

RHINOS OUR SPECIALITY

The African Rhino Specialist Group (AIRSG) is one of about 130 IUCN SSC* groups focused on particular taxa, in this case, white and black rhinos.

Mike Knight | Chair, AIRSG

I was appointed Chair in 2011, and carry out AIRSG duties in addition to my full-time work for SANParks; I am supported by Vice Chair Dr Benson Okita, now working for Save the Elephants, and by Dr Richard Emslie, the AIRSG's Scientific Officer. The AIRSG's goal is to promote the recovery and long-term management of viable populations of the various subspecies of Africa's rhinos in the wild. We work across all African rhino Range States: Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, (Mozambique), Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Some of our activities are known long in advance (such as CITES¹ Conferences of the Parties or Standing Committee meetings and AIRSG biennial meetings), while others are shorter notice (e.g. national rhino plans) or even shorter reactive emergency responses, particularly given the current rhino poaching crisis. Other aspects of our work include contributing reports for *Pachyderm*, the biannual journal of the African Elephant, African Rhino and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups.

We receive very welcome support from Save the Rhino International, which has taken on the burden of managing grant applications and reporting to a number of donors, deals with all the meeting logistics: booking flights, internal transfers, accommodation and conference facilities, and taking care of dietary requirements and room allocations. The Endangered Wildlife Trust manages our bank account and all income receipts and payments. We also receive grants for our ongoing work and the AIRSG meetings

from a wide range of donors: African Wildlife Foundation, the UK's Dept of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, International Rhino Foundation, Nino the Rhino, Peace Parks Foundation, Save the Rhino, WWF-African Rhino Programme and WWF-South Africa, and SANParks very kindly covers my time on AIRSG business.

The AIRSG would not be as effective without the active participation of its members: between the 55 of us, we have centuries' worth of experience! And while the formal, acronym-filled meetings are invaluable, it's amazing what you can resolve over a beer or two round the campfire.

**International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Species Survival Commission*

¹Convention on the Illegal Trade in Endangered Species

Grants

Save the Rhino has set aside \$5,000 from its core funds for the AIRSG 2016 meeting and £6,400 for ongoing activities. USFWS gave \$15,000 for ongoing activities. USFWS has awarded \$44,653, our sister non-profit SRI Inc. \$5,000, Defra £15,000 and IRF \$2,500 for the 2016 meeting. The Anna Merz Rhino Trust has donated \$12,000, Nino the Rhino donated €3,393 and the International Elephant Foundation \$5,000 for *Pachyderm*. Our grateful thanks to all of these donors. We could not function without this kind support.

AIRSG's 10 objectives

- To provide the CITES Secretariat and CITES Parties with the best information to make informed and balanced decisions
- To facilitate rhino conservation mechanisms through liaison
- To recommend best practice and capacity building of Range States and their rhino programmes
- To facilitate the spread of information on rhino-related issues amongst Range States and civil society through enhanced communication and awareness activities
- To cultivate and maintain a positive donor support base
- To assist donors in making informed and strategic decisions on project applications by others
- To assist in minimising illegal rhino-related activities by assisting investigation and prosecution efforts and enabling decision makers (judiciary) to make informed decisions
- To enhance rhino conservation through the development of rhino conservation plans, strategies and policies
- To manage all funds within budget and time constraints, and efficient project management.
- To deal with any miscellaneous rhino-related issues or queries



AIRSG Chair, Mike Knight (left) and Scientific Officer, Richard Emslie (right) with a blind black rhino in Kenya