

The Lake Nakuru Rhino Sanctuary

by F.K. Waweru,
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During the early 1960s, the black rhinoceros was found all over Kenya apart from a small tract of land on the shores of Lake Victoria and the coastal strip. In 1970, their population was estimated to be around 20,000, but today there are only thought to be about 500 left. This rapid decline in their numbers has mainly been a result of poaching, fuelled by the escalating prices fetched by rhino horn in Far and Middle Eastern countries during the 1970s and early 1980s. Neither the Kenyan government's attempts to halt the slaughter by banning hunting and by increasing anti-poaching efforts, nor the struggle by conservationists to control the international trade in rhino horn, has arrested the decline. The rhinos that now remain are mainly in scattered populations, so their chances of reproduction are poor.

In 1985, the Kenyan government, working with a number of conservation bodies, including the East African Wild Life Society, produced a rhino conservation programme which involved the establishment of a series of rhino sanctuaries in Kenya, in the Lake Nakuru, Tsavo and Aberdare National Parks. Work started on the first sanctuary, at Lake Nakuru, in 1986, and by the end of May last year the sanctuary was ready. Four water troughs, paid for



The East African Wild Life Society

The East African Wild Life Society was formed in 1961 by amalgamating the Wild Life Societies of Kenya and Tanzania (both founded in 1956).

The policy of the Society is to safe-guard wildlife and its habitat, in all its forms, as a national and international resource.

Members are requested to address any queries to the Executive Director.

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by the East African Wild Life Society, had been constructed, and a 71-km solar-powered electric fence had been built around the park's perimeter – to keep the animals in and the poachers out.

Before the fence was completed, there were already four rhinos in the park. Two of these, a male and a female, had been there since before the area was made a national park, and it is a mystery why they never appear to have bred. The other two, both males, had recently been translocated to the park: Kiserian from Nairobi National Park, and Amboni from Lewa Downs. After their release, Amboni was often sighted with the indigenous female but no mating was witnessed. In early October, however, a team of rangers and I saw Kiserian and the female mating.

Once the sanctuary was ready, a further 15 sub-adult rhinos – eight males and seven females – were translocated there from the game reserve on Solio Ranch, the last translocation taking place in October. The rhinos are currently to be found mainly in the southern part of the park, although they have been seen as far north as the euphorbia forest to the east of the lake and the Presidential Pavilion to the west. Their movements seem to be restricted by the absence of freshwater in the northern area of the park, but once work is completed on four new boreholes, which will supply water to most of the park, they should start establishing their own more widespread home ranges. My studies of the vegetation indicate that there is suitable and sufficient forage for them distributed all over the park. Plenty of food and space are of paramount importance to rhinos, so the prospects for a successful breeding programme are good.

All that remains, now that the animals are in the park with all the facilities they require, is for the Kenyan government and its staff to ensure that the most vigilant security is maintained at all times to guarantee the safety of these animals.

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