

## How many rhinos?

Tswalu Kalahari Reserve is an 108,000 hectare wilderness lying on the edge of the Kalahari Desert in South Africa.

Jo Shaw

Tswalu, meaning "new beginning" in Setswana, was the vision of Stephen Boler, an Englishman who was dedicated to returning the Kalahari to its natural state by purchasing cattle farms, tearing down fences and reintroducing wildlife. Upon his untimely death in 1998, Tswalu was purchased by the Oppenheimer family with the aim of continuing his dream.

In 1995 eight black rhinos were translocated to Tswalu from Etosha National Park in Namibia. They have adapted well to the Kalahari environment and produced 14 calves. Today the black rhino population on Tswalu stands at 17, with three calves expected during 2004.

In 2003, I began a PhD project at Tswalu looking at the habitat capacity of the reserve for black rhinos. To ensure the ongoing survival of these rhinos, it is essential that as many calves are born as possible and this requires detailed understanding of the capacity of vegetation in different areas to support black rhinos.

Tswalu is the ideal location for this work as the sand clearly retains each footprint, making it possible to follow exactly the movements of rhinos over the previous hours and even days. Black rhinos are browsers, feeding mainly on trees and shrubs and using their prehensile upper lips to manipulate branches into their mouths. The distinctive diagonal cut left on the branch makes it possible to backtrack along rhino tracks recording their exact feeding choices.

JO SHAW



This research will record black rhino foraging behaviour, home range use and movement patterns, to provide details of the optimum number of rhinos that can be supported at Tswalu and allow the development of a habitat-capacity model for black rhino, for use in management to aid their recovery throughout Africa.

Save the Rhino has made a grant of £2,550 over three years to help cover Jo Shaw's field research expenses.

## Another day at the office

Last autumn's issue of *The Horn* reported that Benson Okita Ouma was about to begin an MSc in Conservation Biology at DICE at the University of Kent, Canterbury. Benson's MSc is focusing on how best to use a special database, the Kenya Black Rhino Management System (KBRMS), as a reporting and analytical tool.

Meanwhile, Rajan Amin of the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has been conducting a series of training courses in the use of the database. These training sessions take place in the field, where the rangers are based. Rangers learn how to identify individual rhinos, use GPSs and how to record data collected on patrol.

Cathy Dean, Director

RAJ AMIN

