



PHOTO BY: ED SAYER

Black Rhino Twashuka in North Luangwa National Park, Zambia.

The History of Rhinos in Zambia

By Felix Patton

Pitman 1934 reported that no evidence of White rhinos north of the Zambezi in historical times. Black rhinos were in urgent need of protection being killed for meat and the value of their horns with security hard in some habitats. There was a plentiful population in the Luangwa Valley, a wildlife area of some 63,000 sq km containing four national parks (NPs) and seven game management areas (GMAs), to the east of the river while the population was sparing to the west.

Rhinos became protected in 1946 and by 1952 the decline in the population was thought to be halted with some 350 individuals in the Luangwa Valley Game Reserve and Munyamadzi Controlled Area. Elsewhere there were only remnant populations of between six and 10.

Some areas were completely protected while in others a special licence was required for hunting, but by 1957 even this had been withdrawn. Key rhino areas were Kafue National Park, Mweru Marsh Game Reserve and the Luangwa Valley Game Reserves.

Exact rhino population data was not available but was thought to be at least 400-500 in Luangwa Valley and 130 in Kafue National Park in the late 1960s with some 20 rhinos in Mweru Marsh Game Reserve. Populations and their locations were distorted by tsetse control activities including the erection of fences, fly-around controls and some rhinos needing to be shot. As many as

50 rhinos a year were thought to be poached.

Permits to capture two alive for zoological gardens were issued in 1968. The high cost of a rhinoceros permit (K 400.00, = £200) brought a realisation of their value, resulting in heavier sentences for poaching—up to two years' imprisonment compared with the previous inadequate fines.

At the beginning of the 1970s, an estimated 4,000 to 12,000 rhinos still lived in Zambia. The country was, in 1980, home to the third largest population of Black rhino on the continent. In Zambia's main wildlife areas, such as the Luangwa Valley and the Kafue National Park, the black rhinoceros populations were stable and in some places even increasing. A breeding population of around 20 individuals survived in the Mweru Marsh Game Reserve area.

It became clear in 1979 that commercial poaching was drastically reducing the numbers of rhino in Luangwa Valley and the Zambian Government, through its National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the World Wildlife Fund, responded by setting up Save the Rhino Trust (SRT). Following a low intensity multi-species aerial survey covering North and South Luangwa NP and Luambe NP plus some adjacent GMA on a 2000-km flight path, intended primarily to count elephants, an estimate of 867 ± 250 rhinos was recorded. A high intensity

survey in just the 212 km² Nsefu sector of South Luangwa National Park yielded an estimate of 66 ± 29 rhinos.

By the mid-1980s, some 100,000 elephants and all rhinos had been killed by poachers. Civil and liberation wars were factors in the decimation of rhino population in Africa. The wars led to influx of refugees from many neighbouring countries. The refugees came with illegal firearms, which were used in killing wildlife. Efforts to save this charismatic and highly endangered animal through the late 1970s and early 1980s failed to stem the demand for its horn and the species was declared nationally extinct in 1998. Also since the 1970s, Zambia has had inadequate trained manpower and rhino management plans to guide the design and implementation of conservation strategies.

In 2003, Zambia formulated a national policy on rhinoceros management and rehabilitation. The policy provided guidelines and strength to the rhino conservation fraternity and a framework to guide the reintroduction of rhinos in Zambia's established private and state owned wildlife sanctuaries. The working paper indicated that political will had been lacking in rhino management, citing political patronage of those involved in the rhino horn trade and corruption within the law enforcement agencies.



Twatemwa and Twatasha, black rhino mother and calf in North Luangwa National Park.

PHOTO BY: ED SAYER

The Re-introduction of Black Rhino to Zambia

The North Luangwa Conservation Program (NLCP) was started during 1986 by the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) to support and strengthen the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA), enabling effective management of the park and surrounding Game Management Areas. FZS and ZAWA signed long-term management agreements and, after 17 years of support, wildlife numbers had increased and poaching was under control. Re-introduction of the black rhinoceros was an obvious next step in the conservation of the park.

