



The Chairman of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group, Mr. Mohd. Khan bin Momin Khan, addressing the meeting.



Technical session in progress.

OPENING ADDRESS

Mr. MOHD. KHAN bin MOMIN KHAN
Chairman
IUCN/SSC Asian Rhino Specialist Group

Editors' summary :

Mr. Mohd. Khan thanked Prof. Rubini Atmawidjaja and went on to outline the activities of the Asian Rhino Specialist Group (ARSG) to date. At the 1st meeting that was held in Bangkok (Thailand) in 1979, the three species of Asian rhino, namely the Indian, Sumatran and Javan, were considered for discussion. The objective was to assess their status and prepare an Action Plan. The Chairman emphasised that viable populations were essential for long-term survival of any species. Reproduction must overcome any losses incurred by a population through natural mortality or poaching. He then went on to discuss the status of the Sumatran rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*) which is found in Indonesia, Malaysia, Burma and Thailand (Fig. 1). This wide distribution of the species raises difficult problems for its conservation. In the proposals made in Bangkok in 1979, the main emphasis was laid on the collection of data on the species of rhino through research; protection of their habitats through legislation; regular monitoring of the populations to assess the fluctuation in numbers; promotion of measures that would improve the level of protection and reduce poaching; and a strict control on the trade in rhino products (horn, hide etc.).

The IInd and IIIrd meetings of the ARSG were held in 1982 and 1984 in Malaysia and Singapore respectively. At this IVth meeting in Indonesia, the main task was to review the progress made so far and outline the strategies needed for the future. In the Peninsular Malaysia, for example, information such as how many rhinos are present, where they occur, and what steps must be taken to improve their long-term survival are crucial. Today, thanks to the tremendous work so far carried out in Malaysia, rhinos are better known and understood than they were in 1979. There are more personnel to investigate into the rhino numbers and range. Viable populations of Sumatran rhino are present in Endau-Rompin and Taman Negara in Peninsular Malaysia. A small population is also present in Sabah.

In Thailand, the situation vis-à-vis the Sumatran rhino was critical in 1979 and therefore more surveys were recommended to be carried out in four areas. The situation still remains a matter for concern. Rhinos continue

to face considerable problems from a variety of causes in Indonesia. Habitat destruction, shifting cultivation and poaching still go on. In Sumatra, there are five areas where the Sumatran rhino is known to survive, viz. Gunung Leuser National Park, Kerinci-Seblat National Park, Barisan Selatan National Park, Torgamba production forest, and perhaps Kalimantan (although Dr. Nico van Strien doubts if the animal occurs in Kalimantan). As far as the Javan rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*) is concerned, the Chairman emphasised the need to continue monitoring of the animals in Ujung Kulon National Park, and recommended that anti-poaching measures and the level of protection of the park be improved. In India, the Great Indian one-horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) in comparison to the Javan and Sumatran rhinos, seems to be doing well. It is found in India, Nepal, Assam, West Bengal and Bhutan and in 1979, its number was estimated to be about 1,100.

At the IIIrd meeting of the ARSG held in Singapore in 1984, the main topic of discussion was what should be done with the doomed animals in the case of the Sumatran rhino? It was then decided to launch a programme to capture individual rhinos from doomed areas for breeding in captivity in zoos. Since then, Indonesia has captured five animals (3 males and 2 females), while Peninsular Malaysia captured five animals (all were females) of which one was sent to Thailand as a gift. The Chairman expressed his wish to exchange one female for a male from Indonesia. He also noted that a pair had already been sent from Indonesia to England to be bred in captivity at the Howletts and Port Lympne Zoo Park. Eventually, he hopes to have captive animals in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Note: In the brief discussion that followed the Chairman's address, Mr. Widodo Sukohadi Ramono, (Chief of Balai Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam II, Tanjungkarang, Sumatra) surprised everyone present by his declaration that he had seen some rhino dung in the Way Kambas Game Reserve recently! He was unable to confirm if it was definitely that of a rhino, but ruled out the tapir as a possibility. More surveyes are needed to confirm Mr. Widodo's report. The last Javan rhino was supposed to have been shot in this area in 1961.



Participants and Observers at the Asian Rhino Specialist Group Meeting.



Dr. Thomas Foose, Mr. Mahedi Andau, Dr. Charles Santiapillai and Mr. Raleigh Blouch, attending the technical session.