

# Black rhinos return to Zinave National Park in Mozambique

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Seven critically endangered black rhino, and one more white rhino, have been safely translocated from Manketti Game Reserve in South Africa to Zinave National Park in Mozambique. This follows the successful reintroduction of 19 white rhino to the park just two months earlier.

The white rhinos have adjusted to their new home with ease and, remarkably, a new calf was born into the herd soon after their arrival. The same is hoped for the newly arrived black rhino brought there as part of a pioneering conservation project committed to restoring, securing, and expanding populations of both species.

The initiative is the result of a partnership between the mining and renewable energy solutions company – Exxaro Resources, Peace Parks Foundation and Mozambique’s National Administration for Conservation Areas (ANAC), in support of and in collaboration with the Governments of Mozambique and South Africa. Working to a two- to three-year timeline, the project is already well on its way to relocating more than 40 rhinos to Mozambique in a series of highly coordinated and carefully managed rewilding operations.

The rhinos were kindly donated by Exxaro Resources through its Manketti Game Reserve. Exxaro has played a significant role in the strategic planning, coordination and funding of this international conservation initiative. Dr. Nombasa Tsengwa, CEO of Exxaro Resources, explained: “As part of Exxaro Resources’ ambitious project to relocate its populations of black and white rhinos, a partnership was formed with Peace Parks based on the Foundation’s proposal to establish a new founder population of rhino in Zinave National Park. This option compliments Exxaro’s Biodiversity and Environmental Management strategies and met our project criteria of moving

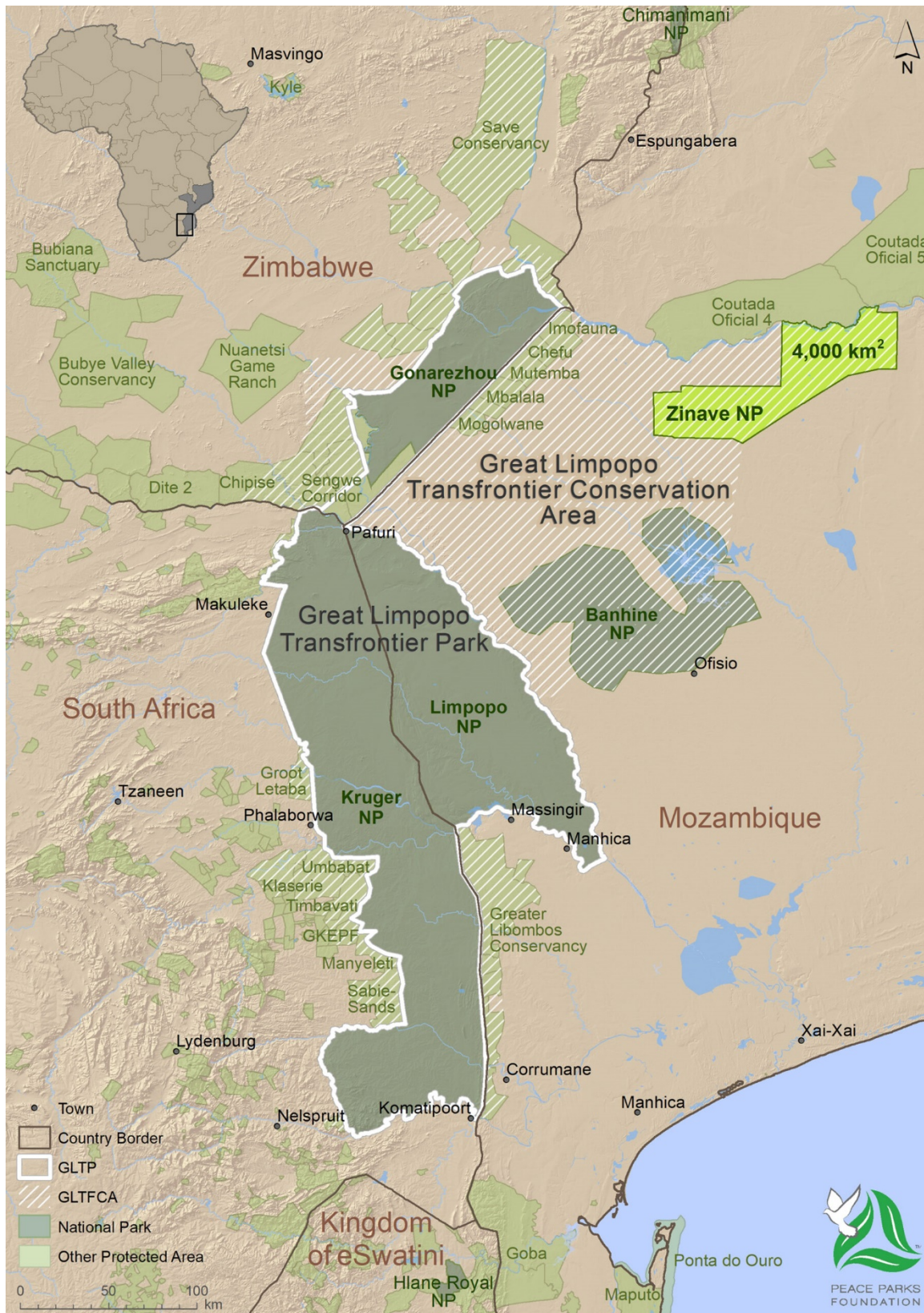
our rhino to a safer location, whilst at the same time significantly contributing to broader rhino conservation strategies of the region.”

