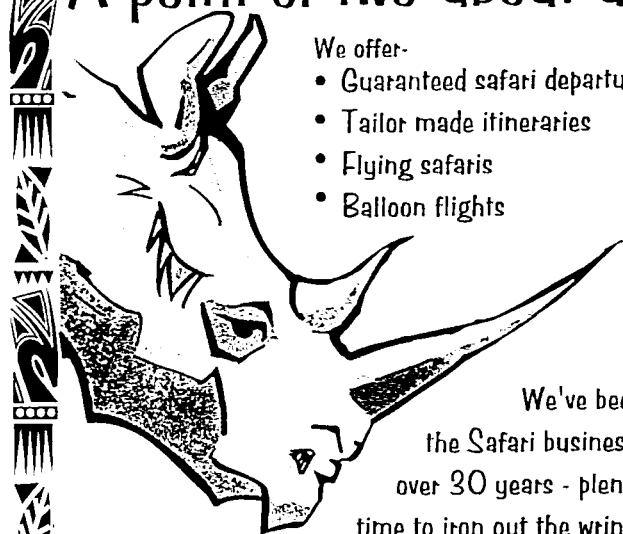


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On the up

Latest estimates put Africa's total rhinoceros population at 14,720 animals. Of these, 3,630 are Black Rhinos, which have shown an increase of at least 500 animals (15 %) over the past two years.

The number of White Rhinos, which had fallen to just 50 individuals in the early 1900s, now stands at 11,090, according to the new figures. Of these, however, as few as 20 are Northern White Rhinos, a race now reduced to a single tiny

population in the Garamba National Park, close to the DR Congo's northern border with the Sudan.

The figures, made public in July by experts from the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the Worldwide Fund For Nature (WWF), are seen as an encouraging sign that the Black Rhino may at last be on the road to recovery, although certain populations, the report concedes, are still vulnerable to threats of increased poaching. And in Cameroon, the report adds, only a few scattered Western Black Rhinos are now believed to remain.

Across Africa, the Black Rhinoceros suffered a calamitous decline from about 65,000 animals in the 1970s to just 2,400 in the mid-1990s. Yet, despite the recent gains, there are still reckoned to be 90 % fewer Black Rhinos today than there were 30 years ago. Kenya, which has 458 Black Rhinos and 221 (Southern) White



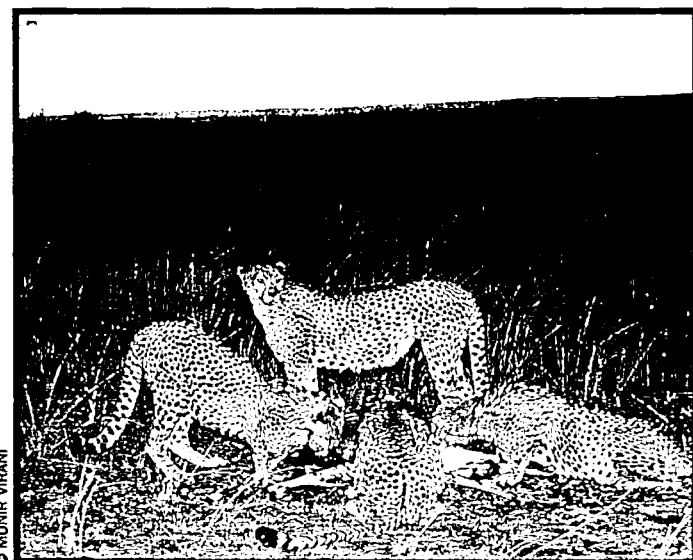
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Like, the Mara cheetah made famous in the BBC *Big Cat Diary* TV series and featured recently in *Swara* [26:3&4], separated from her cubs on 12 June after making a kill near the Ntiakitiak stream, NE of Mara Intrepids Camp.

She had killed a Thomson's Gazelle, and when the cubs joined her she let them eat as usual. Then she walked away.

We thought she might be going down to the river, to cool off perhaps and to get her breath back after the chase. But she kept going, crossing the stream and heading north. After two kilometres she found – and killed – a Thomson's Gazelle fawn, which she proceeded to feed on herself, not even calling the cubs. After this meal she just kept on going, not even

'Exemplary' projects

Rhinos, now ranks fourth (after South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe) among nations that still have rhino populations. The immediate target now, according to Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Rhino Programme Co-ordinator Martin Mulama, is for Kenya to have a minimum of 500 Black Rhinos by the end of 2005.

