

participation systems into overall biodiversity strategies under which priorities for local action and international co-operation might be established.

That said, the ODA is to be congratulated on taking a first step of this kind. It was clearly appreciated by the delegates. It is to be hoped that there will be a follow-up, both at the workshop level and to pursue the policy dialogue with a wider range of African countries. Opportunities for inter-African discussion are not easy to arrange, while the tensions within CITES on the elephant and other issues are never far away. Informal contacts outside the sessions, including the DoE/FFI lunch, were able to help in confidence building. In addition FFI had the chance, through a presentation by the Director in Cambridge during the pre-consultation study tour, to reinforce existing contacts and make new ones. There was much appreciation for the 100% Fund and indeed for *Oryx* as a vehicle for rational communication on conservation policy and practice.

Robin Sharp  
FFI Trustee

## Numbers of greater one-horned rhinos continue to rise

Greater one-horned rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis* populations are still expanding. The newest estimate, given at the December 1995 IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group meeting, was 2135. Nepal's rhinos now exceed 500 and India has about 1600.

Over the last few years, demand for the horn in eastern Asia has been falling. Its export price from the Indian subcontinent has stayed at \$US9000/kg since 1992, although the quantity of horns on the market has been reduced. Poaching in India in 1994 and up to November 1995 decreased by about half (to 31 and 35 rhinos, respectively) as compared with the previous 2 years, while in Nepal no rhinos were known to be poached at all in 1994 in or

around Royal Chitwan and Bardia National Parks, and, according to officials, only one was poached in 1995, north of Chitwan.

The reason for such success against the poachers is that India and Nepal independently stepped up their security measures in 1994 and 1995. In India's Kaziranga National Park (home to about 1300 rhinos), the budget was slightly increased, to \$US667,364 in 1994/95, or \$US1550 per sq km, one of the highest figures per unit area in Asia. The informant system was also improved around Kaziranga; there has been a tenfold increase in reward money over the last 4 years, to over \$US2110 spent in 1994, and 46 arrests were made in that year. Of significant importance was the prevention by the Director of Kaziranga National Park of the transfer of three excellent range officers, who are the key people in the field, motivating the 435 forest staff and regularly visiting the 115 guard camps. There is one man per sq km in Kaziranga, one of the highest concentrations of patrolling effort in the world, and with good leadership there has been improved vigilance and more patrols. As a result, 12 rhino poachers met their deaths in 1994, the most for many years, which has made poachers more reluctant to enter the park. There have also been fewer poaching incidents because more camps for forest guards were placed on Kaziranga's southern boundary, which is close to about 100 small villages. In order to help with patrol work, the Rhino Foundation for Nature in North East India gave boots to all the field staff and many jackets. 'Our guards are living in wretched conditions with hazardous duties' stated the park's director. This small amount of assistance has raised their morale and effectiveness. Not only has the welfare of the staff been slightly improved, but also that of the people surrounding Kaziranga, although officials admit that much more is needed. If local villagers are adequately helped by park officials, it is less likely that they will aid poachers.

A further factor in the reduction of poaching has been better co-operation between the police and the range officers because the police have been less occupied in dealing with



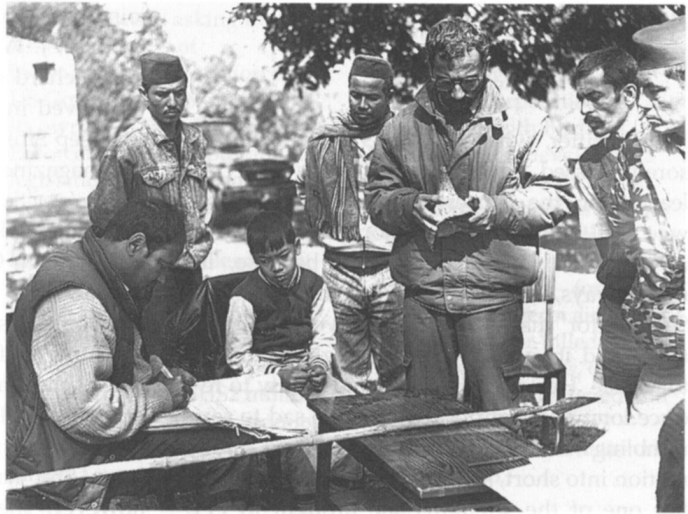
Two-thirds of Kaziranga National Park in Assam, India, are nutrient-rich grassland and ideal Indian rhino habitat (*Esmond Martin*).

