

HOW DID YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE MKOMAZI?

Mkomazi National Park is a sight for sore eyes. I tried to have no preconceptions before my visit but had an idea in my mind's eye from all the various fundraising applications and reports I had worked on. What I knew was how far Mkomazi had come: from a degraded Game Reserve, with local extinction of many species including rhinos, to how it stands today, as a National Park, brimming with wildlife. It neighbours Tsavo National Park on the Kenyan border, forming part of one of the largest protected ecosystems in Africa.

Lucy Boddam-Whetham | Former Deputy Director

I was nervously excited about spending time with the Fitzjohns. Tony is someone I have admired since I was young. I had worked closely with Lucy Fitzjohn, and was looking forward to spending time with her face-to-face. It was an absolute delight to get to know them both better. My partner Matt came along for the ride (and his maintenance background came in handy when explaining the various intricacies of fence work and replacement to me!). What impressed us the most was the Fitzjohns' practical approach. Fitz's boy-scout, no-nonsense philosophy is evident all around. Kisima Camp and Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary are well-oiled machines, run on pure dedication and hard work. All of the Fitzjohns' staff are local Tanzanians, many of whom have worked there for over 20 years. It was a privilege to see the many successes achieved at Mkomazi, though I still can't imagine what Mkomazi must have been like when they first arrived.

Many of the Tanzanian staff have worked at Mkomazi for over 20 years, and are mostly all self-taught. This is **Fred Ayo**, Workshop Manager. Every piece of equipment or vehicle is treated with TLC and its life is extended as far as possible.



ALL PICS MATT BROOKE UNLESS NOTED



Another important member of the team is **Lucy Fitzjohn**, who works tirelessly on all of the admin and fundraising at Mkomazi. During my visit we spent a lot of time working on the fundraising needs of the rhino work and plans for the future.



This aerial view shows the size of the Sanctuary and the incredibly straight fence lines. (This shot was taken during a flight whilst I had one eye on the scenery and the other on the sick-bag I was clutching in my hand - I won't divulge if it was needed or not!)



The best news whilst we were there was that the most recent additions, two of three rhinos that had been brought to Mkomazi from Dvur Kralove Zoo in 2009, had successfully mated and produced a male calf named Hilla. The calf was barely a month old when we were there and was well hidden in the undergrowth, but here is a photo of proud dad Jamie, standing watch over his new family.



Another source of inspiration: this photo shows the view from the hilltop where the EEP classroom is positioned. The rhino skull in the foreground is a poignant reminder of how far Mkomazi has come.



We are currently fundraising to be able to purchase a lifting crane truck that will enable additional population management at the Sanctuary, which is split into five sections. In order to maximise breeding success and genetic diversity of the population, the breeding pairs will be rotated and some could even be moved to other locations within the Park.

The rest of the rhinos continue to thrive, and water shortages within Mkomazi sometimes require the water pans to be topped up via the water bowser kindly funded by Chester Zoo. (Mkomazi does mean 'no water', after all.)



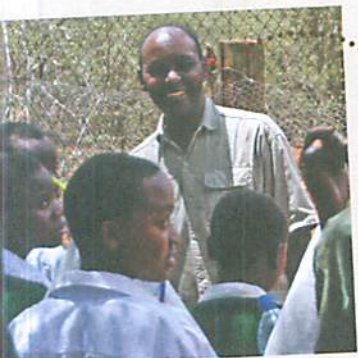
One of the biggest funding needs at the moment is the replacement of the Sanctuary fence. The poles are coming to the end of their 12-15 year lifespan. Many are rotten like these ones and need replacing.



It's not just about the rhinos at Mkomazi, there is also a successful breeding programme for the endangered African wild dog.



Thanks to funders including Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund, Chester Zoo and The Bower Trust, last year, Mkomazi was able to replace approx. 10km of fence line (so far) with a mixture of wooden and metal poles. This is back-breaking work for the team, but it is vital that the integrity of the Sanctuary is not compromised.



I am sure the children find **Elisaria's** smile and enthusiasm infectious and inspiring.

Mkomazi also has its own Environmental Education Programme (EEP) called *Rafiki wa Faru* (meaning friend of the rhino); avid readers of *The Horn* might remember reading about it previously. The Operations Manager, **Elisaria Nnko** also acts as the Environmental Education Officer and is seen here explaining how the breeding programme works to the school group.



Tony Fitzjohn is not just a conservationist, but has also had to turn his hand to being a vehicle mechanic, pilot, diplomat, road and fence builder, teacher, community liaison advisor... the list goes on and on.