



**FRANKFURT
ZOOLOGICAL
SOCIETY**
NORTH LUANGWA CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

North Luangwa Conservation Programme

Black Rhino Reintroduction Programme

Newsletter 2010

Introducing the new rhinos:



A female (W825 or 173) captured in Imfolozi Game Reserve 28th March was re-named Chengelo which means "light". She is (hopefully) a pregnant 22 yr old female.



Mwaiseni—Female 304/W218 was captured 7th April in Hluhluwe GR. Her new name means "welcome" and we hope she too is pregnant. She is approximately 8 yrs old.



The Ithala GR female was estimated to be 5yrs old. Non too keen in having friends either side of her in the bomas, we were able to leave empty ones between her and her neighbours and this gave everyone more peaceful nights but she was definitely ready to be released! We have given her the name Ithala in honour of her birthplace.

Black Rhinos arrive in Zambia...

The ambitious project to relocate a founder population of Black Rhinos (*Diceros biconis minor*) to Zambia has been completed. The first proposals were tabled in 2001 and four translocations have taken place since then. Five rhinos were delivered in 2003, two lots of five more in 2006 and another five in 2008. This last translocation that took place 26th May 2010 is the last piece of the puzzle. Our task now is to ensure their adaptation, allow them to breed and to maintain security.

The actual translocation process began back at the end of March/early April when the Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife Capture Unit (EKZN) darted four females and one male (see column left and next page for details) and



Loading at King Shaka Airport in Durban

moved them to their bomas at Umfolozi. Three of the females and the male originated from Hluhluwe/Umfolozi and the fourth female came from Ithala Game Reserve. The EKZN boma care staff did a wonderful job in keeping the animals in great condition and getting them onto lucerne and cubs. Alison Kennedy-Benson (rhino boma care specialist) spent time with the animals too

and each one was monitored for health and veterinary import measures by the EKZN vet teams.

With permits and health checks completed, the journey began at 21:00hrs 25th May. The animals were loaded into their transport crates and lifted onto the back of crane trucks. From the bomas they were driven to the new King Shaka International Airport



... safely landed in North Luangwa National Park

Cont'd →

in Durban where a SAFAIR C-130 Hercules awaited them. In the early hours, the 5 crates were loaded into the belly of the plane while preparations were being finalised a few thousand kilometres away in Zambia.

In North Luangwa, the Celtic Freight crane trucks had arrived two days earlier and practiced moving a crate on and off trucks and up to and away from boma doors. The sanctuary fence was nearly finished, the bomas refurbished, checked and cleaned, the roads graded and airstrip mowed. Flight time from King Shaka to Lubanga was estimated to be 4hrs and

15mins. The SAFAIR crew in Johannesburg kept us updated on their ETA in Zambia. By 1200hrs VIPs, dignitaries and ZAWA Directors had arrived at the airstrip to witness the 'big plane land'.

For the last time, a Hercules C-130 landed at Lubanga airstrip in North Luangwa NP. An awesome sight and not easily described in words. The sound, the speed, the dust and the knowledge of its responsibility to land those rhinos safely is simply heart stopping.

The offloading went just as smoothly and as quickly as could have been hoped with the SAFAIR, FZS and

Celtic Freight crews working together to shift the rhino in their crates on to the waiting trucks.

In just over an hour the convoy set off on the short drive to the holding bomas.

Once again the releases into the bomas went without a hitch and by sun down all the rhinos were tucking into lucerne, having a good drink and trying out their first taste of Zambian browse!



SAFAIR and FZS crews work quickly to offload the rhinos from the plane

Introducing the new rhinos cont'd:



Female #41 was captured in Imfolozi Game Reserve 30th March 2010. She is the youngest of the rhinos received in 2010 and estimated to be 3yrs old. We have renamed her Tamala which aptly means "last born".



And finally, the big boy... now proudly called Bukwele which means "rhino" in the local language Bemba. He used to be called "Torn Ears" but I can't work out why?! He was captured in Imfolozi GR and is estimated to be 22yrs old.

Nalubuka

Sad news from North Luangwa. Nalubuka, a Kruger NP 7 year old female, was found dead 30th July 2010. She had last been sighted 5th July and was given a condition score 3/5. She was estimated to have died mid-July as the carcass had been scattered by predators/vultures and partially decomposed.

