



Rhinos on the Range



In Africa, a cloud of cattle egrets surrounds a lone black rhinoceros. Black rhinos are in danger of becoming extinct. To help save these rare animals, an organization called Game Conservation International has transplanted several from the African plains to the Texas range. Find out on the next pages how one pair of the rhinos is getting along.

In March 1984, a jumbo jet streaked over the Atlantic Ocean from Africa to the United States. Aboard were several huge crates, each of which held an adult black rhinoceros. The rhinos would soon be roaming the range in Texas. Two of them would find themselves on a large spread near McAllen. There, rancher Calvin Bentsen had set aside 80 acres where the animals would live and, he hoped, raise young.

Bentsen is a member of Game Conservation International, an organization based in San Antonio. Concerned about the rapid disappearance of black rhinos from the wild, the group

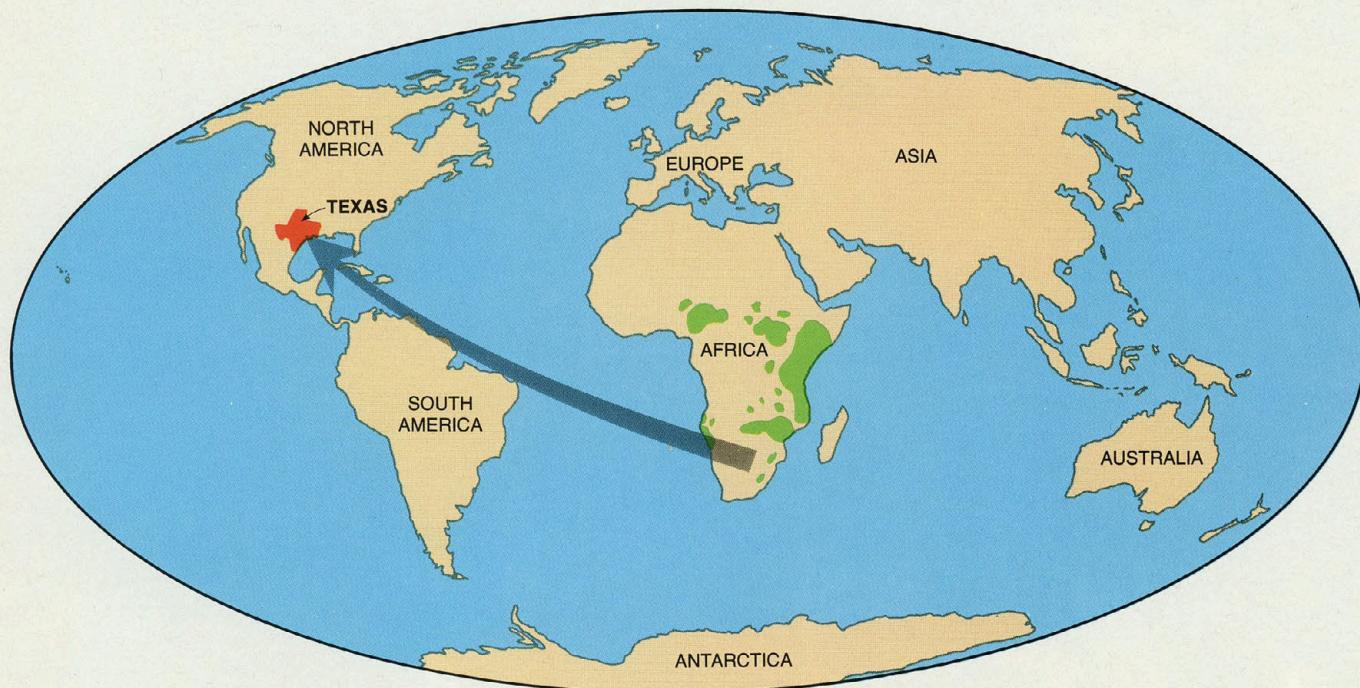
had arranged and paid for the rhino airlift. The group also finances the animals' care in Texas.

