

The Black Rhino Range Expansion Project



Security is a critical part of rhino conservation, but it's also important to manage populations for maximum growth. That's the aim of a successful project in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The Black Rhino Range Expansion Project, a partnership between the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Ezemvelo (the provincial conservation organisation) aims to increase numbers of the Critically Endangered black rhino by increasing the availability of land on which they can breed. It does this by forming partnerships with landholders able to sustain significant black rhino populations and then releasing founder populations of up to 25 black rhino on to these new homes.

Pam Sherriffs | Communications Manager,
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There are currently five project partner sites in KwaZulu-Natal, which between them are home to nearly 20% of the province's black rhino. Through establishment of these sites, black rhino range in the province has been increased by about 90,000 hectares and, since the Project began in 2003, 85 black rhino have been translocated to, and more than 20 calves born on, project sites. Black rhino are translocated from Ezemvelo's state-protected areas. This creates new populations and also means that populations within those protected areas do not exceed the area's ecological carrying capacity.

In order to create large enough areas to sustain significant black rhino populations – up to 20,000 hectares or more – the Project encourages neighbouring landowners to remove their internal fences and manage their properties as a single ecological unit. 'One of the best parts of the project is seeing fences come down', says WWF's project leader Dr Jacques Flamand. 'Fences are very unfriendly to species requiring large areas, like black rhino, elephant and wild dog. The Black Rhino Range Expansion Project has shown that concentrating on one species can be a catalyst for protection of huge areas which then has a knock-on effect.' The project works with private, state and community landowners and when choosing partner sites, Dr Flamand aims for large chunks of land that can sustain significant black rhino populations, but also keeps an eye on possible links and corridors between sites.

There are two species of rhino in Africa – the black rhino and the white rhino. Ezemvelo (then known as the Natal Parks Board) was responsible for the down-listing of white rhino from 'Critically Endangered' to 'Vulnerable' through a ground-breaking translocation programme. Now with WWF and the Black Rhino Range Expansion Project, they are trying to do the same for black rhino. 'Unfortunately for black rhino, they are very anti-social. They tend to be solitary and they need huge tracts of land because they don't want other rhino close to them. It makes them

difficult to manage, and is why their numbers have not increased as white rhino numbers have,' Dr Flamand said. There are about 4,000 black rhino alive today. There used to be hundreds of thousands across Africa, but they were heavily poached. At the worst point in the early 1980s there were only 2,000. That number has slowly crept up because of intensive conservation.

'Ultimately conservation costs money. One of the problems for government is that it doesn't have the resources to do it properly any more. So other formulae had to be found, one of which is our project concept,' said Dr Flamand. 'The arrangement is that Ezemvelo retains ownership of the original founder population, but ownership of the progeny is shared. This creates a strong financial incentive for project partners to manage their black rhino populations. But love for conservation has been the driving force. The common thread through the people who have helped make the project work was passion.'

The Black Rhino Range Expansion Project also funds security measures in black rhino source populations.



The black rhino is a flagship for creating larger blocks of land for conservation purposes. This benefits other species, such as elephants, vultures, leopard tortoises and wild dogs.

Grants

SRI Director Cathy Dean and husband Kenneth Donaldson made a donation of £500 to Wildlands Conservation Trust for Somkhanda Game Reserve, one of the partner sites for the BRREP. A minimum of £2,500 from the Rhino Trek South Africa will also go to Somkhanda.