


# RHINO RETURN TO SAMBURU

## A FIRST FOR A COMMUNITY CONSERVANCY

*The first community-owned and operated Black rhino sanctuary in East Africa has opened its doors. For the first time in 25 years, Black rhino are once again roaming alongside the Samburu, Borana and Rendille people of northern Kenya. It is hoped the Sanctuary will not only nurture Kenya's population of the critically endangered species, but also provide local people with jobs, increased security and tourism revenue.*

PHOTO BY: IAN CRAIG



The Sera Rhino Sanctuary is prime black rhino habitat.





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**One of the rhino from Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is safely loaded into the transportation crate.**

**T**here is a generation of young warriors in Samburu which has only ever heard of the rhino in stories passed down from their grandparents. Up until the early 1970s, the land they call home held significant populations of Black rhino – who would have peacefully shared the plains with livestock herders. The last individual in the area was shot 25 years ago. This marked the end of a long and unrestricted hunting and poaching campaign that wiped out an entire regional population.

The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) has partnered with Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and the Kenya Wildlife Service to reintroduce Black rhino to this native habitat. Last month, animals from Nairobi and Nakuru National Parks, as well as Lewa, were translocated to Sera Community Conservancy, which sits to the east of Archer's Post in Samburu County.

The Sera Rhino Sanctuary - governed by a locally elected board and patrolled by

local rangers - materialises the Government of Kenya's promise to support community based conservation initiatives as part of the new 2013 Wildlife Act. It also embodies the strength of the growing community conservation movement in Kenya – which has managed to reduce elephant poaching in respective areas by 43% in the past three years.

The Northern Rangelands Trust supports 27 community conservancies that span coastal and northern Kenya. The Sera Rhino Sanctuary will be the second community operated endangered species sanctuary in the NRT family, alongside the Ishaqbini Hirola Sanctuary. These conservancies are starting to earn substantial revenue through sustainable natural resource management, eco-tourism and small enterprises supported by NRT. At the same time, species such as Grevy's zebra, Wild dog, lion and giraffe are benefitting too.

According to IUCN, populations of Black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) plummeted by 98% between 1960 and 1995 – primarily as a result of hunting and poaching. Conservation efforts have managed to stabilise and increase numbers in most of the black rhino's former ranges since then, and Kenya has done particularly

well. Kenya's black rhino have increased from 381 to 640 since 1987, and continue to rise. That said; the cost of rhino horn on the black market shows no sign of decreasing, and protecting black rhino is becoming expensive and dangerous.

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PHOTO BY: JO O'BRIEN



**TOP: Sera Rhino Sanctuary Chairlady Pauline Longojine talks to NTV about what these rhino will mean to the community.**

**BELOW RIGHT: Kenya's black rhino population is estimated to be around 640.**

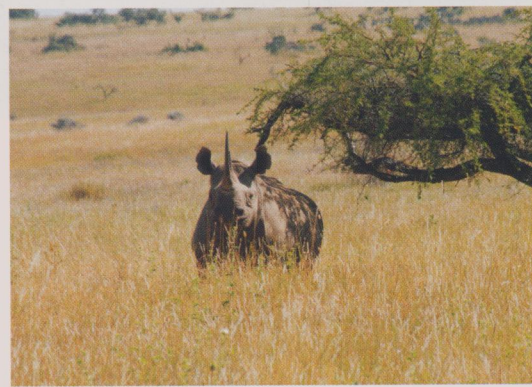
**BELOW: All rhino in the Sanctuary have been fitted with transmitters for monitoring purposes.**

Private sanctuary owners and the Kenya Wildlife Service are now up against highly organised criminal networks, and the cost of security is estimated by the Ol Pejeta Conservancy to be around \$850 per rhino, per month. This has forced many private sanctuary owners to move their entire populations of rhino to safer areas,

resulting in reduced habitats and a higher risk of inbreeding.

Sera Rhino Sanctuary will provide an expanse of much-needed space for the species, as well as encouraging the diversification of the gene pool. The individuals that have been chosen by the Kenya Wildlife Service range from 1.5 years to 20 years old, to try and reflect a natural demographic and encourage natural breeding conditions. All animals have transmitters fitted to their horns, to enable the Sera Conservancy rangers to monitor them closely. The rangers, part of a squad that reflects the diversity of the surrounding communities, have been trained by KWS and Lewa in data gathering, anti-poaching operations, bush craft and effective patrolling. They will have the back up of the NRT and Lewa Anti-Poaching Units when necessary.

It is hoped that the sanctuary will bring increased revenue for Sera Conservancy as ecotourism operations provide income and



PHOTOS BY: SOPHIE HARRISON

employment. The aim is that this ecotourism income will one day ensure the self-sustainability of the Sanctuary. Parts of the sanctuary will also be set aside for dry season grazing for local herders, and the community look forward to increased overall security in the area.

Earlier this year, NRT invited several young warriors from Sera to visit Lewa. Here, for the first time, they encountered Black rhino. Not only that, but they were able to meet and touch Lewa's three orphaned Black rhino calves and learn more about the species from their keepers. The magnitude of this experience was etched on the faces of the young men, and as this story is retold throughout their communities, support for rhino conservation grows. ●

*The Sera Rhino Sanctuary and the translocation of the black rhino was supported by Samburu County Government, USAID, The Lundin Foundation, San Diego Zoo, St. Louis Zoo, Tusk Trust, The US Fish and Wildlife Service, Fauna and Flora International, Zurich Zoo, and several private philanthropists.*