One of five kinds of rhinoceroses, black rhinos live in parts of Africa south of the desert called the Sahara. In 1970, more than 60,000 black rhinos roamed the plains. By 1985, only 7,000 remained. African countries have passed laws forbidding the hunting of these animals. But poachers, or illegal hunters, continue to kill the rhinos for their horns. Smugglers carry some horns to eastern Asia. People there believe the horns have medical value. Other horns are smuggled to Yemen, a country in the Middle

East. There, people carve the horns into dagger handles.

At the Bentsen ranch, the rhinos are safe from poachers. What's more, the Texas climate and many of the plants the rhinos eat are similar to those of Africa. To help the rhinos feel even more at home, Bentsen dug two mud holes. The rhinos spend hours every day rolling in them. "I hope the natural setting will encourage the rhinos to reproduce," says Bentsen.

He hopes to set up an exchange program with zoos. The zoos would send some of their black rhinos to breed on his ranch. In return, he would supply zoos with ranch-born rhinos.



FLIGHT OF THE RHINOS. The arrow (above) shows the starting point and the final destination of the rhinos during a 1984 airlift. The green areas indicate the black rhino's natural range.

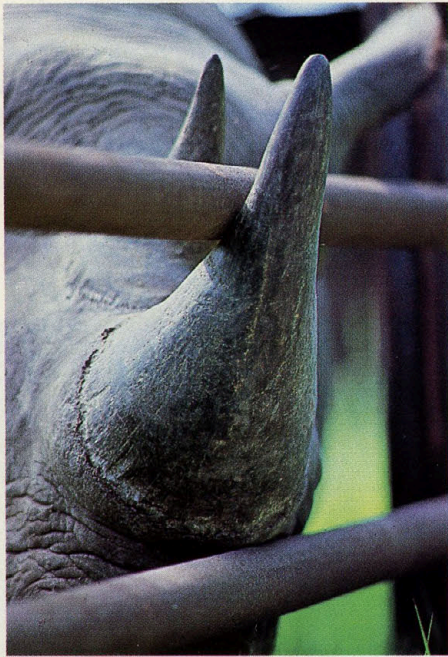
RHINO ROUNDUP. Members of a park staff in Africa capture one of the rhinos (left). First, they injected it with a tranquilizer. While the animal slept, the men attached ropes to it so it could not escape. They also covered its eyes. Here, the rhino has just awakened. The men herd it to a waiting truck.



IN THE HEART OF TEXAS. Two years after their arrival, the rhinos—a male and a female—eagerly accept an apple from ranch owner Calvin Bentsen. The rhinos recognize Bentsen and allow him to come close. Each animal has a one-acre pen of its own. The rhinos also roam freely over 80 acres of pasture.

MUNCH, MUNCH. The male rhino nibbles huisache (we-SAH-chee), a thorny shrub that grows wild (below). Huisache is related to the acacia (uh-KAY-shuh) tree, a favorite food of rhinos in Africa. “The rhinos took to huisache like ducks to water,” says Bentsen. “Each one eats about 40 pounds [18 kg] a day.” The rhinos’ diet also includes alfalfa.





PRIZED HORNS. *Black rhinos have two horns on their snouts (above). The horns actually consist of thickly matted hair. Rhinos use the horns to protect themselves. In Africa, poachers—illegal hunters—kill rhinos and sell the horns for high prices. That’s why black rhinos are endangered.*

AT HOME ON THE RANGE, *the two rhinos graze peacefully (right). In back, huisache and mesquite (muh-SKEET) trees provide food and shade. “The rhinos are always within a few feet of each other,” says Bentsen. One day, he hopes, they will produce young. Bentsen plans to bring more rhinos to his ranch to breed. “I am worried about the future of black rhinos,” he says. “This is my way of trying to make sure they don’t become extinct.”*

