
RHINO POACHING IN THE MAASAI MARA

The first rhino poaching incidents reported in Kenya since 1992 took place in the Maasai Mara Reserve between June and July 1997. Two black rhinos were killed, one of which survived for a week after it was shot and was treated for the bullet wound. However, it died from gunshot damage to critical internal organs in the abdominal and thoracic area. The horns remained intact. The second rhino was found dead with its horns removed. The **first** incident was near Ole Tokoshi and the second was shot one kilometre from the Sand River. Both of these sites are outside the Reserve. Ballistics tests on the bullets show that they originated from a 30-06 rifle, which is not in official use by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the General Services Unit (the GSU is a branch of the Kenya police charged with security issues). Police nor the Maasai Mara anti-poaching units.

Both rhinos were positively identified, and were known to be resident in the Mara, but regularly moved into Tanzania's Serengeti National Park.

Following the incidents, the main security organisations involved in the area, KWS, Narok County Council (responsible for the management of the Maasai Mara Reserve), the GSU and the Police, met to discuss the situation and what could be done. Resulting from the deliberations, a massive investigation has been launched to identify the cause of the sudden increase in poaching activity for the area. Furthermore, additional security measures have been put into place and rhino monitoring has been intensified to protect against a repeat occurrence.

Source - KWS News/Tim Oloo, Kenya Wildlife Service Rhino Coordinator, PO Box 40241, Nairobi, Kenya

RHINOS IN SWAZILAND

Two of the Kingdom's Big Game Parks, Hlane National Park and Mkhaya Game Reserve, are home to all of Swaziland's white rhino while the country's only black rhino occur in Mkhaya.

The actual numbers of rhinos existing in Swaziland are not released here as this is still considered classified" information for security reasons. What can be said is that both populations are flourishing and expanding after the near total wipe-out by poaching between November 1988 and December 1992. During these four years Swaziland lost more than 70% of its rhinos to poaching, in what became generally known as the Rhino Wan 'his resulted in upgraded legislation and many judicial confrontations. The close of this period happened also to be the culmination of the worst drought recorded in history; this impacted severely on reproduction by causing many rhino calves to perish because their mother's milk dried up.

Following a short hiatus of stability, with no adult rhinos being lost to poaching after December '92 and no recruitment from surviving calves during the closing years of the drought, the rains came.

Source: Ted Reilly, Mkhaya Game Reserve, PO Box 33, Mbabane, Swaziland

Over the last 36 months, white rhino have shown a 58% increase in numbers by natural increment, probably enhanced by the synchronization of receptive females after the drought. Every cow capable of siring offspring has done so, with the only negative being that 72% of their young are males. This reflects a very healthy state of affairs within the Big Game Parks and says much for the dedication and effectiveness of the ranger force.

The rhino conservation situation in Swaziland has gone from losing one rhino every two weeks on average, and on occasion up to three in one day, to no rhino poaching incidents reported since December 1992. This dramatic improvement can be ascribed to the new game laws and their inclusion in the Non Bailable Offences Act together with the ability of the Big Game Parks to implement this legislation effectively. The total support and commitment of His Majesty, King Mswati 111, in facilitating the control which now is in place and which is backed by extremely tough anti-poaching legislation, has enabled this remarkable and encouraging achievement in rhino conservation.