



TAG reports 2012

EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION OF ZOOS AND AQUARIA

Case study: Reintroduction project of the Przewalski's horse in the Great Gobi B National Park in Mongolia

In the late 1960s the last free-roaming Przewalski's horse died in central Asia and the species was considered Extinct in the Wild according to IUCN Red List status. A reintroduction programme was initiated with support of the Przewalski's horse EEP to re-establish a population of horses in the Mongolian desert. The first captive-born Przewalski's horses were transported to the Gobi desert in 1992 and subsequently released back into the wild, where the horses soon adapted to the harsh environment. Over the years more horses were imported from European zoos and breeding successes improved annually. Since 1999 the International Takhi Group has been coordinating the reintroduction efforts. The population of the Przewalski's horses in the Gobi desert increased to a total of 137 animals in 2009, when a severe winter period led to a crash of the population, with only 48 horses surviving.

Since that harsh winter the population of Przewalski's horses has recovered remarkably. To date the population numbers 77 horses in the Gobi desert, including 4 mares, which were imported from Europe in 2012. Similar recoveries were noted at the other two reintroduction sites in Mongolia, in the Hustai National Park and in the Khomintal Nature Reserve.

For the 20th anniversary of the reintroduction of the Przewalski's horse in Mongolia in 2012 an international conference was organized in Ulaan Baator, which was attended by Przewalski's horse experts from around the globe. At the end of 2012 a proud count of some 350 wild Przewalski's horses living in Mongolia was made.

RHINO

TAG Chair: Friederike van Houwald, Zoologischer Garten Basel, Basel, Switzerland
TAG Vice Chair: Lars Versteeg, Safaripark Beekse Bergen, Beekse Bergen, The Netherlands

The vision and mission of the EAZA Rhino TAG are to have a healthy, viable population of free ranging and intensively managed rhinos ranging through intact ecosystems, where they are valued and cherished both locally and globally, and to ensure all captive populations are healthy, self sustaining and genetically viable and are capable of being an effective tool in support of rhino conservation in the wild.

The EAZA Rhino TAG met twice during 2012, at the mid-year hoofstock TAGs meeting at Marwell Wildlife and at



INDIAN RHINOCEROS (*RHINOCEROS UNICORNIS*) © TORBEN WEBER



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the EAZA Annual Conference in Innsbruck. A major aim is to continue to strengthen forces with the *in situ* partners to tackle the huge poaching problems throughout the year. For the TAG meeting in Innsbruck, the executive director of Save the Rhino International (SRI), Cathy Dean, and the chair of the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group and member of the EAZA Rhino TAG, Mike Knight, were invited to speak about their conservation work and all efforts undertaken to stop the poaching surge. Furthermore, Rob Ogden has joined the TAG as genetic advisor.

Due to the high poaching numbers of rhinos (see case study), the Rhino TAG urges all rhino holders, to support *in situ* conservation projects. Further information can be downloaded from the EAZA Rhino TAG workspace in the member area of the EAZA website.

The Black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) EEP is stable and can be found in 15 EAZA zoos. EEP participants are encouraged to become more proactively involved with *in situ* conservation projects.

The Indian rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) EEP is increasing, and it is important that new holders are allocated and build their facilities within 2 to 3 years after having committed to participating in this EEP.

The white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) population is developing towards a sustainable level. More animals are starting to breed and initiatives undertaken to stimulate breeding include: exchange of non-breeding males/females, exchange of young females out of their maternal herd, transfer of young males to bachelor groups etc. Partly because of these initiatives, the future does look much brighter for the sustainability of this EEP than a couple of years ago.

Case study: Rhino poaching crisis

In the past 5 years, rhino poaching incidents have dramatically increased. In 2012 alone, 668 rhinos were poached in Africa and around 50 were poached in Asia. These figures are constantly rising and predictions have been made that the extinction of the *Rhinocerotidae* may be something we could encounter in the near future if poaching continues. The demand for horn, especially in Vietnam, is increasing. In Vietnam, rhino horn is not used for traditional Chinese medicine purposes, but rather as a cure for 'hangovers' or as a status symbol. To counter act these developments and form stronger bridges between zoos and field conservationists, the EAZA Rhino TAG has invited Dr. Mike Knight, the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG) Chair, to become a member of the EAZA Rhino TAG. In return, the EAZA Rhino TAG Chair has been invited to become a member of both IUCN Rhino Specialist Groups. In 2012, 110 EAZA zoos participated in rhino breeding programmes. Furthermore 20% of these breeding programme participants back up the *ex situ* efforts by directly supporting *in situ* conservation projects. For 2013 the Rhino TAG is aiming at increasing this figure, including private individuals.

TAPIR AND HIPPO

TAG Chair: Bengt Holst, Copenhagen Zoo, Copenhagen, Denmark

The EAZA Tapir and Hippo TAG had its annual meeting on 29 September during the EAZA Annual Conference in Innsbruck. During the meeting, Dr.med.vet. Christian Walzer from the Research Institute for Wildlife and Ecology in Vienna gave a presentation on fertility in common hippos (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) and the challenges this provides for the captive management. The species coordinator for the lowland tapir, Aude Desmoulins, Zooparc de Beauval, presented a concept of eco-tourism for the benefit of lowland tapir (*Tapirus terrestris*) research and conservation as

conducted by the chairman of the IUCN/SSC Tapir Specialist Group, Patricia Medici, in the Pantanal, Brazil, and the TAG chair gave a report from the V International Tapir Symposium in Malaysia, October 2011 on behalf of Patricia Medici. Special attention in this report was given to an exciting project going on in Brazil regarding the possible existence of a fifth species of tapir. The new species – if it is a unique species – is darker in colour, smaller in general size, has shorter legs (is the only living species with the femur shorter than the mandible), lower mane as a consequence of a lower sagittal crest in the skull, which starts at the fronto-parietal suture as opposed to the situation in lowland tapirs in which it starts well into the frontal. This also makes the area between the eyes broader than in lowland tapirs. The idea of a fifth tapir species is based on morphological analyses of mostly skulls found in the Amazon and on tapirs captured on camera traps. Whether or not the data are valid and there actually is a fifth species is still to be proven, but the data so far is interesting and worth addressing.

Imports from the wild or from range countries in general have been discussed several times for the Malayan tapir (*Tapirus indicus*) for which the EEP population is rather small. But due to the fact that tuberculosis (TB) is a significant problem in the two tapir EEPs the TAG Chair has stated that no Malayan tapir imports from the wild or from range countries will be accepted until the TB situation is under control. This also goes for any transfer of tapirs within the EEP region. All tapir holders are obliged to test their animals for TB, and only tested animals should be moved. This was stressed during the annual meeting, and the situation will be followed closely by both the TAG and the EAZA Veterinary Committee.

During the reporting of the various programmes under the TAG the following problems and recommendations were highlighted:

Lowland tapir EEP: In order to be able to move animals around with certain flexibility it is requested from the holders that they make sure they have the ability to keep any offspring for at least 18 months. Furthermore TB tests were launched in line with the ones being implemented for the Malayan tapirs. No moves should take place without having tested the tapirs negative for TB.

Malayan tapir EEP: A thorough cleanup of the studbook data, including historical data, has more than doubled the number of founders in the population. This will be reflected in the coming recommendations.

Pygmy hippo EEP: There is still a heavy bias towards