

Cranes & customs: capturing rhinos in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has the third-highest wild population of both black and white rhinos in the world, behind only South Africa and Namibia.

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Our project, based in the Lowveld area of Zimbabwe, aims to increase the national capacity to capture and move rhinos where populations exceed recommended maximum stocking rates. By moving the rhinos, we hope to achieve the highest possible population growth rates - moving rhinos from over-populated areas to places where the population is struggling - as well as ensuring timely reactions to all calls for emergency rhino captures.



The rhino crane truck



Rhino does here!

To move rhinos, we needed two things: a crane and a big truck. In early 2006, we acquired an ex-South African Army truck (SAMIL 50 model, four-wheel drive, six-tonne load capacity) in South Africa. The truck was purchased on behalf of the project by Oakhill Developments S.A. (Pty) Ltd, a company that provides varied logistical support or rhino operations in Zimbabwe (as does Oakhill's sister company in Zimbabwe, Madhatter Mining). This re-manufactured truck is a substantially renovated 1985 model.

We also found a new Fassi F130A crane, capable of lifting a white rhino in a crate (as well as lighter black rhinos) in South Africa, and fitted it to our new truck. Unfortunately, the Zimbabwe Customs authorities refused to allow duty-free importation of the truck and crane because the original duty-free arrangement, under which the truck was to be imported, was deemed by the authorities not to apply to second-hand equipment. It was not possible to convince the authorities that the truck had been rebuilt to an "as new" state.

The process of appealing (twice) against the refusal of a duty rebate certificate considerably delayed the importation of the vehicle to Zimbabwe and gave rise to extra costs of storage and renewal of expired documentation in South Africa. However, all was resolved when we secured an additional grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service to cover the importation duty. The truck was finally imported to Zimbabwe in late 2006. John McTaggart provided valuable logistics support throughout.

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Since being imported into Zimbabwe, our truck has been further modified to suit off-road rhino transport requirements. It is currently parked under cover, awaiting the start of the 2007 rhino capture season in Zimbabwe in May. Once the season starts, the truck will be available for certain rhino capture operations outside Zimbabwe, and Madhatter Mining has also undertaken to construct a white rhino crate to fit the truck, and to assist with long-term provision of spares and maintenance.

Grants

In October 2006 the EAZA Rhino Campaign, supported by Save the Rhino International, donated €19,500 to the Lowveld Rhino Conservancy Project, towards the purchase of a new Fassi lifting crane. £1,000 of this had been donated by the Marjorie Coote Animal Charities Fund. A further £5,000 given by Eckö 18 months ago helped pay for the unexpected addition storage and import costs. Thank you to everyone who supported the project.



The crane can lift over one and a half tonnes