

The status of Elephant and Rhino in Africa

by PETER JACKSON

African and international wildlife specialists meeting in Zimbabwe have called for urgent efforts to build up a breeding nucleus of northern white rhinos to safeguard the animal from extinction in the wild. The meeting was convened from 30 July to 7 August by the Species Survival Commission of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). It estimated that fewer than 700 northern white rhinos survive in the wild almost all in Sudan and northern Zaire. It suggested that a small breeding herd at the Dvur Kralove zoo in Czechoslovakia and a group at San Diego in the United States be built up to guard against extinction of this form of rhino. Meanwhile protection of the wild survivors must be stepped up.

The meeting heard that there are now nearly 3 000 of the other sub-species, the southern white rhino, which was once considered extinct until a few were found and protected in Natal. There are over 25 500 in South Africa, more than 300 in other countries in the region, and a considerable number sent to zoos in other parts of the world. Dr David Cumming, Chief Ecologist of Zimbabwe's Parks and Wildlife Department, who chaired the meeting, said that dedicated efforts now could certainly save the northern form from extinction.

The meeting also reviewed the status of the African elephant. It was agreed that the population in areas in which accurate surveys have been conducted is approximately 600 000. The number of elephants occupying the remaining, unsurveyed elephant range is not known, but could be anything from a further 500 000 to 2 000 000. Elephant specialists pointed out the difficulty of assessing numbers in tropical forests and recommended that a survey of the Central African basin should have top priority because the area is thought to contain a high proportion of

Africa's elephants. In recommending enhanced protection of elephants throughout their range in 34 countries south of the Sahara, the meeting emphasized the need for urgent measures to save elephants in West Africa, where they survive in fragmented and beleaguered populations, with the largest numbers in Ivory Coast and Liberia.

Dr Cumming said "There will inevitably be a continuing reduction in the number of Africa's elephants as a result of increasing human population and the demand for land. The key issue is to focus on conservation of elephants in a wide range of habitats throughout the continent. This is why we stressed the importance of the West African elephants. Overall, careful thought needs to be given by African governments to what land and habitat should be conserved before their options are closed."

The trade in ivory and rhino horn was also reviewed. It was declared that the trade in horn must be halted if rhinos were to survive. Countries with stocks of horn were urged to examine whether these stocks should be destroyed. In the case of ivory it was stressed that the trade must be controlled by universal adherence to, and implementation of, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Over 70 countries are now party to the Convention, but unfortunately this does not include all the countries involved in the ivory trade.

The meeting, which included scientists, wildlife managers and other specialists, drew up recommendations for elephant and rhino conservation measures based on the biological importance of the various populations and the areas they live in, their current conservation status, and existing and future economic and human population pressures.

"Although so much has to be done all over Africa, our meeting has identified a small set of priorities which require strong and immediate action," Dr Cumming stated. "There is no doubt that the northern white rhino in Sudan and Zaire is in an extremely precarious position. But the black rhino is declining at an alarming rate, and the major focus for action is to arrest the trade in rhino horn, as well as to secure key black rhino populations in Tanzania and in the Luangwa valley in Zambia."

The meeting was addressed by Zimbabwe's Minister for Natural Resources and Water Development, Mr Joseph Msika, who stressed the importance of conservation for economic development. He said that Zimbabwe regarded wildlife as a natural resource to be protected, preserved and used wisely. Expressing "considerable alarm" over the threat to the rhino in Africa, Mr Msika said that there was a healthy population in Zimbabwe, but the threat from poachers was growing.

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4. **Best Animal or Bird Architecture Photograph: Mr. A. D. Wood of Marandellas**
\$30 from Institute of Architects of Zimbabwe.
5. **Best Slide taken in Suburban Garden: Mr. M. Williams of Salisbury**
\$30 from the Central Africa Building Society.
6. **Best Scenic Zimbabwe shot: Mr. R. P. Blackmore of Salisbury**
\$30 from the Natural Resources Board.
7. **Best Plantlife Photograph: Mr J. L. Seymour-Smith of Que Que**
\$10 gift voucher from Landscapes Nurseries.
8. **Salisbury Pharmacy Trophy: Mr. N. Fernsby of Salisbury**
For the best colour print (won by the runner-up).
9. **Big Game Photograph Trophy: Mr. C. Neilson of Salisbury**
For the best action shot.
10. **Ornithological Society of Zimbabwe Trophy: Mr. N. Belford of Salisbury**
For the best bird slide.
11. **John Wightman Cup: Mr. H. M. Poole of Salisbury**
For the best macro photograph.
12. **Rhode Engineering Trophy: Mr. D. E. Fincham of Salisbury**
For the best student portfolio.