There was no obvious cause of death—no damaged limbs, slight necrosis of a previous wound from earlier in the year, a small dent above the left eye, but little to indicate such a quick demise.

She was a target for observation by the monitoring team towards the end of July but they failed to locate her or obtain a transmitter signal.

This animal had struggled to adapt to North Luangwa since arriving in 2008 and had been given supplementary feed in the field for almost 2 years. She had never moved far from her original release site and relied on the lucerne, sausage fruits and *Euphorbia* spp. offered. She had been darted for suspected trypis in Jan 2009.

Despite the most intensive management we have ever implemented for a rhino, Nalubuka was unable to adapt to North Luangwa conditions. This highlights the risk of such translocations as well as the need for better research and understanding in rhino behaviour, parasitology and translocation success strategies.

Twatemwa

Twatemwa, a Kruger NP female translocated in 2003, gave birth to a calf in May. It was double excitement for the rhino monitoring scouts as they found the spoor just days after the new rhinos arrived! Twatemwa is a wily female and had been more elusive than usual for the preceding weeks. She was (over) due to calve as her previous NLNP bred offspring, Twatasha, was 4 yrs old.



Twatemwa and her as yet unnamed, unsexed calf, Nov 2010

Bukwele's story

Bukwele was free released mid-June 2010 but broke out of the sanctuary on the first night. He settled along a nearby river about 1km from the sanctuary for almost 2 months and in fairly close proximity to a female introduced in 2006 and her 4 yr old calf on the opposite bank. We put her dung in his area to encourage him to seek her out, but they drifted further apart.

At the beginning of August he crossed to the eastern side of the Luangwa river, outside the park and into the Game Management Area. He was found munching on cotton in village fields. Attempts were made to try to get him to cross back to the Park, but that didn't work and he headed further and further east towards the eastern escarpment and the Malawi border. The situation became critical.

We put 4 security teams around him and cut in a new access road through thick bush, across rivers and up valleys (about 25kms). The NLCP plane was flown daily to deter would be poachers and to support the men on the

ground. In the meantime we secured the services of a helicopter and pilot, a SANParks vet, spotter plane and other expertise with the idea being to recapture him, drive him back to the sanctuary, put him into the bomas and soft release from there.

We successfully retrieved Bukwele from the eastern escarpment 28th August. We were very fortunate that on first attempt

He headed further and further east towards ... Malawi

he was found close to a main track/road that leads to a town. Dr Dave Zimmerman, the SANParks vet made an incredibly difficult darting from the chopper look easy and Bukwele went down fairly quickly. The ground teams cut in a road to provide access for the tractor and trailer and he was loaded by 1100hrs. In a straight line he was 95km from his original release site but the

road route back was just over 200km and took 14hrs. He was off loaded into the new bomas very early on the Sunday morning, 17hrs after being immobilised.

We had expected his condition to have been worse after his ordeal but he was looking pretty good. However, the vets noticed that he had an abscess on his neck and at first assumed it was from an injection he was given on release, but soon noticed a hole on the other side of his neck which could have been attributed to a bullet entry. Upon arrival at the bomas a metal detector was used and immediately detected metal within the abscess. Two days after his return Bukwele was immobilised and the abscess cut open. A muzzle loading bullet was removed. Bukwele was treated with penicillin and a poultice.

Three weeks later, his wounds were fully healed and he was released late September under the light of an almost full moon. He was fed and cleaned as normal, then after sunset the boma doors were quietly opened to let him discover

for himself what lay beyond.

He remains inside the sanctuary and has found a suitable area to settle. However, his condition dropped significantly and we began a supplementary feeding programme of a bale of lucerne/day. He has since regained weight and has stopped coming to the feed area, which is a good sign of his recovery.

Three men and two firearms were picked up in follow up investigations. This was not a high tech syndicate specifically targeting the rhino but an opportunistic attempt, and we have to remember that this rhino was well beyond the normal boundaries of the intensive protection zone and even the National Park boundary and the rest of our black rhino population currently remains secure. However, with the regional upsurge in rhino poaching we are fully aware of the commitment required to protect this population. Despite this, the operation went very well and, for now, he has recovered from his ordeal, as have we!



