



And there it was; a beautiful mature 20-25 year old bull rhino. It was an unbelievable moment."

The sighting was made that much more valuable because during the same flight Friedrich found signs of a poachers' camp. "The poachers had laid meat snare lines across busy game tracks, no more than 4km from where I later saw the rhino. I GPS marked this and the next day went back on foot to cut the lines and remove the wires."

It may give some impression of the size of the areas we are safeguarding and surveying in the Selous, to consider that in the five days the team spent foot patrolling the new wet season area they found no signs of poaching. But within just a few minutes of aerial surveying they'd found and marked the poachers'



Plane spotting: Rhinos in the Selous

In Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve, nature was very much out of kilter in March and April this year. The rains failed and what should normally have been a soggy, green time of year when the lakes overflow and roads are impassable became a hot and dusty continuation of the dry season.

Louisa Muir,
Project Administrator
Selous Rhino Project



At the Selous Black Rhino Protection Project, this was more of a blessing than it must have been for the thirsty, hungry wildlife waiting for that first drop of life-giving water, because the dry weather gave us the opportunity to carry out rhino foot patrols for the first time in areas which are normally inaccessible at that time of year.

Each time I fly into the Selous, I keep my eyes peeled on the ground as it disappears under me, desperate to become the first person to spot a Selous rhino from the air. Well, it will never be me, because during this wet-season aerial survey in April, Friedrich Alpers, the Selous Rhino Trust's Project Coordinator, became that first person!

"My first instinct when I spotted this big mammal near some trees below me was that it was a hippo or buffalo," explains Friedrich. "Something was different about its shape, but it was difficult to see from the moving plane. We banked round quickly and flew back over for a better look.

camp. It's not that poachers weren't there while the patrol was out on foot; it's just that trying to find them in thick bush in isolated areas is like finding a needle in a haystack. From the air, they shine like beacons.

Aerial surveying is a critical support to the survey since it allows the ground patrol team to work hand in hand with the aerial team. The plane can cover very large areas very quickly, pinpointing poaching activities and identifying areas of preferred rhino habitat. With this support and GPS mapping, the ground team can really focus their attention directly into relevant areas, maximising efforts and cost-efficiency.

Our aim now is to expand the Selous Rhino Project's wet season survey programme for this forthcoming rainy season, setting up satellite camps that will allow us to undertake detailed surveying and anti-poaching controls further afield, and for longer periods of time. We will keep The Horn updated on our progress.