

# News From the Field: Updates on the Rhino Front

## Javan Rhino Self-Portraits



WWF/R & L Schenkel

For the first time, scientists can accurately identify elusive Javan rhinos in the Ujung Kulon National Park by age and sex and monitor their health and movements through a photographic survey.

Using a technique he perfected, biologist and WWF Field Officer Mike Griffiths started the survey of the last major population of Javan rhinos in January 1991. The rhinos will, in effect, photograph themselves. According to Charles Santiapillai, WWF Senior Scientific Officer, 40 cameras are set up along a grid system throughout the rhino stomping grounds on the Ujung Kulon peninsula, just 150 kilometres west of Jakarta. An animal walking across a pressure pad triggers the camera.

## Nepal Setback

In 1973, with a few hundred pounds sterling from the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society of London, the warden of the Royal Chitwan National Park established an effective intelligence system of informants who identified poachers.

After 16 years of anti-poaching success, with an average loss of less than two greater one-horned rhinos a year, seven animals were killed in Nepal in 1990. The reasons? "One is that a lack of funds has caused the collapse of the national parks intelligence system. The other is the drop in law and order due to Nepal's unstable political situation," says WWF's rhino horn trade expert Esmond Bradley Martin.

## Taiwan's Hot Message

In January 1991, the Council of Agriculture (COA), the Taiwanese equivalent of a CITES Scientific Authority, staged a public burning of confiscated rhino horn and other wildlife products.

The public act is a sign of Taiwan's growing commitment to ending trade in rhino horn and improving its international image. Previous burnings were held in May and November of 1990.

## Zambezi Valley: The Death Toll Is Down

"The war has a far wider front now," says Glen Tatham, Chief Warden of Zimbabwe's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. "The arena stretches from the Mozambique border in the east, along the length of the Zambezi River, to Victoria Falls in the extreme west."

The "war" Tatham refers to is the ongoing struggle between rhino conservationists and poachers. Despite the growing offense—in the form of Zambian poachers—and the difficulty of locating rhinos in the dense vegetation, it seems apparent that "there are a lot fewer [dead] rhinos."

The 12,000-square-kilometre Zambezi Valley is home to the most substantial remaining population of black rhino in Africa. Protection measures have intensified over the last three years as poaching becomes more aggressive.

"We are getting some assistance from Zambian officials," says Tatham, "in the form of follow-up to our information. People are getting arrested." Already funded by groups like SAVE and WWF, new support from Australia, France, England, Canada, Germany, and South Africa is helping to step up the defense.

## Poaching's Double-Edged Sword

Immediate death is not the only result of rhino poaching. "One of the major adverse effects of poaching in Africa is the division of rhino populations into small groups," says Martin. "Isolated groups of one to three animals are essentially doomed." If the rhinos are too old, too young, or of the same sex, they cannot mate, spelling the end of rhinos in that area. The solitary Sumatran rhino, sparsely spread out in Malaysia and Indonesia, particularly suffers from this problem.