



IMAGES JAMIE GAYMER

# Water: the essence of life!

Ol Jogi Conservancy, established in 1980, was formed in response to a poaching epidemic in Kenya that saw the black rhino population plummet from an estimated 20,000 individuals in 1970 to a mere 300 by 1985.

**Jamie Gaymer** | Conservation Manager, Ol Jogi Conservancy

Ol Jogi, like most other rhino conservation areas, is circumvented by an electric fence. Uniquely, however, our fence has 18 'rhino-proof' wildlife corridors, which allow all animals except rhinos to move freely in and out of Ol Jogi. The fence ensures the rhinos' safety as, if they were to venture outside the protected area, they would be highly susceptible to poaching.

Whilst other animals could, in theory, emigrate from sanctuaries like Ol Jogi in search of water, the rhinos are without that luxury. The provision of water in key points around the Conservancy is therefore critical for their survival, and essential for the rangers who work for Ol Jogi to protect them.

When the Conservancy was formed, two boreholes were created (one in the north and one in the south) to feed a series of water troughs to sustain wildlife during the dry months. Several dams were also built to catch rainwater run-off, though they could only provide water during the rainy season.

Some 40 years later and this same infrastructure was becoming obsolete. Pipes had become brittle: bursts became a multi-day per week occurrence. The leaks were starting to threaten both the wildlife and the people on Ol Jogi.

Thanks to donors (primarily the US Fish and Wildlife Service), we have now managed to replace the entire water infrastructure with approximately 12 km of new heavy-duty pipe and the necessary plumbing instruments to transfer water long distances across the reserve to supply tanks and troughs.



Two new boreholes were created, feeding 10 water troughs for wildlife, seven water tanks for rangers, our rhino boma facility and our wildlife veterinary clinic. To ensure sustainability, the new system uses materials that are likely to last decades. And without spending much-needed resources fixing constant pipe repairs, we have already benefited financially from completing the project.

Water, whilst essential to sustain life, can equally be a threat. Permanent water in habitats that are not tolerant to sustained pressure by herbivores and people can be catastrophic to the environment. Understanding this, we encourage wildlife to migrate, allowing the habitat to rest and providing rhinos with access to more of the Conservancy, thus maximising the number of rhinos that can live on Ol Jogi.

With the new water system in place, Ol Jogi's rhinos and rangers have much better access to water, wherever they are.