ZAWA, FZS and South Africa's SANParks joined forces to organise a rhino exchange programme. The objective was to re-establish a viable, breeding, free-ranging population of black rhino (*Diceros bicornis minor*) in North Luangwa National Park in north-eastern Zambia. The effective project management area is almost 17,000 sq km including the Park and surrounding Game Management Areas. Important was security against poaching and proper park management in North Luangwa; a costly affair. Preparations included identifying a sanctuary, recruiting security personnel, training a rhino security team, and building staff houses, holding pens and the sanctuary fence.

Twenty rhinos were obtained from reserves in South Africa: Kruger National Park, Marakele National Park, Pilanesberg National Park and Great Fish River Reserve in the Eastern Cape. They were

flown in individual crates, in batches of five, to an airstrip in North Luangwa - 2 males:3 females in May 2003, 3 males:7 females in June 2006 and 2 males:3 females in May 2008.

The first five were released into a 55sq km fenced area with the next 10 into a 150 sq km sanctuary adjacent to the first. During March 2009, the fence separating rhinos released during 2003 and 2006 was removed. Survival of the rhinos was relatively high and no rhinos were poached. By January 2010 numbers increased with five births exceeding the three deaths. However, the release phase of the project was incomplete, because the number of surviving founders was less than the 20 required and most of the rhinos were confined to the fenced sanctuaries and not free-ranging.

The final five individuals needed to complete the founder population were introduced in May 2010 with four females and one male translocated from the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and Ithala Game Reserve in South Africa.

Today, the population stands at over 30, following nine births, in a 3000 sq km sanctuary split into 4 areas with an overall carrying capacity estimated at 40 to 45 rhinos. However the Project will only be deemed a success when the fences are removed and the rhino once more roams free in the Luangwa Valley, on Zambian soil.



White rhino mother and calf in Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park.

PHOTO BY: PETRA CAMPBELL

The introduction of white Rhinos to Zambia

In 1934 Captain Pitman reported that there was no evidence that White rhinos had inhabited Northern Rhodesia, (the pre-independence name for Zambia), north of the Zambezi river in historical times. In fact there was scant evidence to even suggest they had been in the area south of the Zambezi.

However in 1964, as part of a destocking project in Umfolozi Game Reserve, Zululand, South Africa, two male and two pregnant female white rhinos were delivered to Livingstone Game Park. Some records suggest that one pair went on to Kafue National Park but when the male died the female was moved back to Livingstone. In 1973, a pair from the Park was relocated to the Presidential Palace. Nonetheless by 1981 the population had risen to 13 but poaching saw their decline to six in 1985. The last one was killed in 1989.

In 1993, the Zambian government acquired six White rhinos from Sable Ranch in South Africa. One died and there were no conceptions leaving just 5 in 2001 all in Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park, Livingstone. This was reduced to two by 2005.

In January 2010, poachers shot these last two White rhinos, killing one and wounding the other,

the male Lewis. Later that year, in a deal brokered by Government through the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources, four White rhinos and 10 Black rhinos were obtained from South Africa in exchange for wetland species of antelopes destined for the Namibian government. A calf was born in August 2010 but it died but this was quickly followed by the birth of two female calves, one in December 2010 and the other in January 2011.

The rhinos are kept in the north of the 66 sq km Park under 24 hour a day monitoring utilising a rhino ranger force numbering 20. During daylight hours, the rhinos are physically observed while at night their GPS location is transmitted. The grass in the area is supplemented in times of shortage with hay and lucerne.

The new and soon to be opened Lusaka National Park received two White rhinos donated by the South African government as part of its ongoing re-stocking exercise. The fully fenced 46 sq km park is located south of Lusaka and is seen as central to tourism development. It is to be stocked with a minimum of 500 animals of different species, particularly antelopes, before its official opening.