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WILDERNESS SAFARIS WILDLIFE TRUST



ECOLOGY OF BLACK & WHITE RHINO IN THE OKAVANGO DELTA

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During the 20th century, both black and white rhino subspecies became extinct in Botswana, due to poaching. In 2001, Botswana's Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP), with the help of Wilderness Safaris, the Trust and SANParks successfully reintroduced a number of black and white rhino into the Moremi Game Reserve. Since their release, both species have dispersed far more widely than anticipated, factoring in the carrying capacity of the area.



This project therefore sets out to study the wet and dry season range and feeding preferences of the reintroduced black and white rhino in the area. It identifies key factors influencing the movement of reintroduced black and white rhino out of the habitat into which they were introduced; these will be used to draw recommendations relating to appropriate habitat into which rhino can be released in the future.

The research is being conducted on Chief's Island within the northern part of the Reserve, making use of GPS data recorded by officers of the Anti Poaching Unit during their patrols. In addition, animals are tracked by spoor, identified by means of their ear markings and digital

photographs taken of the individuals to assist with identification. Vegetation is sampled to establish food availability and preferences, and the rhinos' response to other animals and humans is also under observation.

The reintroduction of rhino into any unfenced ecosystem is a complex undertaking and though translocation has been a key component of successful rhino conservation in Africa, the management of these new populations poses a challenge to wildlife managers. The results of the project will hopefully lead to a better understanding with regards to reintroductions in a free-ranging system, and provide a better understanding of the ecology of the two species.