### **Under extreme threat**

Beyond its extinction in Mozambique, the black rhino suffered a radical decline across its entire native range: between 1960 and present day their numbers, scattered sparsely from Kenya down to South Africa, dropped by 98% to less than 6,000 individuals. The mammoth task of increasing numbers and rebuilding thriving populations was overwhelming at its worst – but this has served as a powerful motivation to persist in innovative conservation efforts, with active range expansion being one such approach.

To protect rhino for future generations, their reintroduction to new suitable habitats, with capacity to rebuild large viable breeding herds under strong security and strategic conservation management, is one of the many measures currently undertaken by Peace Parks – and Zinave makes a strong case as safe haven for new founder herds. It offers the expansive but secure range the species needs to thrive, with broadly rich rewards for its own ecosystems in doing so.





The introduction of rhino is the pinnacle of an extensive rewilding programme that has seen more than 2400 animals from 15 different species reintroduced by Peace Parks and ANAC, who jointly develop the park under a long-term co-management agreement entered in 2015. The focus of this partnership is to create a healthy ecosystem by introducing viable wildlife populations, attract tourists back to the park and support the livelihoods of local communities living around the park.

African rhinos are 'keystone species' – their presence and role within an ecosystem has a disproportionate effect on life of all kinds, from insects to antelope and elephant. These biological impacts differ crucially between the two species, combining restorative benefits which cannot be reproduced. Whilst white rhinos are helping to restore Zinave's grasslands as they graze, black rhinos browse on very specific plants and process them uniquely, acting as a potent natural fertilizer and allowing the nutrients from vegetation to be cycled back into the earth with great efficiency. The benefits of this soil enrichment show through in the growth of more, and more nutritious, plants in these ecosystems. This same nutritional advantage, in turn, is passed on to particular species which share the rhino's denser habitats and depend on flourishing vegetation in order to survive and thrive.





The founder herd already consists of a little mother and calf family of its own. As the population continues to reproduce and grow, the integral role of black rhino, a crucial ‘keystone species’, throughout Zinave’s ecosystems will reach a new scale and bring a host of benefits both to landscape and broader biodiversity.

### **Keeping them safe**

Translocating black rhino can pose greater challenges than with their square-jawed relatives given their less tolerant, more aggressive nature, and keeping this precious cargo safe once they arrive in Zinave requires the same level of critical care.



The constant and highly individual care provided by vets, Manketti's own project assistants and logistics experts extended through the duration of the rhinos' time in the bomas to the journey itself. Here, a rhino – blindfolded to prevent sensory stress – has its own unique microchip scanned to ensure that complete identity details are checked and stored before traveling.

To ensure that they were in peak condition before embarking on their epic journey – the longest road-transfer of black rhino ever done – they were monitored in specially constructed bomas for several weeks. Once on the trucks they were supervised by a team of veterinarians throughout, whilst armed forces never left the convoy's side.

Again, they now find themselves in reinforced boma structures in Zinave, where they will be observed until such time as the veterinary teams sign off on their release into the park's rhino sanctuary. To maximize the safety of the rhinos, they have each been fitted with a state of the art tracking sensor,

enabling the live tracking of animals and assets in a central operations control room that is operational 24/7. The sensors form part of a suite of integrated security interventions aimed at keeping the rhino, and the park's other wildlife, safe. Significant investment, also with additional funding support from the German Postcode Lottery, MAVA Foundation and the GEOS Foundation, has been channeled into further protection efforts that includes the recruitment of 34 additional rangers who received specialist training on rhino protection, bringing the number of rangers deployed in the sanctuary and surrounding areas to 80. In addition, 20 sanctuary guards will be deployed for first-line detection of incursions. A helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft – integrated into a rapid response unit with a canine team – was introduced to boost surveillance and counter-poaching reaction capabilities.

“We are proud to see Zinave National Park emerge as a flagship protected area in Mozambique through our partnership with Peace Parks Foundation. The arrival of the iconic black rhino back into the park for the first time in four decades, marks yet another step towards realizing the greater potential of the park and the opportunities it holds for growth in regional tourism, community upliftment and employment. If this is what can be achieved in one park in just seven years, we are excited about what the future holds for more transformative conservation achievements not only in Zinave, but also the other protected areas – Limpopo, Banhine and Maputo national parks – being developed through this partnership,” said Celmira da Silva, the Director General of ANAC.





On arrival in Zinave after their epic journey, the resilient black rhino were each released into their own boma. This step gives them vital time to rest and adjust in pens, and for their state of health to be monitored, before the vets' sign-off and their release into Zinave's wild wide open spaces.

<https://www.peaceparks.org/black-rhinos-return-to-zinave-national-park-in-mozambique/>