

RHINOCEROS FOR MALAWI



Photo: Anthony Hall-Martin

Within a year of the Malawi Government officially announcing that the black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis bicornis* has become extinct in that country, a project was underway which saw two black rhinoceros translocated from the Kruger National Park to the Liwonde National Park.

The development of Liwonde, Malawi's most exciting national park, is a project that the National Parks Board of South Africa has supported over the past three years. The essence of the project has been to develop the Liwonde National Park into an ecologically and economically viable entity.

The National Parks Board has acted as coordinators of the project which has drawn heavily on the Department of Foreign Affairs of South Africa and the Malawi Government itself. This project has to date resulted in the park being fenced with an electrified game fence. This has put a stop to the movements of elephants out of the park where crop raiding had become a problem. It has also inhibited people from moving into the park where the cutting of timber, thatch grass and poaching were major ongoing problems. Further elements of the project have been the upgrading of the road system and building a safari style rest camp at Mvuu on the Shire River. This rest camp has exciting commercial potential and the funds and jobs generated by the rest camp will sustain the park into the future.

ANTHONY HALL-MARTIN



The final phase of the project was to return to Malawi those species which became extinct in the past few decades. Over-exploitation has resulted in the black rhinoceros, eland, roan antelope, Lichtenstein's hartebeest, buffalo and zebra, being eliminated from the Upper Shire valley over the past few decades. The project contemplated at how to get these species back, either by catching animals in other Malawi National Parks or importing them from neighbouring countries. The first of these species to be returned was the black rhinoceros. This was made possible through the generous sponsorship of Justerini and Brookes, the manufacturers of rare blended Scotch whisky, and the Shikar-Safari Foundation also had a very critical role in the entire project. J & B sponsored the movement of two animals which were made available by the National Parks Board of South Africa. The South African Air Force agreed to fly the animals to Liwonde in a military transport aircraft. The rhinoceros arrived in Malawi by the end of October 1993.

There have been many questions asked about the project and in particular why the National Parks Board has seen fit to provide two black rhino, the single most threatened species in Africa today, to a country where the indigenous population recently became extinct. The answer to the question is quite simple in that the project of rehabilitating Liwonde has been precisely to prepare it to accept the responsibility of supporting a species like the rhino. A further very important consideration was that the presence of the two rhinoceros at Liwonde provided the stimulus for sponsors to support a further project. This was firstly to survey the whereabouts of several scattered individual black rhinos in neighbouring areas of Mocambique as well as another one, rumoured to exist in Malawi itself. These animals are on their own, far from mates, are not breeding and are doomed to extinction. If they can be located and translocated to Liwonde to join the two animals

that are already there, a small gene pool of this species can be built up. Without the two animals as the bait, no sponsor is prepared to support the rounding up operation in Mocambique. Within a week of the project being announced, sponsors have come forward who will not only help fund the search for the rhinos in Mozambique, but also will help fund the capture and translocation.

The most critical component of the Malawi




The Malawi game scouts with Jack Greeff of Kruger National Park

rhino project, however is security. This is where the Shikar-Safari Club International Foundation has made a major contribution. The grant from Shikar-Safari Club International Foundation to the Rhino & Elephant Foundation for 1992 was held on ice until the Malawi Game Scout Training Project was launched. This project took off in June 1993 when eight game scouts from Malawi were sent to the Kruger National Park for two months in-service anti-poaching train-



The Malawi game scouts receiving their certificates on completion of their training

ing. They were funded with the Shikar-Safari Club International Foundation money. Training is something that is an ongoing process in the Kruger National Park, which is experiencing major poaching problems of its own. The availability of firearms, economic instability and many other factors are combining to produce a situation where poaching is seen as a lucrative way of life for more and more people.

The Malawi Game Scouts operated with Ranger Jack Greeff of the Nwanetsi section of the Kruger National Park, which is an active poaching area. They were trained in military manoeuvres, tactical techniques, practical operations and also the use and care of semi automatic R4 fire arms. It is a light weapon, easy to handle and to maintain. The Malawi Game Scouts completed their training and were sent back to Liwonde where they now form a rhino protection unit with a 24 hour a day job to guard the two rhinos from Kruger and any others that will be added to that little population. Without the support of Shikar-Safari Club International it would have been extremely difficult to get this project underway and the return of black rhinoceros to Malawi would, for the moment, have remained a dream. 

GAME SCOUT TRAINING

The Malawi Game Scout Training Project described in the previous article, has a lot to thank the Trustees of the Shikar-Safari International Foundation for and in particular the President, Alex Maddox, who supported the concept of the training project right from the start. The other critical player in this project has been Erwin Wilson, who represents the Shikar-Safari Club International on the Board of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation.

The funding has been channelled from the Rhino & Elephant Foundation to the National Parks Board, who have purchased the uniforms, equipment and fire arms for the game scouts. Additional funding of the Game Scout Training Project was received from the South African Department of Foreign Affairs and the South African Embassy in Lilongwe, Malawi.

Now that the scouts are equipped and trained and about to be deployed, it is going to require additional support to maintain them in the field, to maintain their skills and preparedness. It is hoped that further support from Shikar will be able to help the Rhino Protection Unit to function successfully.