

READY AND WILLING TO PROTECT KENYA'S RHINOS

'So when are Borana's rhino's arriving?' It's a question I am asked on a daily basis. It's a question I have answered in a multitude of ways: 'Soon...' 'We're just about there...' 'We've done all we can...' There are only so many ways that one can answer that question without becoming repetitive. The fact remains that, three years on from embarking in earnest on the project, we don't have any rhino on Borana.

Sam Taylor | Chief Conservation Officer, Borana Conservancy

Why? There's still an urgent need for habitat. Despite poaching losses, there is still a surplus in the National Parks and conservancies that protect rhino. The establishment of a contiguous ecosystem between Lewa and Borana is still as pertinent now as it was three years ago. We have received our formal approval to receive rhino from the Kenyan Wildlife Service (KWS), having passed exhaustive ecological and security assessments. So why the delay?

It's nobody's fault. Our timing has been spectacularly poor. There has been a restructuring within the police that has delayed our application for Police Reservist status that will give us the prosecutory powers and firearms needed to deter this recent tide in poaching. The Kenyan general election in March 2013 understandably diverted government attentions away from conservation agendas and more towards the political chopping and changing that surrounds such events. There has been the retirement of our long-standing director of the KWS and the resultant stall of operations that always follows when an established leader and mentor moves aside for another. Then there

has been the unprecedented spike in rhino poaching at levels not seen for decades.

Borana's infrastructure is in place. It has been now for over a year. Gatehouses, fences, new roads have been continually developed for three years. We have the rangers, now in numbers competitive or better per acre than any other private conservancy with rhino.

They are well equipped – thanks in part to

Save the Rhino's unwavering support towards our role in the bigger picture. Our systems are in place, and working well. Right now we are a rhino sanctuary without rhino.

Yet we are not standing idle, waiting for this to happen. Morale is still high amongst the men, despite this long wait. And the reason? It's the men themselves. The men, whose continued determination has been catalysed by the on-going training and 'moyo' (pride) being instilled in them by Pete

Newland and Batian Craig's training outfit 51 degrees Limited – towards which Save the Rhino has contributed funds.

Our (un)armed team has been on three month-long tactical training camps with Pete, not to mention additional commanders' cadres and medical courses. Pete's training has transformed the men. They are motivated, disciplined and skilled in tactics, first-aid, bush craft, map reading and operating with aircraft, vehicles and dogs. They have been operating with men from Ol Pejeta and Lewa, helping in standing night ops, and competing in the yearly march and shoot competitions. We may not yet have rhino yet, but we're in it together with those who do.

At the time of writing, our team is training with Pete here on Borana, lying in ambush, makeshift wooden guns at the ready to protect the rhino that will soon be the entire focus of our lives here. They are 'camo'd up' – almost impossible to see – only broad, proud smiles occasionally give them away. We'll take that though. After all it was another man with his back up against the wall – Winston Churchill – who once said: 'I like a man who grins when he fights!'

This training from 51 degrees has been made possible by funding from Save the Rhino. It's keeping us sharp. And, above all, it means that when I'm next asked when the rhino are coming, I'll reply, 'It doesn't matter. We're as ready as anyone.'

Good luck!

As well as wishing Borana a speedy arrival of its rhinos, we would like to say a big Good Luck to **Nicholas Nangunye**, who works as head horse-riding guide for Borana, and who is running the London Marathon for Save the Rhino. At the time of writing (2 March), Nicholas has so far raised a wonderful £8,750! Enjoy the race Nicholas!

Right now Borana is a rhino sanctuary without rhino but the ranger's morale is still high

Covered with grass and branches, rangers aim to remain undetected from wildlife

BORANA CONSERVANCY

