

## Balancing the sexes (amongst other things!)

If you live in Zimbabwe, it's difficult enough to look more than one day ahead, let alone 10 years.

**Nonetheless, we do have some new and encouraging grounds for optimism.** First and foremost, we require political stability, economic growth and the revival of donor interest among those who, unlike Save the Rhino International, deserted us in our hour (or decade, more accurately) of need. Though sometimes difficult to imagine, from our restricted viewpoint at the centre of the storm, these things can and almost certainly will take place. The groundswell may be hidden by tossing, confused seas, but it is there. And plans are afoot to ride the wave, when it comes.

Dick Pitman | Vice-chair, The Zambezi Society

**T**he Zambezi Society has, for instance, been asked by the Parks Authority to help with the creation of a definitive Park Plan for the Matusadona National Park, where we collaborate with the Authority on the monitoring and management of a small but important black rhino population. This will, among other things, clearly define such issues as manpower and equipment needs, the goals and strategies required for both general management and the management of the black rhino Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ) within the Park, and the resources required to meet these goals. We will, in short, have a series of clearly defined targets to aim at.

One such target will be the incorporation of the Matusadona rhino population into a clear and cohesive nationwide and regional meta-population management strategy. Until now there has often been a deep divide between the management of rhinos on private land and those in the Parks estate. This has been aggravated both by an overall shortage of resources for activities such as translocations, and donor preference for allocating the bulk of their available resources to the private sector.

Within the Matusadona, for instance, there is a seriously unbalanced sex ratio, and a clear and present need for the introduction of several females if the population is to increase significantly. This has been

known – and discussed – for several years, but has not been implemented because of shortages both of qualified manpower and of the necessary financial resources. Today, though, there are clear signs of renewed donor interest in such essential management activities.

Another target is the need for sustainable – and sustained – improvements in the efficiency of the Matusadona rhino monitoring currently carried out by the Parks Authority in collaboration with the Zambezi Society and donors such as Save the Rhino International and SAVE (Australia). We would hope, before too long, to transfer the necessary skills – and resources – to the Parks Authority itself. For the moment, though, NGO and donor involvement are not only required, but are critical.

The use of implanted transponders would be of great value, but in recent years only six animals have been thus fitted, and all six transponders are now inoperative. We still need the resources to carry out an IPZ-wide implantation project, but – as with the translocations of females to rectify the current sex ratio problem – there are signs that these resources may be forthcoming in the relatively near future.

Improved monitoring and skills transfer will, we hope, also be achieved by the proposed



creation of a crack 'monitoring team' with a nationwide mandate to move from IPZ to IPZ. Such a team will be able to train Park staff in a wide range of monitoring techniques, reinforce existing monitoring systems and run regular 'reality checks' both on the efficiency and capability of IPZ staff and on actual numbers and locations of individual animals.

A small population of black rhino, such as that in the Matusadona, may need ongoing periodic introductions for genetic reasons, in addition to those now necessary to remedy the current unbalanced sex-ratio. But given these factors – improved sex ratio, a limited number of further introductions, effective controls locally on poaching and internationally on illicit trade, and improved monitoring – the Matusadona black rhino population should not only survive the next 10 years, but thrive thereafter.

### Grants

In June 2010, Save the Rhino's Trustees approved the release of **£3,570**, the second half of its previous grant for rhino monitoring in Matusadona National Park.

Left: Transmitters fitted in their horns allow for rhinos to be tracked by radio telemetry.

Right: Pfumbe (and oxpecker friend!)

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