

## **Seven brave rhinos struggle for the survival of their species**

by Dr. Markus Borner, Frankfurt Zoological Society

We did fear that we had lost all rhinos in the Serengeti Park after the poaching onslaught of the 80ies. Then suddenly two female rhinos appeared again in the Moru area of Central Serengeti. Two females are not exactly a population, so we started thinking about a mate for them. We should not have worried - one of the young Ngorongoro bulls left the Ngorongoro Crater after a fight with John, the Chief Crater Ruler. Possibly following old traditional routes, the young bull called "Rajabu" appeared over one hundred Kilometres away from the Crater in Moru where he was obviously welcomed by our two lonely females. He ever since happily lived in his own paradise looking after his new found harem. After his arrival four calves were born and the Serengeti - Moru population has now seven individuals.

In population terms, seven individuals are far too small for a founder population. We therefore hope to bring in more rhinos of the *Diceros bicornis michaeli* subspecies to form a viable core. There is a possibility that we can get more animals from Addo Park in South Africa and the Kenyan authorities have signalled that they would consider donating a few of their rhinos to the Serengeti.

With three remaining rhino populations in the Serengeti ecosystem - one in Ngorongoro, one at Moru in Central Serengeti and one in the Masai Mara Game Reserve in the Northern Serengeti - there is hope that in the long run these archaic animals will be roaming again all over the Serengeti, as they did before the greed of man reduced them to just a few survivors. That will not happen overnight, the rhino breed slowly and poaching is not the only threat to their survival. But we are convinced that with enough effort, patience, ingenuity, money and hope the rhinos of Serengeti will become a conservation success story.

## **Herculean Effort brings Rhinos to Ngorongoro**

### **A personal account on the Translocation of two Black Rhinos**

by Dr. Markus Borner

Two endangered Black rhinos, a mother with her calf, were airlifted in December 1997 from their home in South Africa to Tanzania's world-famous Ngorongoro Crater by a Hercules aircraft of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Airforce, as part of a multi-national effort to save the species from extinction.



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The Black Rhino has declined from a continental population of more than 100,000 in the 1960s to just 2,400 today, through the activities of poachers. In the Serengeti-Ngorongoro Ecosystem less than twenty individuals survived.

The dire plight of the rhino has led African governments to join forces to protect the dwindling herds in their last strongholds, such as the Ngorongoro Crater. Ngorongoro is a sanctuary where, as a joint effort of the Ngorongoro

Authorities with the Frankfurt Zoological Society, the rhinos are guarded around the clock by dedicated anti-poaching forces as well as scientists, who monitor their behavior, feeding and genetics. An important part of the African Rhino Conservation Plan is the exchange of rhinos between national parks - in an effort to bring individual rhino populations up to a critical minimum size and to protect against inbreeding.

The mother and calf which were flown to the Serengeti and then driven to Ngorongoro, come from South Africa's Addo National Park and are being exchanged for two other rhinos, one provided by Tanzania and the other by Germany (where it was born in Frankfurt Zoo). The Addo rhinos have an interesting history in that they themselves were originally introduced to the park from Kenya as part of a much earlier effort to restock South African rhino herds. Two descendants of those earlier migrants have made the long journey back to East Africa.



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Flying in the rhinos and resettling them in Ngorongoro was for all of us from FZS here in the Serengeti quite an event. Richard, the young male rhino, that was sent to SA in exchange, escaped its enclosure near the Kilimanjaro Airport the night before the flight. Police and Army were called in, but in the end Richard returned to the enclosure peacefully as a lamb following a few carrots that were offered to him by Dr Pete Morkel, the rhinos specialist in charge of the translocation.

Numerous smaller crises followed, one of which was the onset of the eNino rains that threatened to bog down the huge Hercules aircraft on the dirt strip at Seronera in the Serengeti. High floods in the Olduvai Gorge nearly prevented the rhino convoy to cross the river. When the two newcomers were finally safely in their new home in Ngorongoro, I did notice that I had not smoked as many cigars in such a short time since the birth of my daughter 20 years ago!



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Although Ngorongoro's present rhino numbers are low, the sheer crater walls and excellent food resources within the Crater give the population a very good chance of survival. The older of the two introduced rhinos gave birth to a calf earlier in the year. Unfortunately lions killed the calf when it was only about three months old. Although we had expected that this might happen, everybody involved in the translocation was really saddened by the event.

We all hope that she will become pregnant again and this time will learn how to defend her calf against the Crater lions. Her older calf is together with other resident rhinos and we hope she too will be pregnant soon and help build a healthy rhino population in the Crater.

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