

Company passionate about conservation

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We spread ourselves out under a pod mahogany tree in the cool of the early African morning. A mass of white butterflies danced past through the thin woodland, a million tiny brushstrokes of brightness against the parched grassland and purple haze of the distant hills.

John (Trustee) and I (purse-strings) were with Kes and Fraser Smith (a phrase in parentheses won't do the job), sitting in the middle of the Selous Game Reserve on a warm February Saturday morning, drinking tea and plotting the exciting future of the Selous Rhino Trust. It was one of those perfect moments.

Kes and Fraser between them have spent the best part of the last 22 years protecting black rhino in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A daunting prospect in a dangerous place torn apart by civil war; a wilderness cluttered with lethal poachers. Kes and Fraser need little introduction to readers of *The Horn*. Kes has been a leading rhino scientist for many years and is a pivotal member of the African Rhino Specialist Group. Fraser is a dedicated field conservationist, a trained

warden, whose breadth of experience would be difficult to match anywhere.

And now on this February day, these outstanding people, famous in rhino conservation for their fierce passion and achievements, were sitting with us committing the next stage of their lives to helping save black rhino in the Selous.

This is a well-worn statistic but it's shocking enough to keep repeating: back in the 1970s, 3,000 black rhino roamed the Selous, a 45,000 km tract of African wilderness in Southern Tanzania. In fact the Selous is the second-largest conservation area in the world and a World Heritage Site.

Today, we know there are 19 individuals in the same area, perhaps up to 40. The other 2,981 did not die of natural causes, and nor did 90,000 elephant. And although no rhino have been poached since a determined conservation programme was set up in the late 1990s, poaching in general is still a big issue, is on the increase and the rhinos' status and future remains incredibly fragile.

Kes and Fraser Smith's plan is to focus on protecting the rhino that we know are there, all of which are in a smallish area in the north of the Reserve. This is a sustainable population and young are being



IMAGES: SELOUS RHINO TRUST

born, so it's a question of using very strong and visible anti-poaching methods to give the population a chance to regenerate itself out of the danger zone.

As we write, we are seeking large-scale funding to run the project over the next five years. Nomad Tanzania, Tanzania's most dynamic luxury safari company, has committed to underwriting Kes and Fraser's salaries for the next year, which means that they can keep activities going with the help of the Tanzanian Wildlife Division, and at the same time work to secure the other funds the project needs.

Nomad Tanzania is a company passionate about conservation, with incredible wild camps in some of Tanzania's most remote wilderness areas, including Mahale Mountains, Katavi National Park and of course the Selous. They have actually thrown a lifeline to the project; we can now commit to employing this 'Dream Team'. With donations from Save the Rhino and other donors, we can run our operations over the next year. This gives us time to gear up for a significant fundraising drive to allow us to implement the project over the greater Selous, with benefits not just for rhinos, but also the general security of this vast wilderness and its flora and fauna. Perhaps even the butterflies!

Top right:
Kes and Fraser

Main picture:
The rhino unit at the Kidai
rangers station present
themselves for inspection

