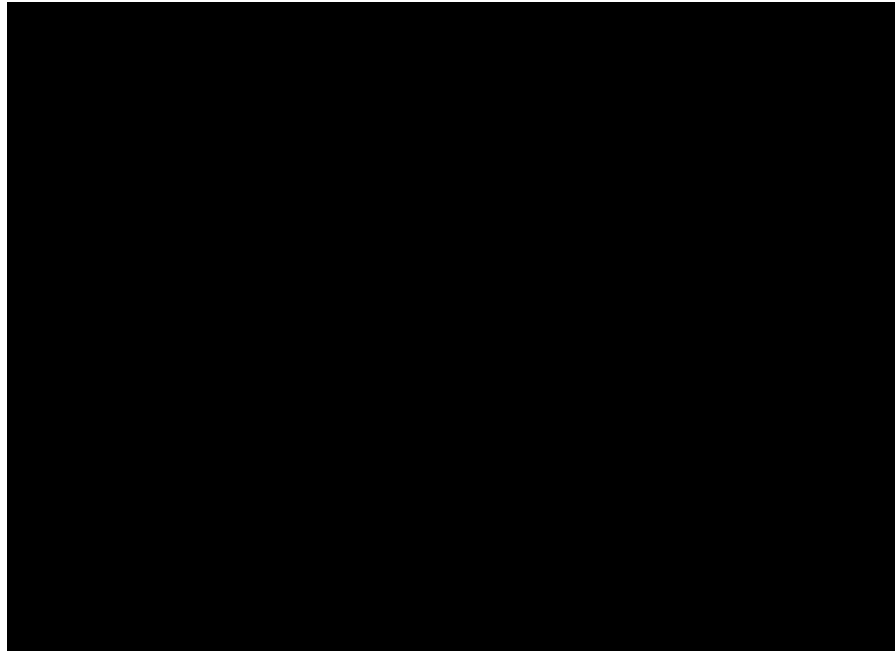


# Video: Roan Plotz is roaming with rhinos

BY: NICHOLAS PINNACCHIO  
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**AG sponsored researcher tracks critically endangered black rhinos through the hub of Africa's rhino heartland.**



AG Society sponsored researcher Roan Plotz talks about how he's using radio transmitters to track rhinos and study their vegetation preferences and the success of their calves.

THERE IS A CONCERN that despite fact that black rhino numbers have dropped by over 90 per cent in the last three generations, there may now be too many critically endangered black rhinos in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve in South Africa, says AG Society-sponsored researcher Roan Plotz. Anecdotal evidence collected from poachers by the reserve has suggested that rhino home ranges are getting bigger and calving periods longer, which usually indicates a population is struggling.

Equally, a repopulating program could be taking too many rhinos out, or poaching the main culprit. "There have been more problems recently with poaching, because the demand for horns has gotten so high in Asian countries, and the price so dear, that poachers can afford fly helicopters into parks to find rhinos," Roan says.

## Africa's oldest reserve, rife with rhinos

"Essentially I think we don't know enough about the ecology of the rhinos," says Roan who is tracking the rhinos to try to find out more. "They're very social and bonded to other individual rhinos, so it's also very hard to understand how taking other rhinos out affects them." The reserve has acted as the key base for both black and white rhino populations since the 1960s when central-southern black rhinos numbered as little as 100 individuals – all found in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi.

When numbers bottomed in the '60s, the reserve, which is the oldest in Africa, began a large-scale initiative to bolster their populations. They pioneered large animal capture techniques and meta-population (fencing off animals and transplanting small percentages to different areas), repopulating large swaths of southern Africa with rhinos.

There are now more than 1600 central-southern black rhinos. White rhino number also having bounced back, from a small population in the park to now more than 17000 across the southern part of the continent.

## Taking another step forward for African rhinos

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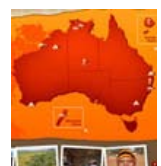


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"It's essentially one of the most successful large-animal conservation efforts in the world, and there is an argument to be made that if they hadn't developed the techniques they did in the park, none of the other rhino populations in Africa would have survived either," Roan says.

Because of the varied pressures on rhino numbers, in addition to conducting a Australia Geographic Society-sponsored study on the relationship between red-billed oxpeckers and black rhinos, Roan has been tracking female central-southern black rhinos (one of four sub species) trying to find out more about what affects their population success.

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