

Pulling down the fences in Laikipia

Save the Rhino continues to play a key supportive role in rhino conservation in Kenya.

Michael Dyer
Borana Ranch

For many years, Borana Ranch has been a strategic partner with the Laikipia Wildlife Forum in the conservation of the Laikipia Ewaso ecosystem, home to the majority of Kenya's black rhino. Existing Laikipia rhino sanctuaries have been so successful at securing rhino numbers that more safe habitat is urgently required.

Borana Ranch, a founding member of the LWF, has also over the last 15 years played an important role in Laikipia's conservation, with a strong emphasis on community-driven conservation initiatives and education.

To maximise conservation value, Borana now plans to enter into a collaborative management agreement with the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (LWC), one of Kenya's leading rhino sanctuaries. Removal of the Lewa-Borana fence will create a single

wider conservation area. The ultimate aim is to extend this wider conservation area to incorporate the community-owned conservancies of Il Ngwesi and Lekurruki, as well as the Ngare Ndare Forest and other areas.

Immediate benefits include an increase in available habitat for Lewa's rhino population, and the maximisation of wider conservation value, with consequent increase in potential tourism returns in support of conservation. Given the underlying conservation objective, the incorporation of both Il Ngwesi and Lekurruki is ultimately essential, as is integration of the Ngare Ndare Forest.

Lewa holds approximately 9% of Kenya's black rhino, and almost 25% of the world's remaining population of Grevy's zebra. It therefore plays a critical role in the conservation of these endangered species. Lewa provides a link between the Ngare Ndare Forest and community-owned range lands to the north, much of which are under integrated conservation management, with support from the Northern Range lands Trust (NRT), which is based in Lewa. This vital link allows for the free movement of wildlife, particularly elephant.

Both Borana and Lewa have engaged extensively with local communities in seeking conservation-based development options. Lewa provided the impetus for the

establishment of the NRT, which supports the establishment of community conservation initiatives further north, including those on Il Ngwesi and Lekurruki, as well as supporting the Ngare Ndare Forest Trust. Borana is the only other private conservancy that is a member of the NRT, and with Lewa supports community conservation initiatives in Il Ngwesi and Lekurruki in particular. Il Ngwesi is the only community-owned conservation area to host both black and white rhino in the country.

There is an immense degree of convergence in the strategic objectives of Lewa and Borana, driven by a shared desire to maximise conservation value. Both are keen to develop and maintain world-class wildlife sanctuaries, ensuring natural processes responsible for ecosystem and biodiversity maintenance are fully sustained. Both endeavour to support local community projects that are consistent with conservation objectives, and thereby ensure wildlife makes a meaningful contribution to development agendas. Both also aim to be, and are increasingly recognised as, private sector role models for the conservation of wildlife.

Lewa is urgently in need of additional habitat for black rhino. The LWC Research and Monitoring Annual Report for 2005 stated that the Lewa black rhino population was approaching its estimated carrying capacity (ECC) of 50 (which it has now reached), and that it is critical that options for maintaining the population at or below the ECC are explored if black rhino breeding performance is to be maintained. Borana is able to provide ideal black rhino habitat - indeed able to contribute to a significant increase in habitat diversity within a wider conservation area.

Thanks

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Main picture:
Black rhino in Laikipia

