

# Kenya's rhino sanctuary is an example for Africa

After 30 years of devastation under the guns of poachers, Africa's rhinoceros population appears to be stabilising. Kenya is playing a leading role in conservation efforts and expects to double its own rhino numbers by end of the decade, write PETER NJENGA and JENNY SHEPHERD.

For more than three decades, the Craig family of Kenya has run a 16,000-hectares dairy ranch in the country's semi-arid North Eastern Province near the border with Somalia.

It's a wild part of the country, but the Craigs have managed to tame it and today have a herd of more than 2,500 cattle on their farm at Lewa Downs.

Sharing the land with them, in remarkable conservation venture, is a growing family of black rhinoceroses.

The Lewa Downs rhinos have been saved from the poachers' guns by the dedication of the Craigs, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and wealthy English expatriate Anna Martz, who has played a key role in setting up one of Africa's most successful private wildlife sanctuaries.

With the help of Lewa Downs and other sanctuaries across the country, Kenya expects to double its rhino population by the end of the decade.

Thirty years ago, Kenya boasted several thousand rhinos. But poachers, hunting the animal for its horn, a supposed aphrodisiac sold widely in Asian nations, have taken a heavy toll.

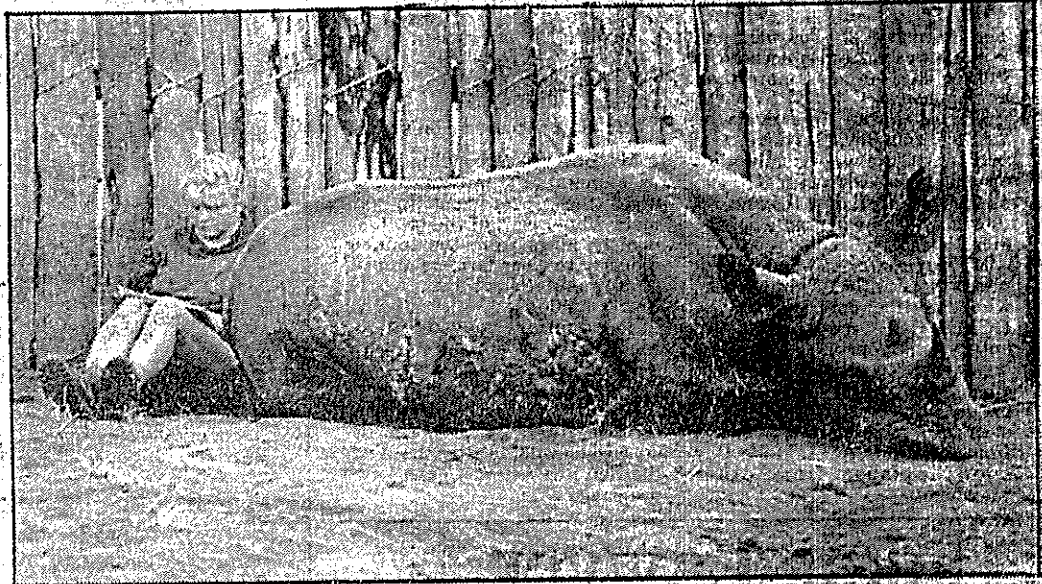
A recent census showed that Kenya today has between 370 and 400 rhinos, 285 of which live in heavily guarded private and Government-owned sanctuaries.

According to the Kenya Wildlife Services, however, rhino numbers have maintained an annual five per cent growth rate since 1984. This is expected to improve over the remainder of the decade to give a total rhino population of about 800 by the year 2000.

Similar conservation efforts elsewhere in the continent give encouragement that the African rhino can be saved from extinction.

In 1960, there were approximately 65,000 black rhinos in Africa. Today, only about 4,000 survive.

"There is no room for complacency," said Rick Weyerhaeuser, WWF programme officer for Eastern and Southern Africa. "We have turned the corner, however, and I think we can win."



A visitor to a Kenyan rhino sanctuary relaxes and reads a book next to the animal poachers love to kill because of its single horn. Kenya's rhino sanctuaries are an example for Africa.

Conservationists worldwide have hailed the success of the Lewa Downs sanctuary.

"It's a remarkable venture," said Holly Dublin, a WWF scientific officer based in Nairobi.

The Craig family - headed by father David and son Ian - converted part of their ranch into a sanctuary in 1989 after they were approached by Martz, a dedicated conservationist who until 1984 had spent most of her life in Ghana with her businessman husband.

Martz is reported to have put more than \$500,000 of her own money into the Lewa Downs sanctuary, which is protected by a solar-powered electric fence and 20 armed rangers who maintain a round-the-clock vigil against poachers.

Eleven black rhinos and one male white rhino were translocated to the sanctuary in late 1989 and more recently three female white rhinos were brought in to breed with the single male.

So far, six black calves have been born and three more are imminent.

In addition to the rhinos, the 3,000-hectares Lewa Downs sanctuary also provides protection for elephants, giraffes, eland, zebras, oryxes, buffaloes, lions and leopards.

Now supported by WWF funds, the sanctuary is operated as part of the Kenya Rhino Action Plan and is managed by wildlife expert Francis Deyer, whose family own a ranch in the

nearby Ngare Ndare area.

Martz lives modestly in a small cabin at Lewa Downs and spends much of her day tracking the rhinos and studying their behaviour.

"She literally lives with the creatures and does all sorts of work such as taking them for walks and spraying them with water to keep them cool in the hot season," said Dublin.

Robert Brett, Nairobi-based head of the Rhino Action Plan, sees Lewa Downs as the ideal model for other rhino sanctuaries which have been established in Kenya in recent years.

For the moment, the Rhino Action Plan is concentrating efforts on breeding animals in fenced sanctuaries. When numbers have been built up sufficiently, said Brett, emphasis will be shifted to re-stocking areas in the wild that decades ago supported huge rhino populations.

Kenya currently has six fenced rhino sanctuaries, including one in Nairobi National Park and one at Ngulia, deep in the heart of the renowned Taavo National Park. Two others are partly fenced.

In the wild, Kenya rhinos today are mostly found in the Masai Mara and Amboseli National Parks, near the border with Tanzania. They are monitored by air and ground patrols at an annual cost of \$300,000.

Although the conservation effort was frustrated when poachers killed five white rhinos at a sanctuary in the northern Meru National Park in 1989, the action

plan over all is proving an outstanding success with nearly 90 rhinos born in the various sanctuaries between 1986 and 1990.

Kenya Wildlife Services director Richard Lenkey has commended sanctuary owners for the efforts and has pledged that rhino poachers "will continue to be hunted down in their hideouts."

WWF officials in Geneva report that anti-poaching measures in Namibia and Zimbabwe "also seem to be having positive effects".

Following Kenya's example, Zimbabwe has launched a five-year programme to establish fully protected rhino sanctuaries, with nearly \$2 million in funding from the British-based Beit Trust.

Another success story has been reported from Zaire's Garamba National Park, home to the world's last remaining population of the Northern species of the white rhinos.

At one time, the park supported a population of about 1,000 rhinos but by 1984 poachers had reduced the number to 15.

Six years ago a rhino protection programme was launched with support from the WWF, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) and the Frankfurt Zoological Society in Germany.

The result: poachers are being kept at bay, the park today has 26 rhinos and hopes are high that the species will be saved from extinction.

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