

Progress report on three eastern black rhinoceroses translocated from Port Lympne, UK, to Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary, Tanzania

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Introduction

The Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary is a sort of mini United Nations of rhinos. There are translocated eastern black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) from South Africa, Czech Republic, England and Germany (via England), as well as home-bred Tanzanian ones. The ancestry of the translocated rhinos goes back to Kenya and Tanzania, but the return route to Mkomazi has been an interesting one.

With thanks to The Aspinall Foundation, we received three rhinos from the Port Lympne Wild Animal Park on the 17 June 2012 (Figs. 1-3). The preparations for the translocation took well over a year. The logistics and administration of something as serious as this are extremely weighty, let alone securing support for this highly specialized endeavour. Their translocation from Port Lympne was described by Dr. Peter Morkel as one of the smoothest and most professional translocations he had ever undertaken. At our end, this is an enormous compliment as he is amongst the leading rhino vets in the world and a veteran of many translocations.

Post-transfer progress, September 2013

Monduli, Grumeti and Zawadi (Figs. 4-7) have now been in Mkomazi for 15 months. From their early weeks here in the holding compounds, they were gradually introduced into paddocks of ever-increasing size. Here they began to adapt to a life in the wild and their appetite for the Mkomazi browse developed.

They were then closed off into a much larger area through the highly scientific technique of laying a trail of carrots down a wide path to a new water hole and wallow. This area was then increased as the dry season took hold. All this involves fencing sections and a new area, along with a new external fence line and water holes (Fig. 8).

Carrots, lucerne and horse nuts were gradually reduced from their diets over the following ten months. Every now and then we give them a treat and this has to



Figure 1. The departure of the three rhinos from Port Lympne, UK, 16 June 2012. (Photo: Berry White)



Figure 2. Loading the plane at Manston Airport, UK. (Photo: Berry White)



Figure 3. Arrival at Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary, Tanzania. (Photo: The Aspinall Foundation)

be done quite carefully to stop Grumeti from chasing the other two rhino off and scoffing the lot. The guys have to make sure she is busy with a slightly increased load of carrots and then there is a rush to give the other



Figure 4. Monduli at Mkomazi. (Photo: GAWPT)



Figure 5. Monduli browsing. (Photo: GAWPT)



Figure 6. Grumeti and Zawadi at Mkomazi. (Photo: GAWPT)



Figure 7. Zawadi. (Photo: GAWPT)

two rhinos their own bucket load a short distance away to finish in peace.

Monduli is a beautiful bull, shy and reticent but a really wonderful animal. He has met with Jabu, a seven year old bull originally from the Dvur Kralove Zoo, through their mutual fence line but despite some huffing and puffing, Jabu backed off pretty quickly. This is a great relief, as bulls can fight to the death and although they are separated through an electric fence with low cantilevers, they do need to both adjust to each other's presence, sound and smell and be aware of their various territories / home rangers. Zawadi and Grumeti are also both wonderful rhino and it is always great to catch a glimpse of them. Both of them have different characters, with Zawadi happy on occasion to take a carrot very gently from one of her trackers in the car. They lead fairly solitary lives in this new bush environment and although they are naturally shy and gravitate away from people, they have also had close contact with their keepers, and therefore seem to have good memories of people. They arrived with their Port Lympne keepers, Claire Lupton, Kira Walsh and Berry

White, and then settled down after a few months with their Mkomazi keepers who subsequently became their trackers. These trackers are probably the best in Tanzania and are dedicated to the job.

We are constantly upgrading the security systems as the poaching crisis worsens. This includes new security outposts in key strategic areas, a new digital radio system and GPS foot collars for the rhinos. We are also looking into the possibility of poisoning the horns. There is, however, no substitute for boots on the ground and we have keepers that are as dedicated and professional as those at Port Lympne and we are very proud of them. New water storage systems were put in place throughout the sanctuary with thanks once again to The Aspinall Foundation.

Semu, the Rhino Sanctuary manager has a new Suzuki motorbike that has room for a (small) passenger and panniers on that means he can carry a reasonable amount of emergency kit quickly around the Sanctuary (Fig. 10). And a new quad bike with a trailer has meant that Noah, in charge of the fence maintenance gang, can move people, fence posts, wire and tools around much



Figure 8. Fence construction. (Photo: GAWPT)



Figure 9. New security outpost. (Photo: GAWPT)

more easily. This is a great help to the enormous task that is the replacement and repair of the Mkomazi Rhino Sanctuary main fence line.

Within a majority of the Rhino Sanctuary, there is an already established hierarchy of rhinos in a large fenced area and it is incumbent upon us to make sure we don't upset this. New rhinos coming in from the outside go through a series of paddocks on the periphery of the main Sanctuary to initially both avoid confrontation and to be in the area where there are heavily maintained tsetse targets. The British rhinos moved in behind the Czechs and it is almost time for the Czechs to be moved into the main Sanctuary.

Conclusions

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, everybody is on the job looking after these rhinos as the street value of horn rises higher than the price of gold. What started off as a small and serious attempt to do something for the incredibly low population of rhinos in Tanzania has developed into a war-footing position against organised crime. Where is Tony Soprano when you need him on your side?

We have faith in our men and we have faith in our systems. Port Lympne has restored our faith in rhinos in captive situations abroad. Please keep breeding. Things ARE tough out here but with a few



Figure 10. New patrol motorbike. (Photo: GAWPT)

more Sanctuary extensions, we can always do with a few more rhino. Maybe the world one day will regain its sanity and allow them to live – though probably not in my life-time, I fear.

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