

# Zimbabwe:

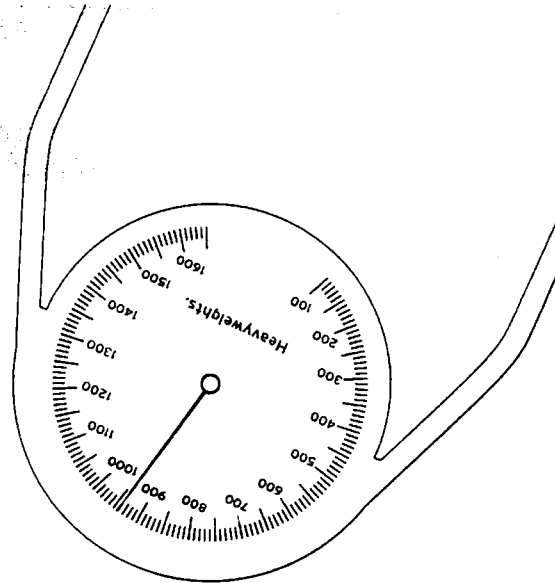
## Teaching a young rhino new tricks

I am not talking about a circus act with rhino jumping through hoops and balancing on high wires, while juggling balls of fire! I am talking instead, about the need to intensively manage and monitor a crash of baby rhinos as part of an introduction programme in a semi-captive environment.

**Duncan Purchase**  
Director: Zambezi Society

**M**y first "hands on" encounter with rhinos came when I worked on a reintroduction programme in Matusadona in 1999-2001. Rhino calves at an intensive breeding facility were separated from their mothers at about six months old. The baby rhino were supplementary fed on a rich milk formula, and without their babies, the mothers bred at a quicker rate. At about 12 months old, the baby rhinos were then transported to Matusadona National Park, where they were slowly reintroduced into the wild through an intensive management programme. This is where the training was necessary for their daily routine.

The maximum number of rhino that we had in the programme at any one time was six. The combined weight of all six was five thousand kilos. You can see why a sense of discipline was needed for us to perform our daily routine of weighing each rhino and fortnightly

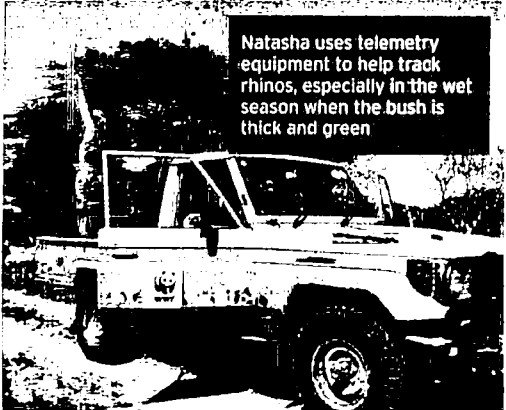


routine of taking various measurements. Without some training, we would never have managed to manage this crash of baby heavyweights.

When the rhino calves arrived, they were still on milk four times a day, which we would make up in a two-litre bottle and use a milk teat designed for domestic cow calves. This was the first training exercise, in which the baby rhino would get used to its handlers and its new environment. This new environment comprised of a boma, or enclosure - all six were connected together - made from wooden poles, a concrete



LOWVELD RHINO TRUST



Natasha uses telemetry equipment to help track rhinos, especially in the wet season when the bush is thick and green

CATHY DEAN

## Great expectations

At times, and particularly now, in Zimbabwe, it feels as if we are continually fire-fighting, barely able to wipe our faces after one poaching incident before we tackle the next emergency. If we are to have any real chance of long-lasting success for our rhino conservation programme however, we need to be able to look over the immediate obstacles towards a vision of how things might be in the future.

**Raoul du Toit**  
Project Executant  
Lowveld Rhino Trust

**W**hile the socio-economic pressures are particularly acute in Zimbabwe at present, they also exist in neighbouring countries since these pressures arise primarily from poverty and competition for land and other rural resources, and will be exacerbated by global climate change since this will cause increasing aridity in the Lowveld region.

