

The Selous' new generation

Through the work of the Selous Rhino Trust and the rhino team, rhino numbers in the Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania, are starting the slow but crucial process of regeneration, following the years of uncontrolled poaching that destroyed 98% of the population. At the end of last year, during a routine rhino monitoring exercise, the Selous Rhino team - whose working lives are dedicated to protecting these rare creatures - found the tiny set of footprints of a rhino calf, no more than five months old, dwarfed by the giant steps of its mother.

Exciting news in itself, but what made the finding so much more significant is that the mother Mary is well known to the rhino team. They first identified her over four years ago when she was nursing another young calf, Audax, named after the ranger who identified the tracks. Before Audax, no rhino between the age of one and 15 had been found in the rhino project area, a telling indication that the rhino population had been seriously traumatised, and that what few animals there were left had dispersed and were not reproducing.

"After all the work we have done in the past four years - anti poaching, rhino monitoring and identification, and training - there is nothing more satisfying for the whole team than seeing this tiny population start to grow again," said Friedrich Alpers, the Selous Rhino Trust

Project Coordinator. "It could have been such a different story."

It is no small task, protecting rhino in an area the size of the Selous, but the statistics paint their own picture. By the end of 2003, the Selous rhino team had covered more than 12,000 square kilometres of the Reserve in anti-poaching and rhino population survey efforts, putting in a total of 160,000 patrol hours. The result? Well, just taking results from last year: 13 fish-poacher camps were found and destroyed, a second baby rhino was born, and another year successfully concluded with no rhino poaching - continuing the record of zero incidence of rhino poaching since the project started.

The Selous' rhino are still vulnerable but, with the expansion of the Trust's work into larger areas of the Reserve over the next two years, combined with an increasingly dynamic population, the future for the Reserve's latest newborn, 'Happy', is brighter than it has been in decades.

We hope that in the next issue of "The Horn" we will be able to report on the re-launch of the Selous monitoring and anti-poaching plane, which is currently being repaired and upgraded in South Africa, generously funded by Save the Rhino supporters.

Louisa Muir, Project Administrator Selous Rhino Trust

A date for your diary

Chyulus-Selous (chew-loo-sa-loo)

The Tabernacle

Friday 12 November 2004

Tickets: £50

Music and dancing