

WHO ARE YOU CALLING ANTISOCIAL?

Almost any text on black rhinos will say they are solitary, antisocial, ill-tempered beasts. While some individuals live up to the ill-tempered claim, the rest is quite misleading and most people who have worked with black rhinos long-term know they are more social than portrayed. Young animals particularly benefit from companionship, as our experience with poaching orphans has taught us.

Natasha Anderson | Rhino Monitoring Coordinator, Lowveld Rhino Trust

Twelve-month-old Bebrave was found fending a pride of lions off his poached mother's body in August 2011. The body of his 3-year-old sister, Benice, was also found. The poachers had opened fire on them as a group, killing Benice at the scene and wounding the mother Beknown, who died hours later.

Fortunately Bebrave suffered no gunshot injuries and only a few minor scratches from the lions. He was captured for hand-raising because

and was also captured for hand-raising. Fortunately the eland, called Sparkle, grew quickly in body size and was soon large enough to pen with the young rhino as a companion. Bebrave (BB for short) and Sparkle spent their days sleeping, browsing and enjoyed playfully pitching their growing strength against each other.

In February 2012, another victim of poaching came our way. A little 7-month-old female black rhino was found running with a young adult cow known as Liveshow. Instantly the rhino monitors knew there was a problem, because Liveshow was not yet five years old and the calf running with her had to be her little sister, Long Playing (LP). The body of their poached mother, CD, was found a few days later.

LP came with an entirely different attitude to BB. She seemed to know that humans had played a significant role in her predicament and was not forgiving anything, even with copious bottles of milk consumed over many months. LP was annoyed

by anyone even venturing near her enclosure and gave a swift pounding to anyone foolish enough to venture in - even if it was to rescue her from a snake.

Having successfully released seven black rhinos into the wild previously, we knew it was best if we raised the two rhinos together. Even though BB was twice the size of LP, they were gradually introduced to each other and finally the gate between their pens was opened. Unfortunately,

LP seemed to hold some grudge against other rhinos too and she proceeded to beat BB until he withdrew to the far corner in dismay. Overnight, BB's friendly disposition won out and BB and LP were then rarely seen apart. Sparkle took the demotion in his stride and accepted that BB had a new best friend.

BB, LP and Sparkle have all been released back into the bush where they belong. BB and LP are still living together and are anticipated to do so for many years, if the previously released orphans are any guide. The last released group are still together and they are now over five years old.

Grants

The Beit Trust has given £43,000 for a new digital radio system in Bubye Valley, one of the Lowveld Conservancies. We gave £4,000 from our Operation Stop Poaching Now appeal for a task force to review failed prosecutions in Zimbabwe and to print more manuals into crime scene investigations and prosecutions. Dublin Zoo has given another €5,000 to the LRT. Thanks to all!

Left: BB playing with Sparkle the Eland

Centre: BB and LP playing in the bush

Right: LP showing her attitude

Main: BB with his beloved tyre

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black rhinos suckle and need protection from predators till they are nearer two.

Bebrave settled remarkably quickly into captive life and never missed a chance to greet anyone visiting his enclosure. He was given a large tractor tyre to play with, which he slept with, would roll around in it and throw it in his wallow. The tyre offered some relief from the loneliness and boredom of being held in a pen by himself.

Not long after Bebrave was orphaned, an eland calf suffered the same fate

