

## Meeting Mr (genetically) Right

**It is an enormous privilege to be custodians of the extraordinary rhinoceros.** The more we know about each individual and its reactions to both its own kind and us, the more we are amazed, humbled and amused. We find they have a sense of humour as well as a memory of things past, yet they still seem to like us in their own wild and not-so-myopic way.

Tony and Lucy Fitzjohn | George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust (GAWPT)

**T**he first translocation of black rhino to Tanzania took place in 1997. They were brought in rather dramatically by air from Addo National Park, South Africa to the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary, constructed and managed by GAWPT. The second translocation took place in 2001 and brought the Mkomazi population up to eight rhino. In 2009, three more rhino were translocated from the Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic to Mkomazi.

The current population is 14, so the outlook is bright (a population needs to reach at least 12-15 animals to be viable and for breeding to expand rapidly). A couple more females and strategic separations and introductions from within our existing stock will give us healthy genetic diversity for many years to come. Whether the Serengeti or Ngorongoro will release some of their animals to add to our populations is, currently, academic and doubtful.

From a very dire and depressing situation in the 1990s, Tanzania now has a slowly increasing (albeit extremely fragile) rhino population, with programmes to secure and protect them underway in Serengeti, Ngorongoro and Mkomazi.

TANAPA (Tanzania National Parks) has now expressed a desire to be more proactive in the security of the Sanctuary and we are both relieved and wary on this front. Discussions are going well but, with a huge investment in money, reputations and dedicated, hard working staff, we are

understandably nervous about the replacement of our ex-Tanzanian Army personnel who have been so effective to date. Our greatest priority at all times is maintaining and upgrading the tight security and integrity of the Sanctuary and its personnel in order to protect the rhinos and allow them to breed up in peace.

With the recent addition of an extension area, which has been put in place to relieve any pressure on the resident rhino as the population grows, the Sanctuary has increased to over 52 km<sup>2</sup>. This was a massive task of civil engineering, involving the construction of another 9km of 7ft high, electrified, alarmed and cantilevered fencing. There are also two other separation areas within the main Sanctuary which act either as introduction zones or isolation areas; ideal for breeding management.

Efforts to turn the tide on the rhino's awful decline have taken enormous dedication and perseverance. There are success stories and tragedies, and the threats are ever-present. But we are all in it for the long-haul and Save the Rhino has supported us through thick and thin on all facets of the rhino protection that we carry out in Mkomazi.

So far, so good. And yes, it has been successful (and rewarding) but let us not kid ourselves about what is at stake and make sure we never lose sight of that and relax our vigilance. Every day is critical. But as long as we can keep funding the operation and not compromise on our promises to the animals or the world in general, we will succeed.



The fence design at Mkomazi is based on successful sanctuaries in Kenya and South Africa.

### Rhino Climb Kilimanjaro

At just under 20,000ft, Kilimanjaro is Africa's highest peak and reaching its summit is a once in a lifetime experience.

**Why not take on this challenge whilst raising funds for Save the Rhino?** Get together a group of friends and we can also organise an add-on visit to the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary to see how the funds you raise are being spent. Visit our website or contact [jo@savetherhino.org](mailto:jo@savetherhino.org) for more details.

**DATES TO SUIT**

### Thanks

Our grateful thanks to the Mohamed Bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund for its grant of \$25,000 towards maintaining the Sanctuary Fence. And thanks also to Chester Zoo and USFWS, which have renewed their technical and financial support for *Rafiki wa Faru*, Mkomazi's environmental education programme.

