



Media Release

Embargo: Immediate

UK-based conservation organisation helps world's rarest rhinos travel back to Africa

Four of the world's last known remaining eight northern white rhinos will be relocated from captivity back to the wild on Sunday 20th December, thanks to the collaborative efforts of a consortium of conservation organisations, including leading global conservation organisation Fauna & Flora International who have secured over 80% of the total funding raised to make the project happen.

"Northern white rhinos are the world's rarest large mammal" said Dr Rob Brett Africa Regional Director at Fauna & Flora International, and member of the IUCN African Rhino Specialist group.

"They are listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species and are thought to be extinct in the wild. Moving them now is a last bid effort to save them and their gene pool from total extinction."

The rhinos will be moved from Dvůr Králové Zoo in the Czech Republic to the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia, Kenya as part of what is being called the 'Last Chance to Survive' project, supported by Fauna & Flora International, one of the partners in the initiative.

"The Ol Pejeta Conservancy is immensely proud to have received the endorsement of the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group in hosting these animals, giving them a chance to breed at the 11th hour," said Richard Vigne, Chief Executive Officer, Ol Pejeta Conservancy.

"If we are successful, the preservation of their unique locally adapted genetic traits may allow their natural range to be re-stocked in the coming years." Mr Vigne said.

Conservationists believe that by providing the four rhinos with a natural habitat and secure African setting will significantly increase their chances of breeding successfully. To date, captive breeding of northern white rhino in zoos has had limited success, with breeding only occurring at Dvůr Králové Zoo. The last calf was born in 2000.

The long-term aim of the translocation is to establish a viable breeding group of locally adapted white rhinos for reintroduction back into secure areas of their original range in eastern Africa. The time frame of such a reintroduction could well be in the region of twenty years or more.

"Together with our partners, we plan to give the remaining individuals with breeding potential their last chance of normal and regular reproduction in a secure location in the wild," said Dana Holečková, Director of Dvůr Králové Zoo.

“The cause for the move is to induce normal social and territorial behaviour that is essential for the rhinos to breed routinely.”

The reintroduction initiative is being carried out by a partnership of conservation organisations, including Fauna & Flora International, the Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Dvůr Králové Zoo, the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Back to Africa, and the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Rob Brett of Fauna & Flora International will be on the ground in Kenya as the rhinos arrive.

The rhinos will be accompanied on their journey by experts, including their keeper Jan Zdarek and veterinarian Dr Jiri Vahala, from Dvůr Králové Zoo, rhino veterinarian Dr Pete Morkel, an expert veterinarian dedicated to rhino translocation, and ‘rhino whisperer’ Berry White. The rhinos were translocated by road from Dvůr Králové to Prague airport, from where they were flown to Nairobi and driven out to Ol Pejeta Conservancy.

ENDS

Images, vision, interviews will be available Sunday 20th December and FAQ document is available now at

ftp://217.154.106.215
Username: fauna-flora
Password: w32myf1l35

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Notes to Editors

Go to www.northernwhiterhinolastchance.com to learn more about the initiative.

About the partner organisations

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) (www.fauna-flora.org)

FFI protects threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take account of human needs. Operating in more than 40 countries worldwide – mainly in the developing world – FFI saves species from extinction and habitats from destruction, while improving the livelihoods of local people. Founded in 1903, FFI is the world’s longest established international conservation body and a registered charity. It is headquartered in Cambridge, UK.

Ol Pejeta Conservancy (www.olpejetaconservancy.org)

The Ol Pejeta Conservancy occupies approximately 360 square kilometers of African savannah within the Laikipia District of Kenya and incorporates the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary. Laikipia carries large and growing wildlife populations and is home to almost 50% of Kenya’s black rhino population. The Ol Pejeta Conservancy works to conserve wildlife, provide a sanctuary for great apes and to generate income through wildlife tourism and complementary enterprise for reinvestment in conservation and community development.

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (www.lewa.org)

Founded in 1995, the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy spans 62,000 acres and serves as catalyst for conservation across northern Kenya. Lewa holds over 10% of Kenya’s black rhino population and the world’s single largest population of Grevy’s zebra. Through the protection and management of endangered species, the initiation and support of community conservation and development programmes, and the education of neighbouring areas in the value of wildlife, Lewa has become Kenya’s leading model for wildlife conservation on private land, leading destination for low impact conservation tourism, and leading catalyst for conservation, and its direct benefits for communities, across the region.

Dvur Kralove Zoo (www.zoodvurkralove.cz)

Founded in 1946, Dvur Kralove Zoo has specialised in keeping and breeding African wildlife since 1960s. Dvur Kralove Zoo is the world's most successful breeder of giraffes, a number of antelope and zebra species and African wild dogs, as well as black rhinoceroses. In addition, the zoo is the only zoo where northern white rhinos have been born and raised in captivity successfully. The zoo has returned over 100 Cape buffalos, several dozens of roan antelopes and multiple sable antelopes, scimitar-horned oryxes and addaxes back to the wild. In May 2009, they reintroduced three black rhinos to Mkomazi National Park, Tanzania. With 47 rhinos of three species and four subspecies, Dvur Kralove Zoo follows San Diego Wild Animal Park in terms of numbers of rhinos held and bred in captivity.

Back to Africa (www.backtoafrica.co.za)

As the name of this non-profit conservation organization founded in 1999 suggests, *Back to Africa* relocates rare and endangered African wildlife species from zoological institutions, thus providing a link between conservation programmes in the wild and captive breeders of African animals. *Back to Africa* have been Dvur Kralove Zoo partners since established, with return of sable antelopes into South Africa being their first joint project, followed by reintroduction of roan antelopes to Swaziland and black rhinos to Tanzania.

Kenya Wildlife Service

The Kenya Wildlife Service is a state corporation charged with the responsibility of conserving and managing wildlife resources within and outside protected areas in collaboration with stakeholders. It is our goal to work with others to conserve, protect and sustainably manage wildlife resources. The community wildlife program of KWS in collaboration with others encourages biodiversity conservation by communities living on land essential to wildlife, such as wildlife corridors and dispersal lands outside parks and reserves. The premise is that "if people benefit from wildlife and other natural resources, then they will take care of these resources."