

Namibia:

Historic move for Namibia's rhinos?

Namibia's black rhino population continues to grow thanks to the investment made by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). The Kunene population of black rhino recovered from fewer than 50 animals in the 1980s to over 140 now.

Michael Hearn, Director of Research, Save the Rhino Trust

The success of this programme has allowed the Namibian government to consider options for rhino being reintroduced from the current range into areas of Kunene where they were poached out in the 1960s and 70s.

Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) has been researching the feasibility of this idea with the support of SRI. Information collected by SRT's tracking teams is vital both for immediate security needs and the long-term research into levels of population growth. The final decision on whether this historic move will occur will be made by the MET, based on SRT's research findings exploring:

- community attitudes towards allocating space for rhinos and sharing resources with rhinos
- the suitability of the habitat, in the form of access to food and water
- the economic potential of tourism at potential reintroduction sites to assist with monitoring costs and creating the appropriate incentives to guarantee ongoing support from the neighbouring communities.

Should the options presented by SRT's research section be feasible, the MET will undertake the translocation of rhino into a new site during the capture season in March 2005. Prior to this, detailed discussions will be held with community leaders on how communities will support the security needs beyond the completion of the reintroduction programme. Rainfall and the availability of funds will also play a critical role on whether the reintroduction can proceed. Should the rains fail between December - March, the move will not even be considered. Conditions in Kunene also require helicopter support to ensure any move that might take place is safe. This requires further funds be sourced to cover these costs in March 2005. Should this programme go ahead, it will be the first time black rhino will have ever been reintroduced into their former range in the Kunene Region.

Other news from the project: the MSc training for SRT's director of fieldwork, Simson Uri-Khob, is almost complete. Simson has been studying conservation biology at the University of Kent's Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology. On

8 September he will be return to Namibia with Michael Sibalatani (the Chief Warden of Etosha National Park). Both students have worked hard and we wish them luck with their final dissertations, which have just been submitted. Their training was supported thanks to the British Government's Darwin Initiative Programme and will build a solid foundation for the continued success of Namibia black rhino conservation programme.

Save the Rhino made a grant of £19,725 in January 2004, the third and final installment of a three-year commitment to SRT.

SAVE THE RHINO TRUST



Desert Trek Namibia: 4-13 June 2005

Save the Rhino has come with a truly unique overseas challenge in Desert Trek Namibia and the 20 available places are filling fast. Here's why:

Location

Uniab River valley in Damaraland, home to black rhino, elephant, lion and a wealth of other game, uniquely adapted to survive in the world's most ancient desert.

A commercial trek in this valley hasn't been done before and access to the valley is restricted to minimise environmental impact...you trek through the Uniab River valley on this trip!

Guides

Leading the trek will be Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), an indigenous Namibian NGO, which has overseen a 200% increase in rhino numbers since beginning their research and monitoring work in 1980s. You'll spend time tracking wildlife with SRT staff and gain an amazing insight to their work.

Skeletons and Camels

The final leg of the trek is through the world-renowned Skeleton Coast National Park, where trekking is usually prohibited. However, the restriction on support vehicles remains and as such the final two days of the trek will be supported by a more traditional mode of desert transport: camels.

For more information ring +44 (0)20 7357 7474; email events@savetherhino.org or visit http://www.savetherhino.org/overseas_challenges