

HUMAN-PROOF FENCES AND HEARTS AND MINDS IN MKOMAZI NATIONAL PARK

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When the Director of Wildlife first asked Tony Fitzjohn if he could put in place an endangered species programme for the black rhino, there were hardly any rhinos left in Tanzania and none whatsoever left in Mkomazi. The habitat of the Mkomazi National Park/Tsavo National Park ecosystem has a very high carrying capacity for black rhinos (in terms of density), with a rich diversity of favoured food plants. A rhino sanctuary with a 13-foot electrified and alarmed fence was subsequently constructed and the first founder stock of rhinos had to be sourced and translocated from South Africa as none was available in Tanzania.

This year has marked a new era in our Sanctuary fencing strategy, with excellent advice and practical hands-on support received from a Kenyan-based fencing contractor. Once again, with thanks to Save the Rhino, USFWS and the Lubin Family Foundation, we have been able to start the first stage of a new fencing configuration. We have already fitted new energisers and alarm systems, which have increased the voltage three- to four-fold and have also shown us where shorting is taking place. If our fence is made more "human-proof" (quite a high priority!) by linking wires with droppers and anti-tamper loops, the fence inherently becomes a "mesh" which makes breaking in or out quite a difficult proposition – critical as the poaching threat increases.

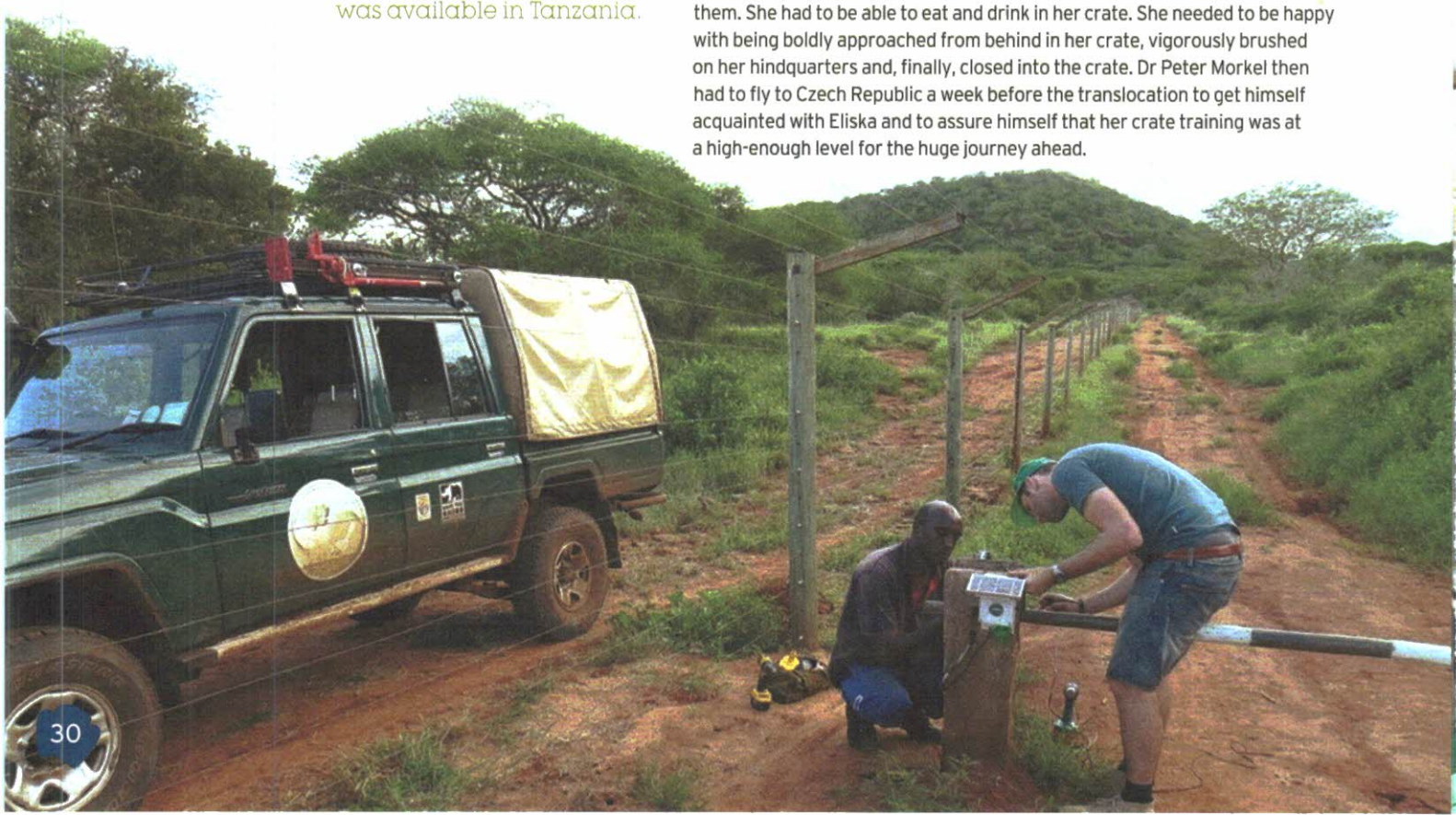
The new fencing configuration is ultimately designed to send wireless transmissions back to our base-camp, whereby the fence can be monitored on a large screen in the digital radio system room. Shorts can be determined to within 100 metres and a log is kept on the hard drive of when, and where, the fence is switched off and on again; making for better management and monitoring. The new system will involve complete fence replacement over time – an imperative against the sustained threat of poaching.

