

SEBAKWE BLACK RHINO TRUST

JANUARY 1996

NEWS LETTER

Editor: John Gripper

RAPID REACTION UNIT

The Midlands Conservancy has formed a rapid reaction unit. The unit consists of nine trained guards and is available to respond to any security emergency within the Conservancy.

The unit has been trained at the Rhino Rescue training centre under the control of Colonel Lionel Dyke. It has been managed by Kevin Burke and is based at his Circle G ranch.

The Trust gave financial support for the training, wages and equipping of this unit. This support will continue in 1996 as we will contribute to the running costs and the salaries of the unit. Capital expenditure on items such as accommodation, transport, and equipment, such as boots, rucksacks, sleeping bags, water bottles and uniforms will also be part of the Trust's contribution.

NATURE'S CRUELTY

We have received some very sad news from Anna Merz in Kenya. Anna manages the Ngaare Sergio Rhino Sanctuary at Lewa Downs in Kenya.

She was pleased to report the birth of a new black rhino earlier this year. The new rhino was a male and was named Samuel. The birth was even more pleasing because the mother, Samia, had been hand reared from 1 day old by Anna.

Unfortunately, both mother and calf were found dead at the end of November. Apparently they had been chased by a bull rhino and had fallen over a cliff in their panic to escape.

NATIONAL PARKS SHAKE-UP

A new Minister of the Environment and Tourism, Mr. Chen Chimutengwende, was appointed in May 1995 to replace Dr. Herbert Muerewa following his promotion to the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The Permanent Secretary was also replaced at the same time. These changes have been followed by a major reorganisation of staff at National Parks.

The Director of National Parks, Mr. W. Nduku, and one of the two Deputy Directors, Mr. Rowan Martin, were both suspended indefinitely. Their suspension is due to alleged corruption during the 1992 drought. Charges that they received payments for the translocation of elephants are being investigated. The other Deputy Director, Mr. George Pangetti, has been moved to another post in the Ministry.

Mr. Willis Makombe was appointed acting Director of National Parks and this has resulted in a number of changes. The research programmes have been halted as have all of the translocation projects. No movement of animals or exports are now permitted without a special written permit that has to be personally signed by the Minister.

Some senior staff, such as Drew Conybree and Brian Childs, have left National Parks. Raoul du Toit will no longer be involved with the Midlands Conservancy and this responsibility will be transferred to Senior Ranger Geoffreys Shumbayaonda.

These widespread changes have caused uncertainty and frustration amongst the staff. There has been a loss of technical expertise and experience. The rhino protection programmes of translocation and dehorning have been stopped. Rhino Rescue's training team, under the control of Colonel Lionel Dyke, has been disbanded; the distribution of the Self Loading Rifles sent out for the guards has also been stopped.

In a meeting with the new Minister of the Environment and Tourism, The Trust was assured that the present policy of equal distribution of Black Rhino between State land and private conservancies would continue. He did not foresee any special problems for the conservancies which had established integrated farming and wildlife management.

Recently Dr. Mike Kock has been given permission to start darting and fitting radio collars for the rhino at Sinamatella Camp in Hwange.

MIDLANDS CONSERVANCY AGM

NEW ARRIVALS

The Annual General Meeting of the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy was held at Dunlop Ranch on Monday 4th December 1995.

The following new Officers were elected :

Chairman	-	Arnie Alcock
Vice-Chairman	-	Bob Swift
Secretary	-	Barbara Small
Rhino Monitor	-	Eleanor Lowe
Coordinator	-	Pierre Favier

The new Chairman, Arnie Alcock, is a highly respected rancher in the Kwe Kwe district outside the Conservancy. He has been elected as an independent Chairman.

A number of matters were discussed during the meeting and it was decided that, in future, committee meetings would be open to any member who wanted to attend. The draft report on the habitat and the carrying capacity, following the survey by Richard Emslie, was considered and comments have been forwarded to him for inclusion in the full report when it is published. Recent changes in National Parks and the Government's policy for wildlife and conservation were subject to much discussion. Security, the rapid reaction team, removal of internal fencing and disciplinary measures to ensure compliance with the Conservancy's decisions also produced lively debate.

1995 has been an exciting year for births with four new arrivals recorded in the Conservancy (excluding Iwaba Estates).

Rebecca, on Moreena ranch, had a calf in June. Crumple, who is on Chinyika ranch, had a male calf born in August. On Circle G ranch, Lundi calved May and Seniorita produced her calf in October.

There have been no rhino deaths recorded. With 33 rhino at the start of the year, this provides a population increase of 12%. The target figure is 5% net annual increase.

This is excellent news and confirms our faith that the Midlands Conservancy can show good breeding results and will make an important contribution to the preservation of these magnificent animals.

CITES 1997 MEETING

Zimbabwe may not host the forthcoming 1997 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) meeting. The venue may be moved to a more neutral country and Israel has been suggested. The reason for this potential change is the Zimbabwe policy on elephants. Zimbabwe will need to demonstrate that they have sound environmental policies regarding elephant utilisation.

Both elephants and rhino are listed on Appendix 1 of CITES as being endangered species. For Appendix 1 species, no trade is permitted in animals or their products. Zimbabwe believes that elephants should be downgraded to Appendix 2. This would allow for a limited trade in ivory and elephant products. Critics suggest that this would encourage a resurgence in poaching.

Elephants were included on Appendix 1 in 1990 in order to restrict poaching. Zimbabwe is a founder member of the Southern African Centre for Ivory Marketing (SACIM) which wants the trade ban lifted and proposes sustainable utilisation of elephants.

Zimbabwe has 70,000 elephants and the population is increasing by 5% a year. It is claimed that the overpopulation coupled with recent droughts is threatening areas such as Hwange National Park.

22,000 elephants are currently in the Park and this number needs to be reduced. Elephant damage to trees is clearly evident and widespread. The Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe has spent more than Z\$ 500,000 drilling boreholes and building and constructing water points in Hwange during 1995.

There has been no culling of elephants since 1990 but this controversial issue is a major subject for discussion. In April 1995, the Government offered 5,000 elephants for sale. The Government also hold a stockpile of ivory estimated to be worth Z\$ 200 million.

An elephant count is currently being undertaken in Southern African States. The count is funded by a grant of Z\$7.3 million from the European Union. The objective is to coordinate and standardise elephant censuses in the region.