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Save the Rhino Trust Project



25 years ago, as a result of poaching, the black rhino teetered on the edge of extinction. In response, Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), a non-governmental organisation, was formed and, together with local communities, succeeded in eliminating poaching in the Kunene region of Namibia. Today north-west Namibia holds the largest unfenced population of black rhino in Africa.

In September 2005, a black rhino workshop was held in Grootberg, north-west Namibia, among different stakeholders, where different research needs for black rhino were identified – amongst them, the need to research the habitat of the black rhino on a local scale. This project aims to explore the use of habitat by the black rhino within its range, taking into account plant density, diversity, composition of trees and shrubs, and investigate the influence of terrain on both the vegetation and on the black rhino.

To date, Save the Rhino Trust has location data (GPS) for individual rhino in the north-west and understands the habitat on a large scale. The study found that rhino were more likely to occur in areas that were close to springs, further away from human habitation, and areas of higher altitudes. The availability of good plant browse was seen as a major influence on black rhino distribution but there have been no local scale, floristic studies of vegetation based on the known black rhino range. The main objective of this study is to answer this by characterising black rhino habitat use and suitability within their current range based on a local scale vegetation study.

SRT's location data for individual rhino will be pooled and used to calculate the size of each home range, and therefore determine the various parts of the area that are "high use", "low use" or "no use" areas of the individual rhinoceros. Within these the composition of plants, their diversity, types, height, and density, and where they are found will all be observed.

The project will aid in determining suitable habitats for black rhino within potential reintroduction sites. It also aims to establish a means of rapid monitoring of black rhino habitat, which can be incorporated into Save the Rhino Trust monitoring programme. Finally, the study will add to the much-needed vegetation diversity database in these areas.

The beneficiaries of the project include the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (aiding in their reintroduction programmes), local community, local guides and tour operators in adding to their knowledge, and SRT in helping the Trust to establish a means of rapid monitoring of their rare charges. ♪



Botswana Rhino Relocation and Reintroduction Project

This project, fondly known as the Mombo Rhino Project, has continued to be an incredible success story, with eight baby rhino being born between 2001 and the time of going to press.

Background

Up until the mid-20th century, both species of rhino had been historically found in Botswana, with the black rhino confined to the Kwando-Chobe area, while the white rhino had been common throughout the area. By the early 1990s, almost all wild rhino had been killed. A substantial piece of the jigsaw of biodiversity was thus absent from areas which were otherwise rich in wildlife.

In 2001, collaborative conservation efforts between Wilderness Safaris, Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust, Botswana's Department of Wildlife (DWNP) and the Botswana Government successfully reintroduced the white rhino

into the Mombo area of the Moremi Game Reserve. Releases took place over two years, with almost 30 white rhino being moved into the Mombo concession.

Phase 2 began with the release of four black rhino in late 2003 – again, a pioneer population of two bulls and two cows. As this species is so highly endangered, the SADC (Southern African Development Community) Rhino Group is assisting with sourcing further animals. Six individuals will be brought to Botswana during 2006, from Eastern Cape Parks and North West Parks, in South Africa, and possibly from troubled areas in Zimbabwe. Finally, satellite transmitters are being considered for future releases, so as to minimise disturbance during monitoring. However, these devices, and running them, are very expensive so their application will depend on donations received.

Thanks to the project, breeding populations of both African rhino species

have been re-established in the Okavango Delta, and aside from the intrinsic value that is added to world rhino numbers and population distributions, guests to Wilderness Safaris' camps have the privilege of encountering rhino on game drives – an encounter that enhances the concept of changing lives of people and Africa. ♪



Map Ives, Environmental Manager reports:

We can now state confidently that this project has been a great success. It is now just over three years since the first release, and at the time of writing we have 38 wild white rhino in Botswana as a result, eight of which were born in the Okavango Delta. An absent species has been reintroduced and is doing extremely well here. We have had veteran guides visit us who last saw rhino in this area in the 1980s, and to see a wild rhino here again quite literally brought tears to their eyes.