

# Black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis minor*) now back in North Luangwa National Park, Zambia

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After an absence of more than 15 years, black rhinos are back in North Luangwa National Park, Zambia. The first 5 animals of a planned founder population of 20 were introduced into a central fenced sanctuary in the park in May 2003 as planned (Kampamba 2003). The reintroduction was a combined effort by the Zambia Wildlife Authority supported by the Frankfurt Zoological Society, and South Africa National Parks, with support from the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation (RPRC) and other sponsors.

Two male and three female black rhinos from Kruger National Park and Marakele National Park in South Africa spent the first few weeks after arrival in bomas where they were fitted with radio transmitters, introduced to local browse, and inoculated against trypanosomiasis. They were then released into the 55-km<sup>2</sup> sanctuary. Initial post-release monitoring, conducted from the first day after their release, was predominantly in the form of aerial radiotracking. Data are being entered into the WildB database.

All the animals are doing well, and none have attempted to break out of the sanctuary. The sanctuary is surrounded by a simple, low-cost 4-strand electric fence, which allows relatively free movement of other animals to take place and has proved effective in con-

taining the black rhinos to this central area.

The Zambia Wildlife Authority has provided an additional 30 wildlife police officers to bolster the existing law enforcement force in North Luangwa. Officers who have been attached to a special rhino protection team have received specialized training and are deployed around the sanctuary at all times. The ranger in charge of this team attended the AfrSG training-of-trainers course in rhino monitoring held at Pilanesberg National Park, South Africa, in July 2003 and jointly funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Fund and SADC RPRC.

Now that the first phase of the reintroduction has been successful, the next challenge facing this project is to find the additional 15 animals needed to bring the founding population number up to the planned 20 in the near future.

## Reference

Kampamba, G.H. 2003. Black rhinos reintroduced to North Luangwa National Park, Zambia. *Pachyderm* 34:94–95.

## The Black Rhino Range Expansion Project begins

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The WWF/Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife Black Rhino Range Expansion Project, which aims to increase numbers of Critically Endangered animals by increasing the land available for their conservation, began in July this year in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. If successful, the project will help reduce pressure on existing

reserves in the province and provide new territory in which the endangered animals can breed and multiply quickly.

First, expressions of interest from potential partners were called for. Potential partners don't need to have been traditionally involved with conservation,

and they can include communities and private and corporate landowners. They must hold suitable habitat within the historic range of the black rhino. The site chosen will ideally be at least 20,000 hectares with a carrying capacity of 50 to 100 black rhinos. To meet the size requirement, fences might have to be dropped between neighbouring landholders.

The project is looking initially for partners within KwaZulu-Natal, although the potential exists to look further afield at a later date. Over 20 individual property owners and one traditional authority within KwaZulu-Natal have responded, and expressions of interest have also come from outside the province. All the properties will be visited and assessed by WWF project leader Dr Jacques Flamand, who was a wildlife veterinarian with the then Natal Parks Board (now Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife) for many years and has extensive experience with rhinos around the world.

As well as size of the area, other criteria to be taken into consideration include current poaching levels, which must be low, adequate fencing, links to existing black rhino areas and the potential to offer economic benefit to local communities.

'It has been really encouraging to see the level of interest from landholders', says Dr Flamand. 'Establishing partnerships between landholders with a strong tradition of independence will be a challenge, yet I'm hopeful that the opportunity to be part of a significant conservation story, with such a magnificent animal, will help overcome the obstacles. As well as helping black rhinos, the project is an opportunity to get land under more rational conservation, as smaller pieces of land can be merged into larger, more ecologically sensible units.'

Once Dr Flamand has assessed all the sites and identified which appear to be the most suitable for the initial phase of the project, specialist ecologists will conduct further ecological assessment. The final decision will rest with the board of Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife. Then the serious work of thrashing out a business and partnership model will be tackled. It is hoped that this model will be useful enough to be replicated for future partnerships.

When the partnerships have been formalized, founder populations of about 20 black rhinos will be released simultaneously, as experience has shown that releasing relatively large groups at the same time is optimal for rapid population growth. Larger founder groups of individuals not closely related also mean that less manipulative management of the population is necessary later on.

The project's proposed model is that Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife will make black rhino and management guidelines available in exchange for suitable land and the provision of security. Landowners will be custodians of the initial founder population, which will remain the property of Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife. However, half of the progeny will be owned by the landowners and half by Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife.

'It should be a win-win scenario for everyone,' said Dr Flamand. 'In their tradition of conservation excellence, Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife has made a decision that is in the best interests of black rhino.'

The Black Rhino Range Expansion Project is being funded and run by WWF in conjunction with the Conservation Partnerships and Projects branch of Ezemvelo-KZN Wildlife. 'The focus of our branch is the power of partnerships,' says branch head Derek Potter. 'This project is a partnership between an NGO, a formal conservation organization and private enterprise with the objective of being beneficial to all.'

The investor's golden principle of compound growth lies behind the project's intention to increase the growth rate of the black rhino population, explains Dr Richard Emslie of the African Rhino Specialist Group.

As is the case with money and investments, seemingly small differences in growth rate of the black rhino metapopulation have a significant impact over time. 'If we start with 1000 black rhinos, then the time to reach a goal of 2000 will be 70 years at 1% growth, 15 years at 5% and only 9 years at 9%.'

Security of existing and new black rhino populations will always be a top priority, and a major component of the project is the continuation of WWF funding in this area. But focusing exclusively on keeping existing animals safe at the expense of growth 'is like keeping your money under the bed in case you get robbed on the way to the bank,' says Dr Emslie. 'What on the surface might seem a safe, low-risk strategy could be anything but. As with money or your share portfolio, it is far more prudent to invest in real growth. Ten years down the line the key question should be: "How many rhinos are there?" not "How many rhinos have been poached?"'

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