

Laconophilia at Borana

Black rhino are perilously close to extinction, and with existing sanctuaries coming close to, or even exceeding their carrying capacities, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is in desperate need of more secure habitat. Borana is an area with prime black rhino habitat, secure fencing and significant infrastructure already in place, and has for some time been part of the KWS' greater strategic plan for black rhino.

Sam Taylor | Chief Conservation Officer, Borana Conservancy

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) national strategy for black rhino aims to achieve a population of 700 by 2011 as a step in the process of achieving a long-term viable population of 2,000 black rhino. While this goal relies upon the securement of many large unfenced habitats, small privately owned fenced conservancies will have to play a large role in providing habitat if this goal is to be reached.

Borana is a pioneer member of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum. Originally a cattle ranch, it was established as a wildlife

conservancy in 1993 with the completion of one of Kenya's first eco-lodges. It neighbours the world famous Lewa Downs Conservancy, which has led the way in rhino conservation in Kenya for the last 15 years.

Lewa's efforts have been so successful that they are close to exceeding their carrying capacity and are desperate for more habitat. Subordinate males are having

a difficult time as they desperately try and establish territories in the wonderfully saturated ecosystem.

Because of these happenings, in recent months, the fenced gap between Borana and Lewa, which leads through the Ngare Ndare forest, has seen the wanderings of rhino back and forth between the two conservancies. One particularly infamous visitor is the black rhino 'Sparta', who has been hosted by Borana on two occasions now and stayed for a total of a month. Normally this sort of behaviour would be cause for widespread alarm between the two conservancies but instead Borana is opening its doors (well, fences) to help Lewa increase the available rhino habitat. It has long been the plan to open the fence between Lewa and Borana, and the pressure created by

the rhinos seems to be speeding up the process of developing one huge uninterrupted ecosystem.

Whilst undertaking rhino conservation is exciting news for Borana, it comes with huge responsibility. Poaching is on the rise in Kenya, and the logistics, organisation and money required to protect these animals is daunting to say the least. However, what we have come to learn is that when it comes to rhino conservation, everyone is in it together. The help, advice and support we are receiving, not least from Save the Rhino, is astounding.

With this help, we have been able to send our top men to the KWS training school in Manyani. Eight members of the Borana security team were selected to go to Manyani to take part in a two-month intensive game ranger wildlife and security course. The course involved aspects of tracking, drill, discipline and wildlife knowledge as well as basic paramilitary techniques and left the team itching for Borana's rhino to arrive. Save the Rhino's kind donation is also helping us to invest heavily in more training and more equipment, so that we will be prepared for the immense challenges that lie ahead.

In 480 BC, Sparta was defended by 300 men against tens of thousands of invading Persians at Thermopylae. Borana now has joined the war to protect rhino. We hope to be protecting our 'Sparta' (and friends) with perhaps even fewer men, but certainly no less endeavour!



Above: One of the prettiest outposts in Kenya

Below: Sparta dining out on Borana

The black rhino 'Sparta' has been hosted by Borana on two occasions now and stayed for a total of a month

UNLESS NOTED
IMAGES BORANA RANCH



MAIN IMAGE: SRI

Grant

SRI provided a grant of £9,909 from core funds to pay for ranger training, uniforms, binoculars and GIS mapping at Borana, in readiness for the rhinos' arrival.