Eliska joins the Mkomazi black rhino herd from Dvur Kralove Zoo

Over the past 20 years, the rhino population has slowly grown, bolstered by five separate rhino translocations. As well as the two rhino translocations from South Africa, we have been incredibly lucky to have been donated rhinos by both Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic and Port Lympne Wild Animal Park in the UK.

In June 2016, Dvur Kralove Zoo donated another female rhino (Eliska) to the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary. It had previously donated three rhinos to Mkomazi in 2009 and the female (Deborah) from that translocation has already had two female calves. DHL very kindly agreed to fly Eliska to Tanzania and an enormous operation of huge logistics ensued, involving over 40 DHL staff and managers. Meanwhile, at Dvur Kralove Zoo, Jiri Hrubry (the Curator of Ungulates) had to start the long process of crate-training Eliska to the right standard.

Zoo rhinos are more difficult to transport than wild rhinos as they tend to have a more nervous disposition and although they know people, their life experience in the zoo environment is more limited – change is not easy for them. She had to be able to eat and drink in her crate. She needed to be happy with being boldly approached from behind in her crate, vigorously brushed on her hindquarters and, finally, closed into the crate. Dr Peter Morkel then had to fly to Czech Republic a week before the translocation to get himself acquainted with Eliska and to assure himself that her crate training was at a high-enough level for the huge journey ahead.





Above: Mkomazi National Park's black rhinos. Left: Eliska was crate trained in preparation for her big move. Below: DHL flew Eliska from the Czech Republic to Tanzania



In Tanzania, all the preparations had to take place for her arrival, including fortifying our holding compounds in the Rhino Sanctuary

where she would live at first, and then strengthening fences in her first reintroduction paddock. Rhino trackers were assigned to care for her, and collect plenty of browse to eat. Meanwhile, the authorities at Tanzania National Parks formed a special committee to work on all the paperwork and permits required. Eliska arrived into Kilimanjaro Airport on 27 June and was taken by road to Mkomazi. This was an enormous undertaking for one rhino, but each rhino is so valuable in terms of rhino conservation that such translocations make all the painstaking efforts hugely worthwhile. Eliska is now in her large holding paddock, having undergone two months of slow adjustment to the area and the browse.

In the background, supporting major events like this, Save the Rhino are always there, supporting the Rhino Sanctuary right from our beginnings, when our work was only a plan on paper. It was thanks to Save the Rhino and its major funder USFWS that we could employ the first team of casual labourers who helped clear the thick vegetation for what would eventually become the Rhino Sanctuary fence-line. The list of their support goes on over so many years; in the past year alone we have been incredibly fortunate to have received a donation of a multi-purpose vehicle (a Toyota Land Cruiser Double Cab Pick Up) for all the Rhino Sanctuary operations.

Grants

Since November 2015, we have sent \$13,200 from the Anna Merz Rhino Trust for ranger salaries, \$5,000 from the Lubin Family Foundation and \$68,702 from USFWS RTCF towards the new fence, and \$19,742 from USFWS RTCF and £2,000 from Ales Weiner for Rafiki wa Faru.

ALL IMAGES MKOMAZI RHINO SANCTUARY



NINE YEARS OF RAFIKI WA FARU

Our environmental education programme, Rafiki wa Faru, has run extremely successfully since 2008, with a tightly choreographed and focused education programme designed to raise awareness and understanding of the conservation in Mkomazi National Park and the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary. The programme focuses mainly on black rhino but also covers the restoration of the Park's broader habitat, and the breeding and reintroduction programme for the African wild dog.

The students' day out in Mkomazi provides a fascinating experience for them, with much learned on conservation issues and many new topics covered. The majority of them have distinct and poignant memories of their day trip in Mkomazi and they go back home with a strong message about wildlife conservation. Above all, Rafiki wa Faru is a hearts and minds programme: throughout the day in Mkomazi, they are encouraged to respect wildlife and the fragility of endangered species, to be proud of Mkomazi and its rhinos, to aspire to work in wildlife conservation when they are older, and to learn the value of a rhino to their nation. Save the Rhino has supported this wonderful programme since it began in 2008.

For all of us in the rhino conservation world, it has been a huge learning curve as we continuously adapt to the increasing poaching threat. We will continue to do as much as we possibly can to protect these species and to maintain established systems which have—so far—proved to be effective. Thank you to all the team at Save the Rhino for supporting this critical work.

Top: Excited school children are bused into the park to see black rhinos

Bottom: Pupils learn about the Park's habitat and meet wildlife rangers