The most promising approach to take in promoting wildlife-based land reform in the Lowveld, and reducing the short-term exploitation of the region's biodiversity, is to: identify and quantify the wildlife assets; develop businesslike and equitable measures by which these assets are related to share holdings; and to use rights, dividends and co-management obligations for the relevant stakeholders, including community groups.



Duncan measuring the back horn of Kiplings, who is fed cubes while Duncan works

A rhino calf walking onto the cattle scale, with mouth open expecting to be fed a cube

# Grant

water trough and half a tractor tyre used for placing feeding cubes. The rhinos would be kept in the enclosures overnight and then, after the morning routine, would be allowed out to forage during the day.

The morning routine started with the first enclosure door being opened and the rhino being encouraged to walk out and into a cattle-weighting scale. This training was done initially using the milk bottle and then with special food cubes. Once on the scale we would take their weight, we'd then stop poking cubes into their mouths from the gap at the front, and they would reverse back out of the scale. Then they'd linger to wait for their mates to follow the same routine. By the time we got to the sixth rhino, there were five other rhinos getting a little restless and impatient to start foraging in the bush. Discipline and training were very important at this point as these 'babies' could get quite boisterous.

Every two weeks we also took various measurements to plot and monitor their growth. We measured their body length, girth, height, horn length, head length, tail length and foot print. This was all done while the rhino was standing in the cattle scale. All this intensive management was to monitor the progress and health of the animal in order to respond to

any medical issue as soon as possible. Once they had gone through their morning routine they were free to forage as a group under the watchful eye of a handler and ranger.

It was not long before each rhino knew the routine: they would walk out of their enclosure and straight into the scale. In the evening when they returned to their enclosures, all six would walk down the road and go straight to their own bomas, where they knew there were more cubes waiting for them before they retired to bed. Bribery perhaps, but it served as a useful training tool.

For rhinos to be the long-term focus of this approach, fundraising and other promotional activities should be aligned with the local socio-economic realities that will ultimately determine the fate of rhinos in Africa. To fit rhinos into the land-use equation, some questions have to be addressed:

- Whose assets are the rhinos?
- What value do rhinos have in Africa?
- Why should they be conserved?
- If it is the economic relevance of rhinos to communities rather than crude law-enforcement or international conservation appeals that will keep them alive in wild populations, then how can this economic linkage be developed?

Apart from ecotourism value (currently deflated in Zimbabwe) and safari hunting value (not realised in Zimbabwe at present because rhinos are not legally hunted), the major economic value that can be developed for rhinos is the global asset value of the species. To express this in tangible terms, a link must be made between the wealthier, western communities who perceive the existence

value of rhinos and can afford to contribute to that, and the stakeholder groups within the Lowveld who are making the land-use changes that impact on the opportunities for rhino populations to expand. This link can be reinforced by the willingness of the western communities to facilitate Africa's rural development.

Incentives-based rhino conservation in the Lowveld requires the creation of a trust fund for providing tangible returns to a defined community group with a share holding in a conservancy, for each rhino calf that is born within that conservancy. This production incentive could be relatively low in financial terms yet still have a significant impact in impoverished rural areas, if appropriately allocated, for instance in the form of support for local schools or similar development inputs at a community level. The incentives (which would need to be made very businesslike, with deductions for poaching losses) would require the definition of the producer groups (i.e. private-community partnerships for defined rhino populations).

By meeting the habitat and management needs of rhinos, a broad range of biodiversity can be concurrently conserved and a high national and international profile can be maintained for these wildlife-based projects. Thus rhinos are appropriate "flagships" for a Lowveld initiative that is underway (the "Lowveld Conservation Forum") to coordinate stakeholders from the irrigation sector, the wildlife sector and the community sector to undertake harmonized planning of land-use and associated veterinary zonation and fencing (for foot-and-mouth disease control), linkages to the Trans-Frontier Conservation Areas, and so on.

The most appropriate institutional framework for coordinated rhino conservation in the Lowveld is the new Lowveld Rhino Trust, created on 1 January 2009, in which the various stakeholder groups will be represented and can therefore formulate joint plans, with a clear understanding of the resources, roles and responsibilities that apply to these plans.

Now we just need some time away from the flames...