

Laikipia Rhino-Range Expansion

As Kenya prepares to launch the Recovery and Action Plan for Black Rhinos in Kenya (2022 – 2026), 7th edition ('the strategy') we should take a moment to celebrate some successes in rhino conservation – for a change.

Jamie Gaymer | Chair, Association of Private and community Land Rhino Sanctuaries



Operational conservancy areas of Laikipia, Kenya

Rhino application pending

Current rhino range conservancy

9 km
5 miles

Through the duration of our last 5-year strategy term, Kenya has managed to reduce rhino poaching to less than 1% of the national population, per year. Whilst we celebrate this achievement, it has left us in a somewhat unusual situation in that we have effectively run out of secure space to accommodate our fast-growing rhino populations.

We have approached, and in some circumstances exceeded, our ecological carrying capacity for rhinos in many reserves. This is having negative consequences in the breeding performance of some populations and exacerbating negative rhino social dynamics.

Kenya's Long-term Vision¹ is to have a metapopulation in Kenya of at least 2,000 Eastern black rhinos in suitable habitats by 2037 and 1,450 rhinos by Kenya's Vision 2030, as a global heritage.

Ever cognisant of the imminent poaching threat, our focus has turned to rhino-range expansion during the current strategy. We urgently need to secure more suitable habitat for rhinos so that we can encourage optimal breeding as we strive towards our strategic vision. The following extract is taken from the strategy:

"There are significant opportunities for establishing new private and community sanctuaries in the Laikipia region, some of which are at the final stages of commissioning. The longer-term strategy of merging the private and community sanctuaries that are in close proximity to each other should also be initiated during this Plan period".

The Association of Private and Community Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS) has developed a draft strategy for rhino-



range expansion in Laikipia that could see up to 680,000 acres secured for rhinos during the next 15 years. The concept includes government, private and community sanctuaries under a collaborative and coordinated approach to conservation in a contiguous landscape.

With the endorsement of the Kenyan Government through the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Wildlife Research and Training Institute, County Government and the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage, the APLRS will embark on the implementation of this ambitious plan together with partners and, importantly, being driven by the local stakeholders.

The APLRS also seeks to support other rhino-range expansion initiatives in the country. Kenya's partnership approach to rhino conservation is, perhaps, one of the reasons for our recent successes in achieving our national rhino strategic objectives.

'Ecological carrying capacity' is the number of organisms that an ecosystem can sustainably support: in this case, the total population of rhinos that can live sustainably in a habitat.

¹ Action Plan for Black Rhinos in Kenya (2022-2026), 7th edition