

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above, do[n't] fence me in

In the 1970s, well over 400 black rhino were recorded in the Mkomazi Game Reserve (now a National Park). By the time the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust (GAWPT) started work on the restoration of Mkomazi in 1989, the wipe-out of East Africa's wildlife populations was emerging from its very lowest and almost critical ebb.

Tony Fitzjohn
Field Director
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IMAGES: MKOMAZI RHINO SANCTUARY

Conserving, protecting and breeding up a population of black rhino in Tanzania is no easy task. By the early 1980s in Mkomazi, there were no rhinos left whatsoever. With the Tanzanian rhino population as a whole devastated to close-extinction, the Government of Tanzania requested that GAWPT establish a rhino sanctuary to help breed up numbers in safety, which it did in 1997.

Establishing the rhino sanctuary involved the construction of a 30 km fence line, enclosing a 45 sq km area in prime rhino habitat. The fence design was simplicity itself and based on successful sanctuaries in Kenya and South Africa: eight-foot high with a three-strand cantilever, and 16 strands of high-tensile wire electrified up to 7,000 volts, alarmed with relay

back to the main security outposts. Over 10,000 fence posts were brought in from Eldoret on the Kenya-Uganda border, as no talinised poles were to be found in Tanzania at that time, and 500 kms of high-tensile wire and solar and electrical equipment was shipped in from New Zealand. Three security outposts were established along the fence-line itself with back-up security provided from internal outposts on hilltops as well as the main base-camp at Kisima - just over a mile away. External security was, and is, provided through the establishment of strategically placed outposts within the National Park, several miles away, and also through the deployment of mobile teams who patrol on a 20km radius of the Sanctuary. Tanzanian National Parks (TANAPA) has recently offered ranger teams to work alongside the GAWPT personnel to enhance this protection.

To date (touch wood), there have been no attempts on the rhinos or on the Tanzanian security guards who put their lives at risk every single day to protect these animals.

So why is the fence our favourite piece of equipment? Very simply, the fence stops the rhinos from straying out and gives us an alarm if someone tries to break in. It is a clean, clear line for the armed rangers and the fence gangs to patrol and a huge psychological and physical barrier to renegade interference. The Tanzanian men and women who work within the Rhino Sanctuary are courageous and loyal and they take the responsibility of protecting these rhino very seriously. They still hold the reputation as being one of the most loyal and dedicated workforces in Africa. They also feel the benefits of a secure fence from which they can tackle a security situation and have some form of protection.

A successful rhino sanctuary is also all about space. The rhinos (now numbering 13) have all established territories within the Sanctuary and very rarely reach the fence line itself. The thick bush is a huge plus in terms of both feed and security, but not enough on its own.

Fence-line maintenance is top priority, with mobile teams checking the entire fence twice a day. They carry out these checks on foot to ensure that they do not miss any problem or potential problem. Repairs are undertaken on the spot and we always have a stock of fence posts and wire in the stores for major repairs.

Like all favourite pieces of kit, the fence is an expensive undertaking: poles, wire, outposts, people, insulators, earth rods, batteries, solar panels, energisers, plant

machines, the list goes on, but we felt that we couldn't designate Mkomazi as an "Intensive Protection Zone" with little or zero external protection.

The fence line is now being extended into an area of higher rainfall and rhino-preferred vegetation and where there are further natural water pans. This is a massive civil engineering project but will have great benefits for the expansion of the Rhino Sanctuary in the coming years. GAWPT is also in the process of replacing the original fence-posts which were installed in 1996. This is an undertaking requiring heavy physical manual labour and massive logistics.

I think we've made the point... favourite piece of kit...THE FENCE!!

Thanks

Our very grateful thanks to the Foundation Friends of Safaripark Beekse Bergen and Dierenrijk, which gave us 5,000 euros for the Mkomazi fence.

We also, together with regular funding partner Chester Zoo, sent over £2,000 in total to pay for the flights and visas for veterinarian Pete Morkeel, who oversaw the successful translocation of three rhinos from Dvur Kralove Zoo to Mkomazi in May / June 2009.

And see pages 20-21 for news about Mkomazi's wonderful education programme, Rafiki wa Faru.

News in brief

A worthy hero

Our congratulations to **Jackson Kamwi**, Senior Rhino Monitor for the Lowveld Rhino Trust, who was selected by the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund as a Disney Conservation Hero. This prestigious international award recognises local people who make significant contributions to conservation in their communities. Jackson received the award in recognition of his commitment to protecting Zimbabwe's black rhinos and his heroic efforts, helping to capture and relocate nearly 1,000 rhinos over the past two decades.

No news from the Selous

Sharp-eyed readers will have noticed that the spring and autumn 2009 issues of *The Horn* have not carried any articles about the work of the Selous Trust (previously known as the Selous Rhino Trust). Fraser Smith, the project's Technical Advisor, has not been able to renew his work permit since March, and negotiations with the Tanzanian Division of Wildlife are ongoing. We sincerely hope, as do co-funders USFWS, IRE, White Oak and Chester Zoo, that Fraser will be able to resume his role.

Change at Zambezi Society

We say goodbye to Duncan Purchase, Director of the Zambezi Society since 2007, who has tendered his resignation. Describing his time at the helm of the Zambezi Society as "very informative and enjoyable, despite the challenges of the operating environment in Zimbabwe," Duncan thanked the Executive Committee for the support that they have given him during his time at ZamSoc. Society Chairman, Ant Williams, together with the Executive Committee, has formed a Task Force to explore future directions for the Society and to chart a way forward for the next six months. Save the Rhino takes a close interest, of course, in the rhino monitoring programme in Matusadona National Park, and we will be keen to see how ZamSoc moves forward.

Running and climbing

We didn't have space elsewhere in this issue to say that the team to run the Comrades Marathon in South Africa in May 2010 is shaping up well; and that we hope to have a climber, Chris Parker, conquering Kili in rhino costume in early 2010. Good luck to all our brave rhinos...