

# Ranches & rhinos

Laikipia is home to over half of Kenya's rhino population. The white and black rhinos on this semi-arid plateau are closely guarded in private wildlife sanctuaries, which have served as important sources for the repopulation of former key ranges such as Tsavo and Meru National Parks. The immediate survival of Laikipia's rhinos is assured, but long-term success in rhino conservation lies beyond these fences.

The next step for the Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF) is to involve the local communities. Supported by SRI, they are promoting the integration of community-based natural resource management and wildlife conservation across the District. Wider participation in rhino conservation will help smooth the way for the reintroduction of rhinos to community areas.

The first reintroductions are taking place in the community-owned Il Ngwesi and Lekurruki ranches of eastern Laikipia. The large rhino populations that once roamed this dry bushland were lost three decades ago. Yet other wildlife survived, and now - with the support of the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Borana Ranch, and the LWF - the communities have seen the benefits of wildlife conservation and are now deriving an income from eco-tourism. They have set

aside conservation areas, built eco-lodges and developed elaborate security networks. Their work has made possible by the reintroduction of Omni, a black rhino orphan from Lewa and the only rhino in Kenya to be fully protected and cared for by a local community. The LWF hope he will be the first of many.



Further west, the LWF is supporting the formation of two other community conservancies. The Nagum Community Conservation Trust (see The Horn, Spring 2002) has set aside 12,000 acres bordering Ol Ari Nyiro, one of the few private conservancies to have sustained a black rhino population. The Naibunga Conservancy - 43,000 acres set aside by nine community-owned group ranches - is the largest community wildlife reserve in Kenya. The land borders the private Pyramid wildlife sanctuary and should

provide a protective buffer zone the sanctuary's rhinos. Naibunga has experienced an increase in other wildlife numbers, including endangered wild dogs.

Sweetwaters is perhaps the best known of Laikipia's five rhino sanctuaries. It also holds large populations of other species including elephant. Despite electric fencing,



conflict between the wildlife and nearby subsistence farmers has been intense. LWF community development and conservation education initiatives will ensure the community derives direct benefit from conservation. With growing community support for wildlife conservation in Laikipia, the prospect of expanding rhino populations is increasingly secure.

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## Kenya - Tsavo

### All quiet on the eastern front

Since the last issue of The Horn, when we reported on poaching of six black rhinos, the situation in Tsavo East National Park seems to be improving. The KWS has reinforced staff numbers and, under the leadership of Assistant Director Peter Leituro and Rhino Officer Richard Ketch, monitoring and patrolling teams are back in force. Save the Rhino and its funding partner in Tsavo, Chester Zoo, plan field visits in late 2002 and early 2003 to review progress and to assess the case for future funding.

In the meantime, Save the Rhino has set up a fuel and maintenance contract for one of the Tsavo East vehicles, so that rhino monitoring and anti-poaching patrols can continue

