



Global Re-introduction Perspectives: 2013

Further case-studies from around the globe
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IUCN/SSC Re-introduction Specialist Group (RSG)





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Re-introduction of greater one-horned rhino in Manas National Park, Assam, India - *under the Indian Rhino Vision 2020*

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Introduction

The greater one-horned rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*) is listed in IUCN Red List as Vulnerable while in CITES as Appendix I. The species is also included in Schedule I of the Wildlife (protection) Act 1972 enacted by the Government of India ensuring high priority in conservation of the species. The greater one-horned rhino once ranged throughout the entire stretch of the Indo-Gangetic



Greater one-horned rhino

Plain of the Indian subcontinent, along the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra river basins, from Pakistan to the Indian-Burmese border, including parts of Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan but excessive hunting reduced their natural habitat drastically. Today, about 3,250 rhinos live in the wild in India and Nepal out of which 2,500 are found in India's Assam alone. They prefer the alluvial plain grasslands of the Terai and Brahmaputra floodplain. As a result of habitat destruction and climatic changes their range has gradually been reduced and today, their range has further shrunk to a few pockets in southern Nepal (Chitwan National Park (NP), Bardia National Park and Sukhlaphanta Wildlife Reserve), Uttar Pradesh of India (Dudhwa NP), northern Bengal (Garumara National

Park and Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary) and the Brahmaputra Valley (Kaziranga National Park, Orang National Park, Manas National Park and Pabitora Wildlife Sanctuary).

Goals

- Goal 1: Range expansion of the rhino to potential habitats within Assam by the year 2020 through wild to wild translocation.
- Goal 2: To increase the rhino population in the wild to about 3,000 in Assam by 2020.
- Goal 3: To conserve existing grassland habitats in Assam through re-introduction of rhinos.



Rhino captured and collared at Pabitora for release in Manas National Park

Success Indicators

- Indicator 1: How many rhinos captured at donor rhino bearing areas and translocated to recipient sites within Assam.
- Indicator 2: Rhino population increase in rhino bearing areas in Assam.
- Indicator 3: Infra-structure enhancement in recipient rhino bearing sites.

Project Summary

Feasibility: The Indian Rhino Vision 2020 was initiated in 2005 which is a collaborative initiative of Assam Forest Department, Bodoland Territorial Council, International Rhino Foundation, World Wide Fund for Nature and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A rhino task force was constituted in 2005 to promote the plan of Indian Rhino Vision 2020. Since 2005 until April 2008 feasibilities of enhancing habitat and security to cater the need of rhinos in the recipient sites were thoroughly assessed and followed up with infra-structure development to ensure that the recipient site is capable monitor them to protect translocated rhinos and habitats. Interaction with fringe communities of the recipient sites were undertaken to generate and enhance their awareness on conservation issues, specifically on rhinos to build up community support to ensure the future of the rhinos. An indepth security assessment was carried out in the recipient sites along with habitat assessment to ensure that ground is set to receive translocated rhinos.

Implementation: After habitat and security assessment was done and report submitted to the Rhino Task Force of Assam, for rhino translocation within Assam which is one of the key output of the IRV 2020, a Translocation Core Committee



Monitoring released rhino on motorbikes

(TCC) was formed by the Rhino Task Force to initiate steps to start rhino capture and Translocation. After improving the security infrastructure in Manas, the first batch of rhino translocation was planned in April 2008 from Pabitora WLS to Manas NP. Accordingly two male rhinos were captured in Pabitora WLS and translocated to Manas NP. Both the rhinos were radio collared. The initial plan is to capture and translocate 20 rhinos to Manas NP of

which 10 rhinos each to be captured from Pabitora WLS and Kaziranga NP and translocated to Manas NP. Since April 2008 until March 2012, 18 rhinos were captured and translocated to Manas NP of which 10 were captured from Pabitora and 8 from Kaziranga. Rhinos were captured during morning and captured rhinos were put into a wooden crate and then loaded into Truck for transportation to Manas NP which is the recipient site. The trucks carrying captured rhinos move from the capture sites (Pabitora WLS and Kaziranga NP) to release site (Manas NP) in the evening so as to reach Manas NP by early morning. Rhinos are then released in the wild in Manas NP in early morning.

Post-release monitoring: All the rhinos released in the Manas NP under IRV 2020 are fitted with VHF radio collars and are being monitored daily by a dedicated team using telemetry equipment. The monitoring is carried out round the clock using vehicles, trained elephants, motorcycles, etc. and after initial tracking of the rhinos, attempt is made to physically observe them. All the rhinos are also ear notched and physical identification is done with the help of their unique identification marks. The monitoring efforts are recorded using pre-designed formats and is entered into a GIS platform for analysis and outputs and annual monitoring reports are produced.

Major difficulties faced

- Procurement of tranquilizing drugs from abroad.
- Unpredictable weather.
- Keeping the team motivated specially the team involved in patrolling and monitoring in Manas.
- No dedicated manpower for the program, skilled and experienced persons of the state offer voluntary service as such timelines needs to be flexible.

Major lessons learned

- Good understanding and team work.
- Plan in advance and execute the plan within timeline.
- Procurement of tranquilizing drugs often takes more time than expected due to complicated import procedures in India.
- Short expiry time of the imported tranquilizing drugs and as such time bound capture using the drugs is important before drugs get expired.

Success of project

Highly Successful	Successful	Partially Successful	Failure
√			

Reason(s) for success/failure:

- Good coordination and team spirit to make it success.
- Commitment of the Government and other partners to make it success.

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