

VETERINARY CARE for Kenya's black rhinos

Rhino populations around the world have been decimated largely at the hands of poachers. It's not the only threat that rhinos face but, because of its prevalence and brutality, there has been an intense focus on rhino security for the last few decades. As a result, issues concerning the biological management of rhinos might have been somewhat neglected.

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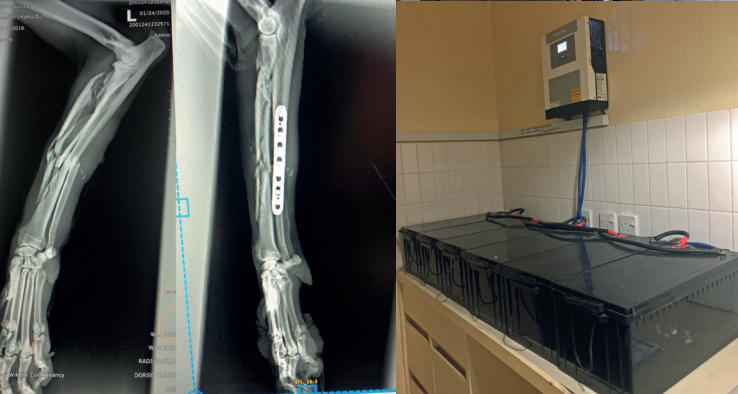
Kenya's rhino population crash of the 1970s and 80s (from an estimated 20,000 to fewer than 300) caused a genetic bottle-neck and severe loss of genetic diversity for the country's Eastern black rhinos. Consequently, the entire population is threatened by exposure to disease. Today, with approximately 1,000 Eastern black rhinos remaining, it's crucial that every animal receives as much support as possible.

In 1995, OI Jogi Conservancy developed a wildlife veterinary clinic to enable our team to treat injured animals as quickly as possible. Inevitably, some of the equipment has depreciated or become obsolete, yet the clinic remains crucial to protect and care for rhinos.

To bring the clinic up to an international gold standard, and with help from several partners, donors and philanthropists, we recently acquired several pieces of equipment to improve our capacity to serve Kenya's wildlife. This included an X-ray, powerful enough to x-ray through a rhino's leg, a Bluetooth- and wifi-enabled microscope, weighing scales capable of weighing anything from a small tortoise to an adult rhino, and an ultrasound machine to determine pregnancy and investigate eye disease.

Just like every area of science, knowledge and understanding of rhino veterinary medicine has evolved exponentially over time. Therefore, collaboration and learning are vital to maintain best-practice. In 2019, OI Jogi, alongside the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Smithsonian Global Health Program and the Mpala Research Center, with support from Save the Rhino, convened a multidisciplinary workshop to bring together specialist rhino veterinarians and conservationists from across the world. The workshop gave rhino vets and conservation professionals the opportunity to discuss a broad range of topics, share ideas, build relationships and improve our mutual ability to serve rhinos from a veterinary perspective.

Through this workshop and continued learning, we're building capacity and knowledge within our team and others, whether that's by improving our population management so that breeding success increases, or by acting quickly to treat an injured animal. At OI Jogi, it is our hope that we can share this capacity, so that wildlife is the ultimate beneficiary.



Improving veterinary equipment not only benefits rhinos, but a whole host of other wildlife species that live at OI Jogi.

When a rhino needs treatment, the team is now well-prepared to do as much as they can to support the animal and bring it back to full health.



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