

Update on WWF/Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Black Rhino Range Expansion Project

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Fifteen black rhinos were released onto Mun-ya-Wana Game Reserve in northern KwaZulu-Natal this month in the first phase of the WWF/Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Black Rhino Range Expansion Project.

The project aims to increase numbers of the critically endangered black rhinos by increasing the land available for their conservation, thus reducing pressure on existing reserves and providing new territory

Mike Reid, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife



Small steps for a black rhino; a giant leap for black rhino conservation in KwaZulu-Natal. The first black rhino of the founder population of 15 runs out on to Mun-ya-Wana Game Reserve, with members of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife's elite game capture team looking on.



The animal turned, stopped, then briefly attacked the door of the crate before running away into the bush.

in which they can breed up quickly. This is being done by forming partnerships with landowners within the historic range of the black rhino but outside formal protected areas. Mun-ya-Wana Game Reserve consists of almost 20,000 hectares of barrier-free habitat, the result of internal fences having been dropped between Conservation Corporation Africa's Phinda Reserve and three of its neighbours (Zuka, Bumbeni and Phumalanga).

'We're thrilled to have found a large new area for black rhinos, which have been bumping up against the edges of the formal protected areas of the province,' says WWF's project leader Dr Jacques Flamand. 'This is a historic partnership between the state and private sectors in KwaZulu-Natal, which sets the tone for future cooperation.'

The animals on Mun-ya-Wana Game Reserve form the core of what is hoped will become a significant new black rhino population.

'The releases went better than we could have hoped,' said Dr Flamand. 'There is always the risk

that further down the line there might still be conflict between some of the animals, but so far we have been delighted with how they have settled.'

Because of the feisty nature of black rhinos, releasing them onto new land always carries risk so efforts were made to reduce the likelihood of conflict between them. All of the animals were released during a three-day period, ensuring that they were all newcomers simultaneously. Animals in neighbouring bomas were released at neighbouring sites in the field. Dung from each animal was spread around its allotted release site to make it feel more familiar in the hopes that it would settle more quickly. The largest and most dangerous bulls were sited at extreme ends of the reserve in the hope of minimizing aggressive contacts.

Each animal had a radio transmitter implanted in its horn to allow intensive monitoring. This helps understand the existing population and will also provide invaluable information for the release of the next founder population.

Transfer of Swaziland's southern white rhino from CITES Appendix I to Appendix II

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The Kingdom of Swaziland's Big Game Parks not only subscribe to the sustainable use of their renewable natural resources but indeed depend upon it. The kingdom's wildlife depends on the revenues its parks generate for its survival. The Big Game Parks, which manage all of Swaziland's black and white rhinos, have had to become self-sustaining without tax support, and miraculously we have achieved this. This has been possible only because of dedicated staff and the unfailing moral support of the head of state.

The rhino reproduction strategy is exactly in line with the strategy developed by the SADC Rhino Management Group (RMG) and endorsed by IUCN's Af-

rican Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG). Swaziland is committed to promoting maximum reproduction of the species to increase its rhino numbers as rapidly as possible.

Swaziland believes a usable surplus of rhinos will encourage increased investment in propagating the species. It will encourage land owners to open additional range, which would be good news for rhino conservation. The South African experience is a supporting example. A direct consequence of such a scenario would be to expand the tourism potential, thus providing job opportunities.