

Tanzania:

Educating local communities in Mkomazi

Over the past 14 years, the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust (GAWPT) has been supporting an outreach programme in the villages surrounding Mkomazi Game Reserve.

Lucy Fitzjohn
George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust

This has been a huge undertaking, encompassing 41 villages in three districts and two administrative regions. Being a small wildlife charity undertaking a wide range of disciplines, our Trustees initially made a decision to focus efforts on educational and water services as a priority, based on the needs of the people and the community conservation policies laid down by the Government of Tanzania. To this end, we have constructed an entire secondary school, refurbished and

upgraded nine other secondary schools and eight primary schools, de-silted dams in rural areas, provided water pumps for villages, refurbished a medical dispensary, supported women's groups, supported the District Councils with municipal works and road works and many other initiatives.

We have many other schools to refurbish, and yet the time has come to run a simultaneous programme for environmental education. Save the Rhino, Chester Zoo, Tusk Trust and GAWPT have joined together to launch and run this programme, which initially involves the major step of purchasing and modifying a bus and the training of an Environmental

Education Officer (EEO). The new bus will act as a mobile classroom, travelling to the schools and community groups in the villages surrounding the game reserve. The EEO will be able to teach the school children and villagers about wildlife conservation, and together with audio-visual presentations and the dissemination of educational materials, we hope this will provide a much-needed link between district authorities, community groups, wildlife and nature conservation.

The bus will also be able to bring selected school children into the Game Reserve and significantly the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary, managed by GAWPT since 1997 and supported by Save the Rhino, where they will be able to experience wildlife in a safe environment, watch Rhino Sanctuary personnel at work and engage in discussion. We hope that these efforts will encourage active involvement in conservation and will help the local communities understand the importance and benefits of Mkomazi Game Reserve's imminent transition to National Park status and the sustained value of black rhino to the nation.

As part of this initiative, Save the Rhino and Chester Zoo took the GAWPT Operations Manager, Elisaria Nnko, up to Laikipia in Kenya to see the Laikipia Wildlife Forum's Environmental Education (EE) programme in operation, with Ephantus Mugendi Mudo at its helm. Elisaria was able

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Above and left: Black rhino in the Mkomazi Sanctuary

Below: "Seriously, there's a rhino behind you"





to gain extremely useful knowledge about this programme and to determine how it has to be adapted to fit the different environmental, tribal, geographical and political characteristics of Mkomazi.

We have also decided to build an education centre with educational materials and audio-visual displays so that the children can spend an informative time in the game

reserve and learn about the Mkomazi project as a whole. The story of Mkomazi over the years is an interesting one, and we feel it would be good for the children to see photos of Mkomazi in the 1960s, when there were over 400 rhino and 10,000 elephants; Mkomazi in the 1980s, when it was a devastated wasteland with no rhino and just 11 elephants; Mkomazi in the 1990s, when rehabilitation was underway, the Rhino Sanctuary was being constructed, and translocation of black rhino from South Africa to Mkomazi was taking place; and finally Mkomazi today, during its transition to National Park status.

The EE programme has huge capacity. It can even expand into local football leagues, running and supporting competitions, under the banner of rhino conservation. The educational materials, as well as the pens, hats and badges that will be awarded to the best essay writers, for example, will all follow this central theme of rhino and wildlife conservation - and we are fortunate enough to have the backing of Save the Rhino and Chester Zoo for these materials.

In February 2007 Save the Rhino, TUSK and GAWPT launched the EE programme with a fantastic party in London to raise

funds for the bus and EEO. And after much consultation with master mechanics throughout Tanzania and Kenya, we have now bought a chassis and a bus body that are already being modified. The bus itself will be named 'Rafiki ya Kifarui' (Friend of the Rhino), brightly painted in local Tinga Tinga style.

So, as always, our sincerest thanks to Save the Rhino for their incredible and far-reaching support, which encompasses the critical day-to-day management of the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary and also the environmental education of the surrounding communities.

Grant

So far, Save the Rhino and Tusk Trust have raised nearly £80,000 for the EE programme in Mkomazi. Chester Zoo has so far given £10,972; Mkomazi Matatu raised approximately £20,500; Capital International gave £7,334. N M Rothschild gave £250; ICAP has given £40,500. The total cost for the first three years of the programme was £120,000, so we still need to raise another £40,000 to complete the campaign. If you'd like to contribute, please email petra@savetherhino.org for details.

Mkomazi Matatu

Zoe Savage
Events Manager

On Thursday 8 February 2007, over 200 people gathered at the Porchester Hall in West London for Mkomazi Matatu, a dinner and dance to raise money for the new Environmental Education programme in the Mkomazi Game Reserve in Tanzania.

Tony Fitzjohn, OBE set the scene with a moving presentation about the importance of the project, what it needs, and why. Schoolchildren from Notting Hill had decorated toy buses, which formed the centrepieces for each table, and were a visual reminder of what the event was all about.

After a delicious three-course dinner, catered for by Party Ingredients, an auction packed full of some spectacular lots - including African safaris, a signed Peter Beard picture, sailing in the Baltic Sea and fishing trips - set the fundraising well on its way. Nana Tsihou and the Supa Hi-life band provided entertainment until the raffle draw when,

much to the envy of the other guests, two lucky people won a safari to the unspoilt outer reaches of Northern Tanzania's best safari destinations (flights included), thanks to the generous support of Nomad Tanzania, Natural High Safaris and Kenya Airways.

The party raised over £20,000 for Mkomazi's Environmental Education programme, with a further £4,500 each for Tusk Trust and Save the Rhino to be spent on projects worldwide.

Thank you

A fantastic night was had by all. Thank you to everyone who supported the event, particularly the Mkomazi Matatu Committee, all those who donated tickets and lots, and raffle prizes, Natural High Safaris and Nomad Tanzania, Tusk Trust, Whitley Neil, Party Ingredients, Chester Zoo, The George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust, Kenya Airways and Elephant.co.uk.

