

## **LESSONS LEARNT FOR THE ADAPTATION OF OF BLACK RHINOS FOR LONG DISTANCE TRANSLOCATION**

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Zambia was once home to the third largest black rhino population on the African continent numbering 12,000, of which 4,000 lived in the Luangwa Valley and 2,000 in North Luangwa National Park. Through the poaching crisis of 1970-1980s the population was decimated and they were ultimately declared nationally extinct in 1998. In 2003, following years of successful conservation and anti-poaching efforts the North Luangwa Conservation Program embarked on an ambitious black rhino project to translocate a founder population of south-central black rhino (*Diceros bicornis minor*) to North Luangwa National Park. From 2003-2010 twenty five black rhinos were airlifted to NLNP from South Africa in a multi-national / multi-agency agreement. Until recently this was the largest translocation of its kind on the African continent. The re-establishment of a free-ranging population of black rhino in Zambia has largely been a success with no poaching losses and successful breeding. But the process has not been without its challenges and many lessons have been learnt. The NLNP black rhino project has repositioned the back drop against which all future translocations have since been undertaken: from the selection of animals, to capture and boma time, the transport used, the release strategy adopted, and above all the monitoring of the adaptation process. Black rhino social structures and the impacts of their disruption on breeding success are now better understood for large scale translocations; none of which were envisaged or understood prior to the North Luangwa translocations.

## **REPATRIATION OF EASTERN BLACK RHINO INTO THE WESTERN SERENGETI ECOSYSTEM**

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After an absence of more than thirty years, the Singita Grumeti Fund, in collaboration with Tanzania Wildlife Division and the Aspinall Foundation, repatriated two eastern black rhino into the western Serengeti in 2006. The two animals were sourced from Port Lympne Zoo in the United Kingdom: a third-generation zoo-bred cow and a fourth-generation zoo-bred bull, named Laikipia and Limpopo. Preceding the translocation of these animals was a massive effort to restore the integrity of the area to which they were to be relocated. Decades of illegal and unscrupulous hunting within the 'protected area' had decimated local wildlife populations. In collaboration with government conservation authorities, a security plan was devised and implemented to safeguard the ecological integrity of the ecosystem, and thus began a remarkable recovery and regeneration of the area.

While the repatriation of Laikipia and Limpopo can be viewed as a minor victory, the fight to establish a viable black rhino population in the western Serengeti is far from over. We have experienced rhino mortalities from natural causes, political interference, budget cuts and omnipresent security challenges, but none of these obstacles is insurmountable. The Singita Grumeti Fund is now looking to play a larger and more active role in black rhino conservation in East Africa through the expansion of the current rhino program at Sasakwa. Engaging with dedicated rhino conservation organizations, both nationally and internationally, is a strategy that the Singita Grumeti Fund believes will enable us to overcome the aforementioned challenges and reinvigorate efforts to establish a viable breeding population of black rhino at Sasakwa. Over and above the obvious short-term goal of bolstering the black rhino population in the western Serengeti, the Singita Grumeti Fund would welcome the opportunity to play a meaningful role in rhino meta-population management in line with the national rhino management strategy for Tanzania.