

Rainfall and resilient landscapes

Borana is currently going through a dry cycle and this will be our third consecutive year of below-average rainfall. This prolonged dry cycle is something that comes around every 14 to 16 years and has a significant impact on the ability for vegetation to grow and sustain itself, due to the increased pressure from browse species, like black rhinos. In turn, the animals have less food, negatively impacting their nutrition, breeding success, and overall population growth.

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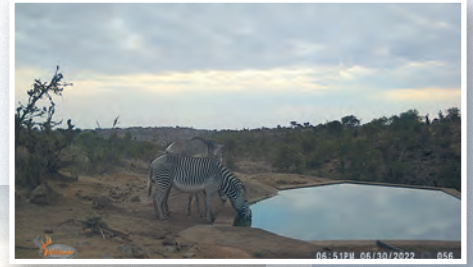
At our last annual aerial count, we saw a large reduction in the number of elephants on the Borana landscape, when compared to the last two years. This was as expected, as elephants can migrate into higher altitude areas, which have more rainfall and therefore better forage.

In comparison, given the importance of their security, rhinos cannot migrate into new

landscapes. In turn, we must pay close attention to every rhino during dry seasons, and our monitors have continued to conduct body-condition assessments every month to check the health of each animal. Fortunately, all have remained in good condition. However, in 2022, we decided to begin a supplementary feeding programme for large herbivores that were struggling, particularly white rhino and buffalo.

Two main feeding sites were established, and a mix of lucerne and Rhodes grass was provided regularly to support the nutrition of these populations. Of course, whilst this has been necessary, it is not ideal. Rather, we would like to focus attention on improving the quality of habitat and rangelands, using livestock as a management tool.





Ecological Outcome Verification, or EOv, is a science-based method of ensuring healthier soil and in turn, more resilient habitats.

Thankfully, the landscape has remained resilient throughout this prolonged dry spell. The black and white rhinos across Borana have continued to have stable body conditions, and we have not seen large numbers of other species, like buffalo, deteriorate. All this is because of continued rangeland management practice supported by Ecological Outcome Verification (EOV) monitoring.

In December 2022, we measured 35 EOv sites across the Conservancy, recording baselines from the data we received. Going forward, our monitoring will be conducted annually, each December, and will be used to monitor and inform management decisions and interventions. This information will help ensure that our planning is having the desired positive effect on the ecosystem and, therefore, the wildlife that it supports.

As our rangelands continue to improve, we have noticed an unintended consequence associated with this: our dams are not filling up as quickly as they used to. When it does rain or there is a storm, rainwater is now being well infiltrated into the soil. Through our partnership with Save the Rhino and its donors, we have been able to address this water-storage issue, improving water reticulation thanks to investment into new waterpoints.

Despite the low rainfall, 2022 was another great year for the rhino population on Borana Conservancy. For the eighth consecutive year, we celebrated zero poaching, and our rhino numbers continue to grow. Additionally, our aerial count shone the light on an animal closely related to rhinos – our Grévy's zebra population grew significantly. These successes highlight the importance of resilient, connected ecosystems that provide forage, shelter and safe spaces for species as they respond to changes in our climate.



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