
Wildlife and Security

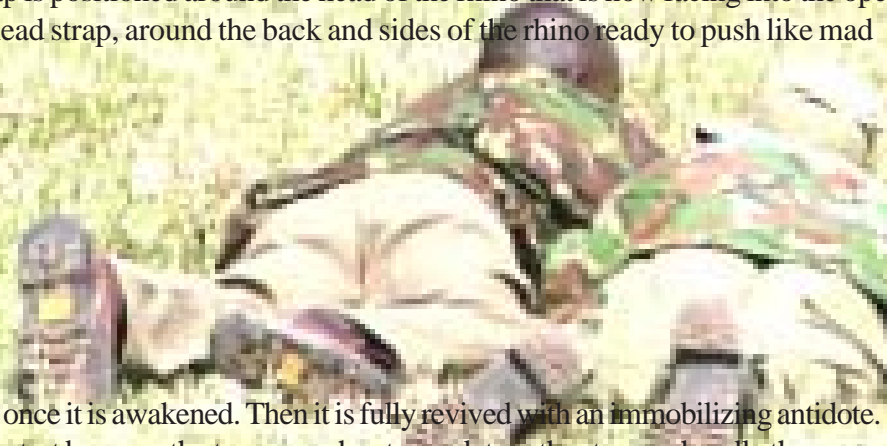
East Africa's Largest Black Rhino Move.

Imagine darting an adult wild black rhino on foot from just a few meters away! What if it charges you and there are no trees? What if you dart it and it runs off into thick bush and you cannot find it? What if you are trying to dart one particular rhino out of a group of four animals, there will then be four sensitive noses, eight ears and eight eyes on the alert for your approach? What if communications between the ground team and the aerial team fail at a critical moment, say when you are 25 meters from the rhino and in thick bush? Rhino captures present all sorts of varying problems, but first the safety of the rhino as well as the capture team personnel is paramount importance. It is therefore very necessary to plan accordingly, with careful attention to detail, when undertaking an operation of this nature. Your problems are compounded by the fact that you are interfering with a critically endangered animal, it is a dangerous animal especially when pursued on foot and lastly, in this case, you are not just catching 1, but a total of 32 rhino!



In the largest known black rhino translocation in East and Central Africa, 31 black rhino and one white rhino were moved into Ol Pejeta Conservancy and Ol Jogi Ranch's; Pyramid Rhino Sanctuary (27 and 4 respectively). The first phase of the operation was to improve the genetic gene pool of black rhino in Ol Jogi by moving out four animals (two male and two female) and replacing these with another four of the same sex from Solio Game Reserve and Ol Pejeta in a swapping exercise. The second and largest phase was aimed at stocking the newly expanded Ol Pejeta Conservancy with 27 animals from Solio Game Reserve and at the same time to de-stock their over population of black rhino (three of these animals went to Ol Jogi) and the third phase of one white rhino from Lewa to Ol Pejeta.

In brief detail, the process that took place is to locate a rhino from the air and then guide the small darting team in on the ground using radio communications. If the rhino was positively identified by the sanctuary ranger as a candidate then an approach on foot, taking into account wind direction and bush cover, to a dartable distance of between 20 to 40 meters was made. Once the rhino was darted the aircraft, must at all costs, maintain a visual contact with the animal until it has the full effect of the immobilizing drug and at the same time to guide the ground capture team to the recumbent animal as fast as possible for stabilization and loading. The ground team consists of two Land Cruisers, one lorry with a rhino crate, one tractor to pull the crate on and off the lorry via ramp and a steel cable and finally a capture crew of at least 15 men that includes veterinary personnel, drivers and capture hands. The rhino is blindfolded first and then the vet quickly stabilizes the recumbent rhino, a radio transmitter was fitted to the horns of most the rhino and all were ear notched for individual identification purposes, thus making it easier for post release monitoring at the respective release sites. At the same time the crate is off loaded and positioned so that the rhino can be moved into the crate. This procedure can be tricky but often exciting! A heavy strap is positioned around the head of the rhino that is now facing into the open door of the crate. Capture crew are positioned on the head strap, around the back and sides of the rhino ready to push like mad when given the call.



The rhino is then given a tranquilizer injection to calm it once it is awakened. Then it is fully revived with an immobilizing antidote. The rhino is simply woken up! Now the fun and games start because the team now has to work together to manhandle the now standing rhino into the crate! Once into the crate, blindfolds, straps and ropes are removed. The crate is then pulled back onto the lorry for onward transport to the release site. All the rhino were "free released" on Ol Pejeta and Ol Jogi. This too is a delicate process where the crate is off loaded again from the lorry, all vehicles and people must move some distance away leaving just two men on top of the crate to open the doors for release. It is critical that noise is kept to an absolute minimum and thus no disturbance is caused to the already distressed rhino. Post release monitoring has shown that these animals have settled better than we could have hoped.

at
of
k
s of
is a

to
e
ne
m
e
s
of

n
e
ce

