

# Pioneering the re-introduction of rhino in Uganda

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**O**ur project. Rhino Fund Uganda (RFU) and Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary have had an action-packed few months.

After an EU feasibility study to identify a suitable area for the establishment of a rhino breeding sanctuary was completed, Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary was born.

Preparing the Sanctuary for accommodating rhino was no easy task, but after a year of hard work it was finally ready. In July 2006, Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary took its first delivery of two female and two male Southern white rhino (SWR) from Solio Ranch in Kenya. It was a monumental effort getting them here, with the usual bureaucratic nightmares that one comes to expect at the borders.

In September 2006 we received our second delivery of two more SWR, donated by Disney Animal Kingdom in the USA. All the rhino have adapted well and we are hoping that soon we will be able to introduce more SWR in order to edge closer to our target of 20 animals.

Ziwa can now accommodate a maximum of 39 Southern white rhino and nine Eastern black rhino. The Sanctuary is totally fenced by a 14-strand electric fence quarantine bomas have been built, and rangers have received training.

The re-introduction programme The RFU rhino re-introduction programme for Uganda has three phases:

- Importation of two Southern white rhinos to the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre in Entebbe, for educational and awareness-raising purposes
- Breeding of Eastern black and Southern white rhinoceros in a safe and secure environment
- Release of rhinos into protected areas in their original habitat

The project is now in Phase II of the overall re-introduction plan. It is vital to concentrate efforts on sourcing additional suitable land for the future re-introduction of Eastern black rhino, a species with a higher conservation priority in Africa than the SWR due to its critically endangered status. At the same time preparations to secure additional land within the National Parks of Uganda needs to be put in motion for Phase III of the project.

Also vitally important to the conservation cause is the establishment of the East African Rhino Management Group (EARMG) which will include the majority of former and current rhino range states in East Africa such as Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. The formulation of this group will provide the very important link between all the countries concerned to

facilitate the movement of rhino (black and white) into suitable habitats in former ranges.

RFU has launched a successful education programme based at the Sanctuary, focusing on educating people in the surrounding communities and schools. A survey, reported in *The Horn* (Spring 2006), conducted by RFU in 2005 revealed that only 20% of the interviewed children in schools surrounding Ziwa know what a rhino looks like. RFU thus recognises the need for conservation education and runs successful school outreach programmes throughout the country.

Two school programmes for the upper primary and lower primary have been developed. Onsite programmes have been developed for visiting schools, which present a unique learning opportunity for the younger generation and enhance biodiversity conservation in Uganda.

The future is bright for rhino re-introductions into Uganda, particularly for Eastern black rhinos. However, a few critical components need to be put in place before this can happen. A national rhino management strategy, taking all stakeholders into consideration (National Parks, private sanctuaries and community areas) needs to be developed in collaboration with the EARMG. Areas suitable for rhino, particularly for Eastern black rhino need to be identified and secured. Once this is done and once a team of rhino specialists, managers, rangers and wardens has been identified, Uganda will pioneer the re-introduction of rhino back into their former habitats in East Africa.



Left and bottom:  
White rhino relax at the  
Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary

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