

5 Rhino Global Captive Action Plan

May 2006, Zoological Society of London, Whipsnade Wild Animal Park'

The first Global Captive Action Plan (GCAP) for rhinos was developed in 1992 from a workshop at London Zoo. This was the first time that a significant number of rhino experts from zoos and the field community had got together to look at the global situation for all species of rhinos. At that time very optimistic 10 year targets were set for populations of rhinos in our zoos and for funding to be raised through zoos in support of field conservation activities. The population goals were too challenging but the amount of money donated to the field efforts in the following 10 years probably more than matched the goals.

By 2005 it was very obvious that GCAP II was needed to review the goals and objectives set in 1992, to assess the current situation for rhinos in the world and to revise or set new targets. With the EAZA Rhino Campaign set and with the AZA Rhino Advisory Group prepared to run their campaign at the same time it was agreed that 2006 would be a good year for the 2nd GCAP meeting and that ZSL would be the host.

Over 30 delegates representing regional zoo organisations' rhino programmes, rhino field conservation agencies and population biologists spent 3 days on the task of making sense of the data from the past 14 years, what is currently happening to rhinos in zoos and in the wild and what will be happening in the future.

It was an extremely interesting meeting with a good representation from all the key rhino ranges although unfortunately the Indian zoo delegate had to cancel at the last minute. It was obvious from the meeting that zoos are getting better at managing our rhinos but there is still some way to go both in population management and in the husbandry of our rhinos. Zoos are providing significant funds for rhino conservation although it is not known exactly to what extent they do this and the scale of the support provided. The representatives from the field were able to demonstrate that there are some excellent programmes in operation across the rhino range countries with good models that can be used in other regions or for other species. Managing small populations of rhinos in isolated pockets in the wild is not too dissimilar to managing zoo populations and tools now available can be used in both scenarios.

One recurring topic of discussion, which was interesting and key to any future success of the GCAP, relates to the understanding of the role of zoos in rhino conservation and how zoos promote and record their activities in this area. It is crucial that every effort is made to ensure all aspects of rhino conservation are understood by those involved. It is also important that advantage is taken of the huge audiences visiting zoos each year and of the wider skills available in education, public relations and marketing.

The GCAP will provide a strategic global overview of rhino conservation efforts with targets and an action plan to maximise the use of the resources available. The aim is to

ensure that we manage our rhinos effectively in our zoos and support other conservation work when possible. To do this effectively we need to:

- Prioritise which taxa are appropriate for zoo-based programmes
- Maintain an overview of the global zoo populations of these species
- Manage zoo populations globally where necessary
- Develop husbandry practices in zoos that are appropriate for the species and the regions
- Coordinate research programmes to maximise the resources available
- Develop closer liaison between zoos and the IUCN SSC African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups
- Promote a better understanding of the role of zoos in rhino conservation in zoos and amongst field specialists
- Promote a better understanding in zoos of the challenges faced by field conservationists
- Encourage long term commitments by zoos to field conservation activities
- Exchange information more widely and successfully on all aspects of rhino conservation in zoos and in the field
- Use the zoos' visitor base to disseminate information on rhinos and to encourage support for rhino conservation
- Establish a forum and a process to implement and manage the GCAP process

The Indian rhino is rather a good example of how a global plan can work for a rhino species. With a full international studbook and two strong regional programmes in Europe and the USA the zoo-based population has a good future although new holders will be required in the near future. There are relatively few wild populations but those that exist have a good future but will always be in need of funding and other resources to develop and expand. Zoos can work well with other conservation and government agencies to ensure the future of rhinos in India and Nepal is secure. A tremendous conservation story of one of the most charismatic animals for zoo visitors.

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