

Borana's wait is finally over

In previous issues of *The Horn*, Borana has reported on its anticipation and tireless preparations to receive rhinos on its land. We are delighted to report that on 26 August 2013, the first resident black rhino on Borana Conservancy for over 50 years barrelled out of his crate and stormed off to acquaint himself with his new home.

Sam Taylor | Chief Conservation Officer, Borana Conservancy

It wasn't the smoothest of releases, and the appropriately-named 'Songa' ('move' in Kiswahili) disappeared into a dense thicket, huffing and puffing with the indignity of his eviction from Lewa. Borana was now the world's newest rhino sanctuary.

This was the culmination of 15 years of planning and preparation towards a collaborative rhino programme between Borana and the already highly successful rhino conservation efforts on Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. The process had been long and complicated; every facet of Borana's infrastructure and security was scrutinised to ensure we were completely prepared for the daunting task of protecting this critically endangered species.

While the onslaught of rhino poaching in recent years has been well documented, the need for habitat is every bit

as pertinent. Kenya's black rhino population remains roughly stable, with poaching

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losses negated by the births. This balance is changing though, as those conservancies

that hold out against this poaching epidemic edge ever-nearer to reaching their carrying capacity. The birth-rates would start to decline as intra-species competition escalated in over-crowded habitat and, with that, the poaching losses would start to take precedence over the births, and numbers quickly slide towards the extinction of the species in Kenya.

Eleven carefully selected candidates came from Lewa, and a further 10 from Lake Nakuru National Park, another haven for rhino under pressure. After Songa made his reluctant and belligerent arrival, the releases came thick and fast. The Lewa candidates arrived constantly throughout the week, each de-horned and a telemetry transmitter placed in the stump of the posterior horn. The Nakuru animals arrived late at night, similarly de-horned and tagged; their journey somewhat longer.

The Nakuru animals appeared to settle quicker. Perhaps the tranquillity of a moon-lit release allowed for a more sedate entry into their new home. Many moved into an area of good browse and water that night and have moved no further.

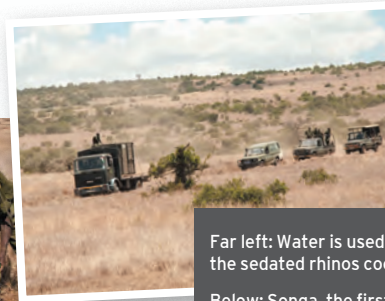
The Lewa animals were more inquisitive, covering large distances before finally deciding where to settle down. We were concerned that many of these animals would try to rush back to Lewa and scouts were stationed on the boundaries in 12-hour shifts, but this did not happen and so far there has been very little pressure on the peripheries.

As I write, all the animals have been found by the scouts who are buzzing with excitement. The hilly terrain on Borana allows for excellent use of telemetry, and the night security can be deployed efficiently as a result of this. Reassuringly, the rhino appear to have quickly settled down into their

areas and already seem to have decided on their home.

The range of emotions at seeing these incredible animals finally on Borana

is difficult to describe. Excitement, certainly. Trepidation at the daunting challenge



Far left: Water is used to keep the sedated rhinos cool

Below: Songa, the first black rhino translocated from Lewa to Borana

facing us to protect them. Wonder at seeing our familiar surroundings suddenly added to by these magnificent animals. But the most over-riding emotion is relief, and that is what this operation has been about. Relief for submissive male rhinos who now had an equal opportunity to express their fecundity, relief for the over-burdened sanctuaries in Kenya, and relief for the planners of the Borana-Lewa programme who could now see their efforts after many long years of planning finally come into fruition.

Grants

Our very grateful thanks to USFWS RTCF, which awarded \$25,383 to the costs of helicopter and fixed-wing hire for the animals coming from Lake Nakuru National Park and telemetry equipment. Save the Rhino contributed \$4,116 from our own core funds to the translocations.



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