

IUCN/SSC Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group

NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 1994

Reorganization of the AWCSG and completion of the Action Plan

As many of you will know the Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group (AWCSG) is currently involved in a process of reorganization and enlargement - a process from which it hopes to emerge both revitalized and with a clear agenda for the next five years. As part of that reorganization I have been asked by the SSC Chairman, George Rabb, to act as the group's Interim Coordinator. One of my priorities is to improve communication within the AWCSG and consequently I am circulating this brief newsletter to all the Group's members. This newsletter has two main aims, firstly to inform group members of the activities of their fellow members and secondly to ask you to send me news of *your* activities. (So if are, or have been, actively involved with wild cattle and buffalo conservation but are not mentioned below let me know!)

I have very nearly completed the final draft of *Asian Wild Cattle and Buffaloes: Status Report and An Action Plan for their Conservation, 1995-2000* and it will soon be distributed for checking and review by the Group's members and other interested parties. It is hoped that the publication of the Action Plan will help the AWCSG focus its activities more effectively in the future.

The Action Plan reviews the various options for the conservation of cattle and buffaloes in Asia, addresses the problems inherent in setting priorities and discusses the questions raised by feral animals. Attention is also drawn to the threat posed to wild cattle and buffaloes by the trade in wildlife parts - a threat which has often been overlooked in the past. The final section of the Action Plan provides the most up-to-date account of the status of the eight species of Asian cattle and buffaloes available as well as a summary of what is known about their taxonomy, distribution, ecology and behaviour, emphasizing those aspects most relevant to their conservation. Each species account also provides a detailed conservation plan with clearly identified priorities and criteria for assessing the success of the recommended programme.

It is intended that a meeting of the AWCSG and a Wild Cattle CAMP Workshop (in collaboration with the CBSG) will be held in Thailand in mid-1995 (probably in May or June) and implementation of the Action Plan will form the main topic for discussion at this meeting.

Activities in the 1990-1993 period

During this period Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group members were active throughout much of the Asian region. George Schaller and his Chinese colleagues conducted wildlife surveys in the high plateaux of Tibet during which information about the region's remaining wild yak was collected. Roberto Escalada served as Project Officer and Veterinarian for the Tamaraw Conservation Programme in the Philippines and Roger Cox and Michael Woodford conducted a technical evaluation of this programme in 1990. Mangala de Silva, Charles Santiapillai, Sarath Dissanayake and A.H. Sumanasena were involved in assessing the status of water buffalo in Ruhuna National Park, Sri Lanka during 1991-1993. Charles Santiapillai was also responsible for the production of the AWCSG newsletter (although the term 'newsletter' does not really do his efforts justice).

Between 1989 and 1992 group members (Roger Cox, Ha Dinh Duc, John MacKinnon, Bouaphanh Phanthavong, Richard Salter, Sivannavong Sawathvong and Michael Woodford) were involved in surveys for kouprey (and other wild cattle) in Vietnam and Laos. Unfortunately all the surveys produced either negative or inconclusive results (as far as kouprey were concerned). In 1994 Michael Woodford participated in an aerial survey for kouprey and other wild cattle in Cambodia. The results of this survey, which was led by Robert Olivier and funded by the NWF/IUCN/WWF Collaborative Programme on Endangered Species in South-east Asia further heightened concerns about the survival of this species (no kouprey were seen). The survey also confirmed that the status of gaur and banteng in Cambodia is a matter for serious concern.

A preliminary Wild Cattle CAMP meeting was held in San Diego in early 1994 by members of the American zoo community and the CBSG but unfortunately (due to a number of factors, not least the expense of attending) the only member of

the AWCSG present was Bruce Read. Another CAMP meeting is being organized and will be held later this year in Thailand where it is hoped a greater proportion of the Specialist Group's members will be able to participate. Bruce Read has also been involved in research aimed at clarifying the phylogenetic relationships in the subfamily Bovinae.

In addition the AWCSG also contributed to the review of the proposed new criteria for the IUCN Red List categories and provided the World Conservation Monitoring Centre with updated information on the distribution and status of Asian wild cattle and buffaloes for inclusion in the *1994 IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals*. While WCMC seemed to have agreed with most of the information I provided their decision to include Bangladesh in the current range of gaur, and Nepal, Afghanistan and Bhutan in the range of wild yak came as something of a surprise. Anyone with information about the presence of either wild yak or gaur in these countries is requested to send the information to me as soon as possible! Furthermore the doubt expressed about the continued occurrence of banteng in Cambodia is unduly pessimistic: recent aerial surveys have revealed that banteng still survive in the country although their status is a matter for grave concern. The exclusion of Sri Lanka from the range of wild water buffalo is more understandable although an entry such as 'Sri Lanka?' would have been preferable (the status of the Sri Lankan water buffalo is discussed in detail in the Action Plan).

Current activities

Sompoad Srikosamatara (a newly invited member) is compiling a report on the status of banteng and gaur in Thailand and Theerapat Prayurasiddhi is conducting a study of the ecology of gaur and banteng in western Thailand. I am currently studying the ecology and behaviour of banteng and feral water buffalo in East Java (the study encompasses the important Baluran and Alas Purwo banteng populations and will continue until the end of 1996).

Please let me know if you are currently involved in a project concerned with the biology and conservation of Asian wild cattle and buffalo but are not mentioned here. Please also feel free to send me any information you may have about the current status of wild and feral Asian cattle and buffalo; project proposals (or anything else which you think should be included in the Action Plan); or suggestions for people who should be invited to join the IUCN/SSC Asian Wild Cattle Specialist Group.

I can be contacted at the following address: Simon Hedges, Taman Nasional Baluran, Pos Wongsorejo 68453, Banyuwangi, Jawa Timur, INDONESIA (or by fax to the following number: + 62 333 24641).

Best wishes!

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