terrorists in Assam. Recently, several arrests were made of rhino horn traders in Calcutta, Siliguri and Dudhwa; in the past such arrests were very rare. However, as Anne Wright of the Rhino Foundation states, 'India must be one of the few countries in the world which lets rhino poachers out so easily on bail', and this must be rectified through better enforcement of India's Wildlife Act.

Rhino poaching in Nepal has been reduced recently for similar reasons. The police have become more active. About 40 rhino poachers were in jail in 1995 (including 14 arrested in 1994), and unlike in India, the sentences are commonly upheld. Furthermore, sentences were increased to a maximum of 15 years in jail and a Rs100,000 (\$US2000) fine in 1993. Of great importance to the safety of rhinos is the integrity of the District Forest Officers (DFOs), especially around Royal Chitwan National Park, because the animals are sometimes

poached when they wander into neighbouring farmland. The DFOs were very active in catching poachers and traders in 1994 and 1995. Non-governmental organizations have been increasing their efforts in Nepal also. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) is helping to fund two new antipoaching units inside Chitwan and one more outside the park. Each unit consists of six armed men. There is now a similar unit in Royal Bardia National Park, also funded by WWF. The army has increased its day and night patrols inside Chitwan and Bardia as well, acting as an effective deterrent against poachers.

As in India, most poachers are caught through informers, and intelligence gathering has been improved recently in Nepal. The International Trust for Nature Conservation is now paying people on a regular basis to collect information, as well as giving reward money. These payments have increased five-



Officials of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation in Nepal keep up-to-date records of rhino-poaching incidents (*Esmond Martin*).

fold since 1991, to \$US6827 in 1994. This money has been raised from individual donors and through a collection box at Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge in Chitwan.

Officials have also been allocated access to a higher budget to improve park management, as in India. In 1995/96 the total budget of Chitwan was about \$US900,000 (or \$US966 per sq km). More financial aid must be given to the neighbouring villagers, however, because rhinos damage crops and even kill people. There are a few eco-development projects under way and more are planned to improve relations. For example, buffer zones have been proposed around Chitwan and Bardia, with 30–50 per cent of the revenue earned by the two parks being spent on these zones for local people. When this is approved by the government, the killing of rhinos may be reduced even further.

One must not become complacent in view of these increasing successes against poachers in India and Nepal. One corrupt or inexperienced senior official can have dire consequences, as can a breakdown in law and order. In Assam, at least nine rhinos were killed in Orang Wildlife Sanctuary in 1995, due to mismanagement and lack of adequate patrols, following the theft of the main radio set and arms by terrorists. In Manas National Park there are perhaps only 20 out of 90 rhinos left,

due to political disturbances in the area over the last 7 years. Both Orang and Manas now urgently require equipment to strengthen anti-poaching efforts.

The question is, has wildlife in India the same level of political support from the Prime Minister as it had in the days of Nehru and Indira Gandhi, to enable the government to allocate sufficient funds and manpower to safeguard India's rhinos now and in the future? According to S. Deb Roy, formerly Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) Assam and Inspector General of Forests (Wildlife) Government of India, 'The rhinos will be gone in 25 years if there is not the political will to save them'. The same fear exists in the long term in Nepal now that the King, a supporter of rhinos, no longer has so much power with the advent of multiparty democracy.

Rhinos can be saved if adequate funds are provided for their protection and if there is effective leadership in the field. The situation in both India and Nepal has improved and will continue to do so in the future as long as there is significant support from senior politicians and bureaucrats.

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