

African programme of Traffic, the British group which monitors trade in flora and fauna, says surveys show that the demand for horn in many Asian countries, where it is believed to reduce fevers, is likely to continue.

Guarding rhinos in intensive protection zones has been effective in south Africa and Zimbabwe but is expensive, an estimated £2400 a square mile.

In 1994, CITES called on the international community, and specifically the Global Environmental Fund, to help meet these costs, but funding has been minimal and the countries have had to pay for their own conservation.

"The cost of protection is vast and Africa has a tremendous shortfall which it must bear in order to protect its rhino," says Holly Dublin, senior conservation officer for the Worldwide Fund for Nature. In an attempt to find new ways to fund conservation, Zimbabwe removed the horns from many of its rhinos, with few side-effects. Rhinos regrow their horns, and many local conservationists believe the horn could be "harvested" and the income used to fund protection.

Such thinking is behind South Africa's proposal.

"We are in 'no-win' situation at present, so maybe it is better to try controlled trade," Mr. Milliken says. "Although I think we need to study the matter further before it is approved."

Genetics of Sumatra's at-risk rhino

Science News, Feb. 8, 1997 by Christine Mlot

In many cases, an endangered species can more accurately be described as a collection of genetically distinct endangered populations. To maximize diversity, each population needs to be managed separately - if there are enough individuals to keep the population alive.

The two-horned Sumatran rhinoceros typifies this dilemma. Only about 300 animals remain in the wild, and one population, on the island of Borneo, is down to about 50 animals. The Sumatran is

considered the most ancient of rhinos. Unlike other species, the Sumatran rhino is hairy and relatively small, measuring 8 feet long and weighing less than a ton. The rhinos in the Bornean population are the smallest and have a distinct skull shape.

In an article in the April CONSERVATION BIOLOGY, Columbia University evolutionary geneticist Don J. Melnick and his colleagues quantify the genetic differences that go with the obvious physical differences. Analysis of DNA from mitochondria in the animals' cells revealed little difference between rhinos in eastern and western Sumatra but a 1 percent difference between the Bornean and other Sumatran populations, indicating an evolutionary divergence.

The Bornean rhino, which inhabits tropical forests has been separate from the other rhino population since at least 10,000 years ago, when the local terrain became an archipelago. Disappearing forest habitat and pressure from poachers in search of rhino horns have pushed all the Sumatran rhino populations to the edge of extinction. The researchers recommend that conservationists maintain the Bornean population separately, to preserve the set of genes best adapted to the island, but "unfortunately...we might not have the luxury."

Rhino & Tiger Fund Continue Endangered Species Protection

Source: USFWS Press Release 4 February 1998

(as seen in: Animal Keepers' forum Vol. 25, No. 3, 1998, pp 108-109)

Interior Department Secretary Bruce Babbitt recently spoke about successes achieved so far from efforts funded under the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act of 1994. That Act provides money to fund projects that will provide effective long-term conservation proposals. Congress has funded the program through the year 2000, with \$400,000 being appropriated for FY 1997 and 1998.

* In Assam, India, the Fund provides support for various conservation efforts at Kaziranga National Park and Pobitor, Orang, and Laokhowa wildlife sanctuaries. Kaziranga National Park provides habitat for the largest remaining Indian rhino population.