

# HOW DO RHINOS ADAPT TO NEW SURROUNDINGS?

The Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary is a sort of mini-United Nations of rhinos. There are translocated rhinos from South Africa, Czech Republic, England and Germany, as well as home-bred Tanzanian ones.

Lucy Fitzjohn | George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust

**T**he rhinos that arrived from South Africa were all wild-caught and in some cases ferocious. In fact, vet Dr Peter Morkel thought that one female (Charlie) was one of the most aggressive he had ever handled.

Charlie has adapted well to Mkomazi, but is as aggressive as ever, even hospitalising one of her trackers, Evans. He is probably one of the best rhino trackers in Tanzania and is well used to her. Charlie is used to Evans too, since each rhino has to be sighted every day. However, one morning Evans came round a corner very quietly and startled her

with her young calf. She got a shock, rushed

in Czech, and her ears were twitching back and forth, listening to the familiar sounds. When Deborah gave birth, she walked the calf fairly close to the vehicle so that we could see, then turned her back on us and disappeared into the acacia woodland.

The Port Lympne Wild Animal Park rhinos from England are flourishing in Mkomazi and their individual characteristics are coming to the fore. Monduli, the bull, met one of the bulls from the Dvur Kralove translocation through the fences that separate them and although they displayed a bit of aggression towards each other, one backed off so it was nothing serious.

Then there is Jabu, a young male from Dvur Kralove Zoo, who will soon be paired with a female. At the moment his main companion is a lunatic male buffalo, an orphan given to us some years ago. The two of them make an unlikely couple with the buffalo acting as an additional security guard!

The Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary is closed to all tourism, leaving the rhinos to breed with as little interference as possible. The trackers are well used to each of their characteristics and when schoolchildren visit as part of our environmental education programme, *Rafiki wa Faru*, they are keen to hear stories from the trackers about each of the different rhino personalities. Perhaps some of these students will be part of a new generation to help protect these rhinos in the future.

## Grants

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 Many thanks to USFWS RTCF, which awarded \$43,975 for a digital radio system for Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary. Save the Rhino is giving \$12,489 from core funds towards the same project.

Right: The local community gathers to learn about conservation at Mkomazi

Main: A lunatic orphaned buffalo provides extra security against poachers!

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past him flicking him with her horn as she went and he ended up in hospital for over a month with a punctured lung. The other adult resident rhinos are all impressively fearsome, charging any vehicle with great speed and agility.

The zoo-bred rhinos have all adapted well to life in Mkomazi. Their voracious appetite for the Mkomazi browse was evident from the day they arrived. Deborah and Jamie (from the Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic) and their calf are rarely seen, seeking the security of the bush very early on with only their trackers regularly seeing them. Even the smallest sound of a footstep sends them rushing off in the opposite direction. That said, Deborah still has positive human memories; when Dr Dana Holeckova of Dvur Kralove Zoo came to visit after the rhinos had been here for a year, she talked to Deborah

