

ON THE STATUS OF THE SUMATRAN RHINO IN CAPTIVITY IN THAILAND

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Editors' summary

Dr. Chira Meckvichai, who is the Director of the Dusit Zoo in Thailand received the female Sumatran rhino that was presented to the King of Thailand by the King of Malaysia, to be reared in the Zoo. It was named "Linchong" (means flower in Thai) by the Queen of Thailand. It was very tame and inhabited an enclosure 20 x 35 m where provision was made for the animal to wallow. The animal was seen defaecating often into the water. The food given to the animal was different to what it used to get in Malaysia. Dr. Meckvichai pointed out the difficulties in obtaining wild plants in such an urban city as Bangkok, far from forests. Therefore, as an alternative, the animal was given beans, bananas, sweet potatoes and plenty of leaves. The animal was wormed regularly and it continued to remain healthy. Dr. Meckvichai expressed his concern over the fact that the animal was being given too much carbohydrate at the expense of fibrous material. The Zoo had two post-graduate students to monitor the daily activities of the animal. The Zoo was anxious to obtain a male to begin the breeding programme. If a mate became available, the Zoo authorities were planning to release the pair into a fenced off area in the Kao Yai National Park (where the last rhino was shot 15 years ago). According to Dr. Meckvichai, there were other possible areas (eg Phu Kheo along the Laos border, and Huay Kha Khaeng along the Burma border) where rhinos could be reared in a semi-natural environment.

DISCUSSION

SANTIAPILLAI : welcomed the idea of breeding rhino in large enclosures in natural habitats and hoped that the experiment would succeed.

MECKVICHAI : pointed out that the animals would be kept in a kind

of "open zoo". He also made reference to the already successful re-introduction programmes on deer that had been going on in Thailand for the past ten years. The question was how successful these captive-bred animals would be in the wild after they were re-introduced. Could they defend themselves successfully against their predators (and poachers) ?

FOOSE : wanted to know if the animals would be released into reserves to roam free or would they be kept in these reserves within large enclosures ?

MECKVICHAI : reiterated his earlier comment that the animals would not be simply released into the reserves, rather, they would be kept in large enclosures there. Each enclosure would be about 5 - 10 acres in area and would hold a pair.