

# Namibia:

## Opel Zoo's grant is put to immediate good use

In January 2006 Opel Zoo, through the EAZA Rhino Campaign 2005-6, awarded €35,000 of the €50,000 it is planning to give in total. The remainder will follow in subsequent years to help pay for rhino translocations in Namibia.

**Cathy Dean**  
Director

**T**he Kunene Region in the north west of Namibia is home to the largest population of black rhinos outside a protected area in the world. The successful recovery from the brink of extinction in the 1960s brings its own problems: overcrowding has seen the annual growth rate drop to around 2.5%, well below the IUCN / SSC recommendation of at least 5%. A major translocation programme was needed, which would move rhino into new areas, reducing pressure on the source area, and creating founder populations in communal area conservancies, in turn facilitating the development of eco tourism opportunities.

This was planned as a three-step operation: firstly, moving two surplus males immediately; secondly, fitting 13 animals with horn transmitters in order to monitor them from the ground and air for 12 months, before moving them to a new location in 2007; and thirdly, a further nine animals were marked and fitted with transmitters in the Poacher's camp and Springbok river area of the Torra Conservancy, in order to assist the community to get controlled and sustained rhinoceros tracking with paying clients.



*A lifting crane is used to move one of the crates on to the ground*

A range of new equipment was required to do this: the reconditioning of a truck and Landrover, which would become a fully equipped vet's mobile laboratory; building / adapting two trailers; and building three special rhino crates. This was paid for with the grant from Opel Zoo, together with additional funding from MET, the Game Products Trust Fund and other donors.

### The daily routine was as follows:

- Ground team leaves camp at Palmwag between 05h30 and 06h00 to a central locality within the area demarcated for the capture. As soon as light conditions allow, experienced trackers from SRT follow fresh tracks.
- The spotter aircraft manned by the pilot and one or two experienced trackers gets airborne and starts to search the designated area.
- The helicopter with the pilot, veterinarian and two experienced trackers on board searches the capture area in close liaison with ground tracking teams and spotter aircraft. As soon as a rhinoceros is spotted, the spotter aircraft guides the helicopter and ground team to the locality.
- Once the rhinoceros is darted, the spotter aircraft guides the ground team in over the shortest or best route. Where it is impossible for the ground team to reach the immobilised animal, core members of the ground team were flown in by helicopter with equipment to process the animal in the shortest time possible.
- Every evening a full debriefing session is held concerning the activities that took place that day, followed by planning for the next day.

Between four and five animals were processed per day (except on day one and day two when the two animals caught were translocated from the upper



*Coaxing rhinos into crates is a delicate operation*

Barab-Aub to the Klip River in Khoad, Hôas Conservancy).

To quote Pierre du Preez, Chief Conservation Scientist at MET, the operation was "a huge success." Pierre added: "The specially developed and designed capture and translocation equipment ensured that the operation could be conducted without the use of any heavy trucks and equipment. The duration to fully process one animal during 2005 was on average 1 3/4 hours, while in 2006 this came down to only 55 minutes, even with more procedures carried out. The specially designed and custom-built capture equipment proved its value under some of the most extreme conditions. The important result of the field trials is that modifications needed will now be done before the rest of the equipment is manufactured. This system will furthermore prove its value as a quick reaction unit."



*The fully equipped vet's mobile laboratory*

### €15,000

The remaining €15,000 of Opel Zoo's grant will be used to support further translocations; vets' fees, horn transmitters, drugs and vehicle and aircraft fuel.