"To this end," Mulama says, "we are going to have to maintain a net rate of increase for the rhinos of at least 5 % per annum." In the Nairobi National Park, now home to 70 Black Rhinos, the annual growth rate stands at a healthy 6.7 %. "This," Mulama says, "coupled with successes in the Lake Nakuru National Park and on some private Rhino Sanctuaries, has so far enabled us to stay on course, despite some reversals suffered elsewhere in the country."

– GB

• For more on the work of the KWS Rhino Programme, see pp. 70–73.

Kenya's National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) earlier this year used the occasion of World Environment Day – 5 June – to present two 'Exemplary Achievement' awards for environmental conservation to the giant cement producer, Lafarge East Africa.

The NEMA Chairman, Professor Ratemo Michieka, cited the ongoing expansion of Lafarge's pioneering work in rehabilitating used quarries mined by its Mombasa subsidiary, Bamburi Cement, as indicative of the group's continuing commitment to excellence in both nature conservation and environmentally responsible industrial practice.

Also singled out for praise was the Bamburi subsidiary's Green Schools Project, a new reforestation initiative for creating woodlots in impoverished arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya, now in its pilot phase at 12 rural schools in remote parts of the country's Eastern Province.

Under this project, schools benefit from tanks built for them by the company to hold fresh, clean water for their drinking and cooking needs. Water previously fetched for their own consumption by the schoolchildren and their families was of very poor quality and is now being used instead to water plantations of tree-seedlings established on and around the respective school compounds. The growing trees being cared for by the children represent

a source of both fuel wood security and future income for their communities, while also improving the productivity and health of their local environments.

In the run-up to 2004's World Environment Day, 3,000 trees were also planted at Bamburi Cement's Nairobi Grinding Plant in a ceremony attended by senior provincial administrators, national environment regulatory authorities, and representatives of the local community, as well as the company's own top brass.

The NEMA awards ceremony, held at Lafarge's Baobab Farm in Mombasa, culminated in another tree-planting ceremony – at Bamburi's South Quarry, and officiated by Dr Newton Kulundu, then Kenya's Minister for the Environment, together with the UN Environment Programme's Deputy Secretary-General, Seka Toure, and leading NEMA representatives, among a host of other dignitaries from both government and industry.

Six baobabs were planted in a ring, in what – in years to come – is expected to become a striking focal point for the company's reclaimed South Quarry.

– reported by Dino J Martins

• For more on the environmental rehabilitation projects undertaken by Lafarge Ecosystems, see pages 18–22.

The parting of the ways

looking back to see if the cubs were following.

The cubs, when they had finished feeding, had no idea where their mother was. They headed south to the main road between Mara Intrepids and Talek Gate. On 14 June, the cubs managed on their own to kill a young hartbeest, which they fed on. The next day they crossed the Talek River, moving south after crossing the Burringat Plains, reaching the Olkeju Rongai River on 17 June.

The grass in the Mara was then quite tall, with few animals around for the cheetahs to hunt. Making a kill under these conditions would certainly test the skill and resolve of the grown, yet inexperienced cubs, which – sensibly perhaps – remained together.

The cubs got almost as far as Keekorok before heading



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back. They are currently [as of mid-September] in the Olkeju Rongai area. Still together, they are reported recently to have killed a duiker. A week earlier, they killed a young wildebeest. They seem to be doing well, now that there is more for them to eat. We are watching them with interest, to see what happens once they too decide to go their separate ways.

Kike herself, meanwhile, ventured as far as the Aitong Plains (this year more than usually thick with livestock) before returning to the Rhino Ridge area, between Governors Camp and Mara Intrepids.

Kike's sister, ensconced near the old Mara River airstrip and the Aitong Plains, seems for now to have assumed Kike's starring role. Her three cubs are

now also jumping on to cars (albeit much less frequently). Most people love watching cheetahs with young cubs, as they are always playful, with the mother forever trying to teach the youngsters tactical lessons – or hunting to keep them fed. This family has since relocated to Kike's territory on Paradise Plains.

Since separating from her cubs, Kike is no longer quite so sought after as she was before (which is probably no bad thing). In another few months, however, when (we all hope) she bears another litter, people may start flocking to see Kike all over again.

– by Paul Kirui, KPSGA-s

• For more on Kike, and other enigmatic Mara big cats, past as well as present, see pages 59 – 65.