulu, Natal, South Africa, from 12 to 17 February 1996. I look forward to seeing all members of the AfRSG at the meeting. The holding of the meeting, as usual, will be contingent on obtaining sufficient funding. These meetings, which are held about every 18 months, are critically important for reviewing the status of rhino conservation in Africa and for developing appropriate strategies and action plans to ensure the rhino's long-term survival. Any interested donors are requested to contact the AfRSG Chairman as soon as possible.

Apart from collating data on poaching statistics and numbers and distribution of rhinos in Africa, the meeting will identify priority projects that need funding.

The results of recent international studies of the costs and benefits of different approaches to rhino conservation, and the economics of rhino conservation and trade, are awaited with particular interest and will be subjected to rigorous debate.

## Poaching

It appears that in the first half of 1995, levels of poaching stabilised in a number of countries. This largely reflects the fact that most rhinos now occur in small, well protected and managed "sanctuaries". Sadly, the rhinos occupying the vast, unfenced expanses of land where they once roamed in large numbers, but where it was not possible to deploy sufficient manpower, have now either been poached out or reduced to low numbers. The stabilisation of poaching levels in South Africa in part reflects that some conservation agencies have increased their anti-poaching and intelligence efforts in the face of increasing threats. There is no room for complacency. As long as there is an illegal demand for horn, *in situ* populations will continue to be threatened.

The real challenge facing managers of *in situ* populations is to obtain adequate funding to ensure that good security and intelligence are maintained. The lack of funding is becoming a major challenge facing rhino conservation agencies, which in recent months have continued to suffer budget cuts in real terms as government grants have either been cut or have failed to keep pace with inflation. This trend is of great concern considering that successful rhino conservation and protection is expensive. For example, it has been estimated that to conserve rhinos *in situ* successfully may cost as much as \$1,000 - \$1,200 per km<sup>2</sup> per year. Indeed, history shows that successful rhino protection measures in Africa have been strongly correlated with expenditure.

Reduced funding for *in situ* conservation programmes threatens much of the progress achieved to date. The funding of *in situ* conservation programmes therefore should become a priority for interested NGOs and foreign governments.

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## UNEP Elephant and Rhino Conservation Facility

At a meeting between the IUCN Elephant and Rhino Specialist Groups and the Facility in October 1994 agreement was reached on the relative roles and responsibilities of the two organisations. One of the major roles of the Facility was to provide funding for priority projects and activities of the Specialist Groups and to acquire information and to develop plans, which, for the AfRSG, is done at our "annual" meetings. Unfortunately no such support has been forthcoming, but we remain committed to the liaison in the hope that the Facility will soon complement our efforts by providing funds.

### Action Plans

Funding has been obtained by the IUCN/SSC to print an updated African Rhino Action Plan. We are working to meet deadlines for production and publication by the end of September, 1995.

Members of the AfRSG played a major role in drafting the revised black rhino conservation plan for South Africa and Namibia. This plan was developed under the auspices of the Rhino Management Group.

### Newsletter

The format of the newsletter has been designed and the necessary software and hardware has been obtained for its production. Requests for material and country reports from members have been sent out and some material for the first edition has been received. Members of both the AfRSG and AsRSG will be sent copies. Anyone else wishing to be put on the mailing list for the newsletter, or to contribute to it, is asked to contact the Scientific Officer, Richard Emslie, at Box 662, Pietermaritzburg, 3200, South Africa, Fax +27 331 473278, e-mail "remslie%npb.natalparks@ahub.csir.co.za".

### AIRSG key issue report No. 1

In the last few months the AfRSG produced a key issue report on the subject of the controversial media allegations that numbers of rhino had crashed in Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park and 800 had been "lost". The report concluded that the population had not crashed and that the population was likely to be nearer to the official Natal Parks Board's estimate of 1,800 rather than the 1,214 counted during a helicopter count. The report pointed out the problems inherent in unreplicated helicopter counts, emphasising that

many animals are missed from the air. Raw helicopter count totals need to be adjusted to account for undercount biases to produce estimates of the actual population size, but the use of such correction factors is fraught with problems. The review supported the Natal Parks Board's use of Line Transect Distance Estimation as the method best able to estimate population size.

Following distribution of this report, the Scientific Officer was requested to participate in a workshop on population estimation in Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park convened by the Natal Parks Board, and was able to present the strengths and weaknesses of the various techniques for estimating population sizes of rhinos.

