

Normally, when there is blood on the ground it means trouble...

Four Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) rhino unit were on patrol last month in the Chyulu Hills when they were stopped in their tracks. On the ground was fresh rhino spoor and on top of them was a spattering of blood. Thinking the worst, they continued and found more blood, then more. They moved on and trepidation turned into delight. Instead of finding a carcass, they found afterbirth and the tiny tracks of a rhino calf taking its first few steps. This birth brings the total to three births in the last two and half years.

Richard Bonham, Chyulu Hills rhino project



ALL IMAGES: DAVE STIRLING

We are still struggling to get good sightings and positive identifications of rhino, as they maintain their survival strategy of keeping to thickets in the day and only venture out at night to find water. So our contact with them is still limited to finding tracks, dung and occasionally an angry snort which sends the rangers running for the nearest thorny tree!

With luck though, this is about to change. With the help of Save the Rhino and the International Rhino Foundation, the US Fish and Wildlife Service funded a tractor and water bowser, which has now arrived. As I write, we have just finished the construction of one water point and are beginning the second. This is a huge step forward for two reasons: it will mean that the rhinos no longer have to leave their relatively safe thickets and lava flows to find water, and also will give us the opportunity to monitor them much more easily, establishing who is who and their sex ratios.

Another piece of good news is that Chyulu Hills National Park has just had 30 new rangers deployed, of which four have been allocated to the rhino unit. This brings the rhino strength of the KWS Rhino unit to 14 men, who are further supported by 10 Mbirikani community scouts, so we now have a combined force of 24 men dedicated to rhino security.

The Save the Rhino and Chester Zoo-funded Land Rover is the only reliable vehicle supporting operations and is doing sterling work. Since the arrival of the tractor and water bowser, its workload has diminished substantially, as it means that it no longer has to do the donkey work of hauling drums of water to keep the ranger posts going and can get on with supporting patrols.

So all is well on the Chyulu rhino front and let's keep our fingers crossed that it won't take long for the rhino to find their new water source.



Chester Zoo has just awarded the fantastic amount of £9,880 towards the Chyulu Hills rhino project, which will pay for patrol vehicle fuel costs, bowser costs, and the construction of portacabins at each of the waterholes, to facilitate overnight monitoring and anti-poaching patrols. We are very grateful indeed for the continued support.