

# Tanzania:

## Come fly with me...!

For those of you who haven't had the chance to visit the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania, it's the second-largest wildlife reserve in the world and has been recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. It has spectacularly beautiful scenery and amazing variety and numbers of wildlife, especially when seen from the air.

### Fraser and Kes Smith

Technical and Scientific Advisors  
Selous Rhino Trust

**F**raser first started work part-time in the Selous in 2005, but there has only been funds for the project to operate full-time since November 2006. Kes works partly there and partly from a back-up base in Kenya. We both came from 22 years in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a very challenging rhino

and ecosystem conservation programme initiated by Kes that was extremely successful for most of that time, despite two civil wars in Congo and one ongoing one across the border in Sudan.

Our work in Selous is for the Selous Rhino Trust and involves the conservation of the black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*) and the ecosystem of which they are part in the Selous. You cannot conserve rhinos in isolation. They live with many other species of animals and plants. That is what is

meant by an ecosystem. Other species like elephants are far more numerous and poachers come across them more easily. Finding poaching of other animals is an indication of where and how to find the poachers and stop them before they kill rhinos, but also the trained rangers and the vehicles and equipment provided by the project help them to protect the elephants and other species as well as the rhinos. The area north of the wide, sandy Rufiji River which runs through the top third of the Reserve is for photographic tourism only and holds an estimated 19 of the rhinos.

The southern sector of the Reserve is huge, wild and consists mainly of hunting blocks. Initial surveys have indicated a minimum of 25 rhinos in the areas visited and there are undoubtedly more. These are the South Central subspecies (*Diceros bicornis minor*). We need to do more intensive surveys of the area and, with the Wildlife Dept and concessionaires work out the most effective ways of assuring their conservation.

In the 1970s there were over 3,000 black rhinos in the Selous. The massive poaching that swept through Africa then almost wiped them out; in fact they were believed extinct. When Richard Bonham suddenly found rhino tracks, he began with others to raise the money for the Selous Rhino Project. Black rhinos live in thick bush and are very difficult to see, especially when there are so few of them, so most of the earlier work was

IMAGES: SELOUS RHINO TRUST



Above:  
Scouts check co-ordinates  
before sending off the  
Super Cub

Left:  
The Super Cub in action

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On 12 and 13 December Fraser had the first sightings of rhinos from the air, after 77 hours of flying since February 2006!  
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*Selous rhinos are elusive*

based on tracks and dung and signs of browse. But with those minimum numbers, the Selous rhinos represent over 70% of the rhinos in Tanzania and is one of the largest totally natural populations. The African Rhino Specialist Group rates the population in the Selous as "Continently Important" - making it vital for the recuperation of the species.

Since we started work here, one of the biggest changes and advantages has been the use of our Super Cub aircraft. It has added a whole new dimension to both the monitoring and protection. As both the flying and ground work of the rangers have shown that there is an increase in poaching, we have been focusing on developing effective protection and monitoring of the rhino in the northern sector of the Reserve. Use of the aircraft has significantly increased the detection rate and range of poaching signs and helped guide rangers in to combat the poaching. Once the improved protection and monitoring is up and running - and the capacity of Tanzanian Wildlife Division's staff has been increased through strengthening infrastructure and training

in law enforcement - we can start surveying the southern sector too.

The aerial monitoring so far has had the most exciting results: On 12 and 13 December Fraser had the first sightings of rhinos from the air, after 77 hours of flying since February 2006! They were a group of two and a group of three rhino in the Nyakadeka region. Since then we have had seven actual rhino sightings involving 15 rhino - six of which were from the air. Dawn departures have proved most valuable in trying to spot rhinos whilst they are still active and before they hide up in thick bush.

Sadly the aerial surveying has also shown the extent of illegal poaching activities in the Selous, to which we've been able to react swiftly via air-to-ground operations. Early morning and late evening are the best times to spot smoke from poachers' camp fires, whereas carcass detection is easier done later in the day, once vultures are circling & feeding. Illegal fishing and elephant poacher's camps are the most common sights of commercial wildlife crime, and sadly it seems that poaching in the Selous is on the increase. In January and February 40 hours were flown over Selous - six active fish poaching camps were found, some of which were followed up on the ground and rangers recovered seven canoes, five paddles, seven nets,

a variety of cooking utensils plus hundreds of fish. Elephant carcasses have also been found near fishing camps indicating that such fishermen sometimes kill elephants and other wildlife when they are in the areas. Other aerial observations included two old meat poaching camps, two recent meat poaching camps and one occupied camp that when followed up by rangers, led to the recovery of 14 elephant tusks, seven elephant tails, a spring balance, 3x458 calibre bullets, 35 used bullet shells, 135kg of maize meal, cashew nuts, 60 fish, a fish net and other camping utensils. This incident, together with another elephant shot in the Msine area for its tusks, is evidence of the commercial poaching being carried out. Of real concern is that the location of some of the poaching camps, suggesting that the poachers may be trying to locate rhino and settle for elephant rather than returning empty-handed - we need to stay aware.

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Selous Game Reserve from the air

### Grant

In May 2007 we sent over £2,100 for the Selous Rhino Trust to pay for general operating costs. We are very grateful to Mr and Mr Robin Cooke-Hurle, the Swire Charitable Trust and anonymous individuals for enabling us to make this grant.