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BOTSWANA RHINO

RELOCATION AND REINTRODUCTION PROJECT

This project, also known as the Mombo Rhino Project, began in 2001 when some 30 white rhino were successfully reintroduced into the Mombo area of the Moremi Game Reserve (in a joint effort by Wilderness Safaris, Wilderness Safaris Wildlife Trust, Botswana's Department of Wildlife and South Africa National Parks), after having been poached out in the 1990s. Since then, the project has concentrated on monitoring and observing the animals, their social and territorial behaviour and their response to the annual Okavango floodwaters, rainfall and other animals in the area. 2007 saw a need for the increased presence of and protection by a monitoring team particularly in the cases of rhino having settled outside the formally protected areas.



Some rhino remain on Chiefs Island where they were all initially released, many of the remainder having moved significant distances away. Currently, seven rhino carry active transmitters, most of which reside on Chiefs Island where the Mombo Rhino Patrol vehicle is able to access them and monitor them. This monitoring is carried out by the Rhino Monitoring Officer, the Environmental Manager and the Conservation Ecologist in collaboration with the Anti-Poaching Unit.

However, the Mombo Rhino Patrol vehicle only operated on Chief's Island, meaning the rest of the population had not been monitored to the same degree. Added to this was the concern over increasing levels of poaching in the areas surrounding National Parks. The Rhino Reintroduction Project thus urgently needed to expand its presence into these outlying areas.

The purchase of a second Rhino Patrol vehicle and camping supplies has enabled the Rhino Monitoring Officer, Environmental Manager and the Conservation Ecologist to conduct patrols to areas where the

rhino have moved, in order to monitor and keep track of them.

With this additional support, the project has been able to maintain and expand the detailed monitoring programme currently being carried out by Wilderness Safaris Botswana in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks Anti Poaching Unit. This programme involves locating the rhino by means of telemetry or tracking and recording their GPS localities, condition and behaviour patterns – all of which is added to the Rhino Monitoring Database.

Results that are expected to be produced by the project include an increased presence of the Rhino Reintroduction Project in and around community areas where some of the released rhino have dispersed. Increased monitoring of these populations will also add to their protection and safety as well as increase the degree of environmental and conservation education shared with local communities living in close proximity of these rhino.

