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On May 29, 2009, an effort was made to bring back to Africa an animal that has seen a rapid population decrease over the past few decades. Three Black Rhinos from the subspecies *Diceros bicornis michaeli* were flown into Kilimanjaro International Airport in Tanzania after being taken from their home at the Dvůr Králové Zoo in the Czech Republic. The rhinos, Jimmy, Yabu, and Deborah, took a journey back to their ancestral homeland in large wooden crates. First transported by vehicle to Schiphol Airport in the Netherlands, the animals were loaded onto a cargo plane for a nine-hour flight before being offloaded in Tanzania. They were then put back on trucks using large cranes and machinery for their final journey to Mkomazi National Park's Rhino Sanctuary in northeast Tanzania.

The three rhinos, aged two, three, and five, are all capable of breeding. But Mkomazi has no current plans to release the animals into the wild. Being in captivity forces them to lose many of their natural instincts, preventing their offspring from the possibility of surviving in the wild.

TRYING TO SAVE THE RHINO IN THE CLASSROOM

It is difficult today to imagine the Africa that Hemingway often romanticised. He described a land so abundant with rhinos that it was easy to see a dozen or more in one day.

Poaching, hunting, and habitat loss have caused the rhino population to plummet. In 2006, the West African subspecies of the Black Rhino was declared extinct. In 2008, poachers killed the last four wild Northern White Rhino forcing them into extinction as well. Though a few remain in zoos around the world, with so few numbers breeding becomes difficult, causing even their survival in captivity to be highly unlikely. The Southern White Rhino is labeled as “near threatened” and has far greater numbers than the Black Rhino that is now “critically endangered.”

Luckily for the Black Rhino, their low numbers have gained worldwide attention and brought many organizations together to aid in efforts for their survival.

In 2007, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimated that 4,180 Black Rhinos remain worldwide, many of which cannot be considered wild. Several rhinos are housed in zoos or sanctuaries around the globe. Ol Pejeta Reserve in Kenya is home to nearly 80 Black Rhinos, most of which are wild. But the reserve must place orphaned calves with armed rangers for 24-hour security. Currently the reserve has one female under secure watch that was orphaned after its mother was poached in another sanctuary.

Mkomazi National Park in Tanzania, which will house the three



Far Left: Rhino in Ngorongoro Crater.

Left: Rafiki wa Faru bus used by Mkomazi.

Below: Rhinos from Czech Republic being offloaded.



windows in excitement as they see their first cheetah, lion, or zebra. For many children, this is their first view of wildlife. "Laikipia has nearly 50% of Kenya's black Rhinos. For the children, the trip is incredibly important as they get to learn the rich diversity of their district through this opportunity," Ephantus said, of the inclusion of rhinos as a main focus of the curriculum. Apart from school children, EEP also educates community groups comprised of adults from the region. To date, it has been highly successful in reaching over 15,000 adults and children.

Rafiki wa Faru and EEP are fairly new initiatives having started in 2008 and 2004 respectively, and both already offer great potential for the future. It is a focal point in each programme to help change the attitudes held by many villagers in these areas. Though economic livelihoods play a massive role, an overall appreciation for these ecosystems is needed. To learn from an early age how to care for and look after the environment is perhaps one of the most important lessons that can be taught. Likewise, it is important that those dependent on the tourism brought by these areas help support the underlying activities of each region. These programmes are providing the opportunity for communities to play an active role and benefit from the parks/reserves as well. There are few better ways to encourage involvement than to allow children and village members to explore these regions and enjoy their beauty.

It will continue to be critical for governments and organisations to work with communities and aid efforts that create a balance between conservation, agriculture, tourism, livestock, and development. Hopefully, with the assistance of environmental education programmes, these areas will be full of members who are educated from an early age and carry an embedded desire to help protect and manage the remaining bush lands. Although some rhinos, such as those recently transferred to Mkomazi, may never leave the sanctuary, they have a strong potential to be invaluable educational tools. The knowledge they may help foster can empower those that their survival depends on. Perhaps their existence in captivity *will* play a role in saving their species.

– Laura Hartstone

rhinos from the Czech Republic, has a designated area of 43 square miles that acts as a sanctuary for the animals. The park had an estimated 250 rhinos roaming wild in the 1960s, yet by 1988 all of them had been eradicated. Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary was established in 1997 as an initiative to not only bring Black Rhino back to the park and help increase the numbers worldwide, but also to provide education to local communities and tourists.

The cost of running such a sanctuary is high and to transport the rhinos is very expensive. Other tasks, such as breeding, can be difficult, a process that Mkomazi struggled to get going for many years. Tourists often lean away from visiting sanctuaries when they can drop down into places such as Ngorongoro crater and witness the animals in the wild. Justifying the ongoing funding needed to keep these animals in captivity can be difficult, however, reserves and sanctuaries can offer invaluable education for tourists and more importantly, for the youth of Africa.

Rafiki wa Faru (*Friend of Rhino*) was created in an effort to reach out and educate school children by bringing them to Mkomazi. The programme incorporates field trips around the park and through the rhino sanctuary where children and teachers have the opportunity to view wildlife while they learn the importance of preservation and conservation. Their work starts in the dry season and aims to take a group of 30 children every day from the 41 villages that surround the park.

Similarly, Ephantus Mugo leads the Environmental Education Programme (EEP) for the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, a project targeting schools around the boundaries of the Laikipia Plateau in Kenya. On a typical day, Ephantus will jump in his big green bus, pick up 30 school children and drive them around various parts of Laikipia or nearby reserves. He has created large magnetic displays that can be placed on the side of the vehicle to further explain various processes and principles. The children eagerly press their palms and faces to the

Laura Hartstone was born in Flagstaff, Arizona and received a degree International Studies from the University of Arizona. During her educational career she studied hydrology and wildlife ecology/conservation in Tanzania.