



A right royal encounter at Chester Zoo

Just before Prince William waved off the Port Lympne rhinos, Semu Pallangyo, the Rhino Sanctuary Manager at Mkomazi, met Queen Elizabeth II.

Cathy Dean | Director

The Queen was visiting Chester Zoo as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. Dignitaries were invited, bins removed from sight, and key field staff from programmes supported by the Zoo brought over to the UK. Among these was Semu, who has worked for years in the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary, accompanied by programme manager Tony Fitzjohn. The photograph above says it all really.

We asked Lucy Fitzjohn what Semu, and his colleagues back home, made of his encounter.

“Semu was absolutely overwhelmed and lost for words about the whole trip. He has done things that most people living in England have never done. So he doesn't really know how to describe it apart from saying how special it was. He is now back at work dealing with the tsetse flags for the incoming rhino. All creatures great and small. The other guys in camp said 'Aisee' which roughly translates as 'I say'. They were pretty amazed too!

I think the Queen is a well-known peripheral figure in their lives and they were amazed that someone from their village had met her. The British High Commissioner wants to put the photo up on the BHC website for Tanzania!

Rhino media stars

The complex logistics of a rhino translocation were filmed in June by a BBC news team who became rhino lovers – despite the unusual in-flight entertainment. The three jet-setting rhinos arrived safely in Tanzania from Port Lympne Wild Animal Park in Kent, thanks to the Aspinall Foundation, Tusk Trust and the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust, in a DHL cargo plane (which hopefully had a good scrub out afterwards).

Tira Shubart | Patron

Five-year-old Grumeti, Zawadi and Monduli were trucked from Kilimanjaro Airport to secure bomas in Mkomazi National Park to recover before their release. But international rhino celebrities, especially ones waved off by Prince William, can't expect the quiet life.

Tanzanian BBC correspondent Hassan Mhelela and I joined our London colleagues and, in the best media tradition, we started

extraordinary tale of Mkomazi from a poacher-depleted wasteland to the newest Tanzanian National Park. It's taken several decades of sheer tenacity and hard work by Tony and Lucy Fitzjohn and their supporters worldwide, including Save the Rhino.

In between the live broadcasts, we would approach the bomas and gaze with wonder at the jet-lagged rhinos

a few feet away. Armed guards patrol the electrified, alarmed secure Sanctuary regularly. They proudly described their work to Hassan.



“Whenever we hit turbulence on the rhino's 757 cargo flight, a sea of rhino pee flooded down the plane towards us”

broadcasting from a rocky outcrop above the rhinos.

Meanwhile, under an acacia tree, Chris Jackson of Getty Images, having survived a ride on the back of Tony Fitzjohn's quad bike, was satelliting his photos to the world's press.

The rhinos were in demand for live interviews by a dozen BBC programmes. As the rhinos were strictly 'no comment', BBC Environment correspondent Jeremy Cooke and *Focus on Africa* TV correspondent Hassan Mhelela interviewed rhino hero Tony Fitzjohn about the newest additions to the black rhino herd. Fitz detailed the

Rhinos just love the camera! (above) Being filmed by the BBC and Tira with an inquisitive rhino

Finally, Fitz invited cameraman Matt Goddard into the Sanctuary for up close and personal rhino encounters. A few minutes later a rhino was charging our vehicle – or was it? Fitz hit the brakes, and leapt out. We held our breath. The rhino stopped, then gently approached Tony. The young male politely accepted some carrots from his friend and obligingly turned to face Matt's camera. It was the best kind of reality programme.