Bukwele recovering from his adventure back in NLNP



Above right: Muzzle loading bullet removed from Bukwele's neck

Centre right: Trajectory of bullet indicated by sites of entry and exit wounds

Below right: c. 1850s trading rifle confiscated in follow up operations



Black Rhino Management Plan

A four day planning workshop was held at Protea Arcades Hotel in Lusaka 18th – 21st January 2010 with representatives from ZAWA, FZS, International Rhino Foundation and Flora & Fauna International, to develop a medium term management plan for the North Luangwa black rhino population.

The length of time needed to reintroduce a complete founder population was underestimated and the challenges faced were not all envisaged. As a result, much of the planning and coordination of NLNP rhino management activities to date have been based on expert advice, learning from best practice elsewhere and trial and error. This Plan has captured the experience and knowledge gained through the reintroductions and laid out plans and decision making processes needed for the future management of this population, while recognizing that conservation management of NLNP's black rhino must move from a reintroduction project to a longer term integrated approach.

A practical, appropriate and logical North Luangwa Black Rhino Management Plan, aligned with ZAWA national rhino conservation policy has been developed. The plan has an in-built framework for actions, decision-making and monitoring. This will result in effective conservation management of the NL black rhino population and a documented and monitored process for input to future reintroductions.

To find out more please visit us at www.fzs.org



Update on the 2010 rhinos...

Chengelo and Mwaiseni, two of the recently translocated females from KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, are both believed to be late term pregnant. Post release they showed a loss in condition compared to the other 2 females translocated at the same time who are not pregnant. At the end of August the decision was made to try to supplementary feed them in the field rather than boma them and to get them as quickly as possible on to lucerne.

Since the end of 2007, there has been a more intensive hands on approach to animals losing condition. The reintroduction programme has been a truly regional effort with enormous effort and resource input and there is a greater responsibility to ensure the founder population achieves its objective.

The adaptation to NLNP is known to be prolonged and cannot be underestimated and there are many factors involved, not just nutrition, but the feeling being that if we can "assist" these marginal rhinos through the adaptation phase with some supplementation then there is less chance that they might succumb to other stressful factors that might cause condition loss, spontaneous abortion and/or other debilitating conditions.

The rhinos have been offered lucerne and sausage fruits. The two females have been taking a bale a day and they are still browsing well. Both animals have started to miss 'meals' and are ranging over larger areas—good signs of their adaptation.

Typically the Zambia rains begin in November and end in April. The 2009/2010 rains ended late on into April this year which meant the rivers and natural water points remained flowing and fuller. The start of the rains in November was slow but it turned out to be an average month. December has had good rainfall that has replenished the rivers and completed the vegetation flush that began back in October. With these resources now abundant for the new animals we anticipate they will pickup condition more quickly, although the arrival of two calves and subsequent lactation will place additional strain on their bodies.



Chengelo December 2010

Acknowledgments *The North Luangwa Conservation Programme, on behalf of the Zambia Wildlife Authority, would like to thank:*

Frankfurt Zoological Society, ZAWA and all the staff from HQ to the Rhino Monitoring Scouts, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Save the Rhino Trust Zambia, Save the Rhino International, SANParks, Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife, Eastern Cape Parks Board, Dr Pete Morkel, Dr Wigganson Matandiko, Dr Dave Cooper, Dr David Zimmerman, Dr Chap Masterson, Raoul du Toit, Alison Kennedy-Benson, SAFAIR, Celtic Freight crane truck crews, Rod Tether, Ernst Jacobs, Skytrails, Staravia, Milmax catering, Moses Nyirenda, SES and Paul Tudor Jones. Many more have helped both directly and indirectly and continue to do so behind the scenes. Their hard work and dedication is also acknowledged here.

The 2010 translocation was filmed by Windfall Films and Aquavision in co-production for National Geographic and will be screened in 2011.

The North Luangwa Conservation Programme is a Frankfurt Zoological Society project that has been working in partnership with the Zambian Wildlife Authority in North Luangwa National Park since 1986.

And finally... wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all of us in North Luangwa