The Scientific Officer also visited Kruger National Park to give a seminar to senior Park management and research staff, and to discuss the use and relative merits of various black rhino monitoring techniques, and their suitability to Kruger National Park conditions.

### Strategy for range states with small populations

A number of countries with very small populations, often of indeterminate size, have been contacted and encouraged to undertake baseline surveys to assess rhino numbers and distribution. Such information is essential for the drawing up of action plans that are generally required before external donors will consider funding. The AfRSG has offered to assist by providing technical support and advice.

### Zimbabwe conservancy review

Earlier this year, the Scientific Officer visited Zimbabwe at the request of the Rhino Custodians Committee to undertake an independent assessment of the relative demographic success and habitat suitability of the Midlands rhino conservancy compared to the lowveld conservancies (using Save Valley as an example). A report has been sent to the Zimbabwean Department of National Parks and Wild Life Management (DNPWLM), and the Custodians Committee, for their attention.

There are exciting developments in the Zimbabwean lowveld where the introduction of black rhinos on a custodianship basis has catalysed the development of a game and ecotourism industry. Economic studies suggest that the development of the wildlife industry will achieve superior economic returns to cattle farming, create more higher paying jobs and generate

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much valuable foreign exchange for Zimbabwe. Thus it appears the rhinos are playing an important role in providing benefits for people.

### **Scientific Officer**

Apart from assistance with the day-to-day running of the AfRSG office, advising the Chairman on issues, helping to set up meetings, and undertaking projects, the Scientific Officer is being regularly called upon to:

- Review rhino project applications (eg, for Universities, WWF, IRF, and Zimbabwe DNPWLM.

- Give technical assistance to those in the field regarding population estimation of rhino numbers, and in particular in the use of Bayesian Mark-Recapture techniques.
- Comment on rhino habitat suitability and the effects of management actions on potential black rhino carrying capacities.

## **RAPPORT DU PRESIDENT: GROUPE DE SPECIALISTES DU RHINOCEROS AFRICAIN**

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### **Atelier sur la préservation du rhino blanc du Nord**

La réunion devant discuter et réviser les différentes options de gestion de préservation en vue d'améliorer la survie du rhino blanc du Nord aura lieu au Centre de Conservation de White Oak, en Floride, USA, du 18 au 20 octobre 1995. Les membres du Groupe de spécialistes de rhinocéros africain (GSRAf) sont chargés d'organiser la réunion mais aussi de rassembler toute la documentation nécessaire à la réunion.

Cette réunion rassemblera toutes les personnes clés pour débattre des alternatives stratégiques. On espère que le produit de ces discussions amènera une stratégie de conservation pour la sous-espèce et un plan d' action. La participation d'une délégation de haut rang venant du Gouvernement du Zaïre, avec des agents importants de la population vivant en captivité, facilitera la réalisation de tout plan issu de la réunion.

Je me réjouis de vous faire part des progrès de cette question dans mon prochain rapport de président.

### **Réunion du GSRAf en 1996**

La troisième réunion du GSRAf doit se tenir dans la Réserve de Faune d'Itala, au Kwazulu Natal, en Afrique du Sud, du 12 au 17 février 1996, et je me

réjouis de retrouver tous les membres du GSRAf à cette occasion. La tenue de la réunion dépendra comme d'habitude de l'obtention de fonds suffisants. Dois-je encore dire que ces réunions qui ont lieu environ tous les 18 mois sont d'une importance vitale pour réviser le statut de la conservation des rhinocéros en Afrique et pour la mise au point de stratégies et de plans d'action appropriés pour garantir leur survie à long terme. Tous les donateurs qui sont intéressés sont priés de contacter le président du GSRAf le plus vite possible.

La réunion va rassembler des données sur les statistiques de braconnage, le nombre et la répartition des rhinos en Afrique, mais elle va aussi identifier les projets prioritaires qui nécessitent un financement.

Nous attendons avec un intérêt tout particulier les résultats des récentes recherches internationales sur les coûts et les avantages des différentes approches de la conservation des rhinos et sur leur aspect économique; ils feront l'objet d'un débat très rigoureux.

### **Braconnage**

Il semble qu'au cours de la première moitié de 1995, le braconnage se soit stabilisé dans un certain nombre de pays. Ceci est principalement la conséquence du fait que la plupart des rhinos se trouvent maintenant