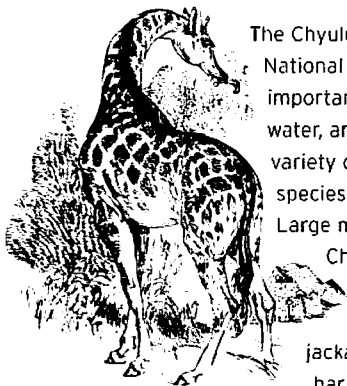


The lost rhinos of

The Chyulu Hills, an elongated stretch of volcanic cones, covers a total area of 741km² and adjoins Tsavo West National Park

Cathy Dean



The Chyulus were gazetted as a National Park in 1983 because of its importance as catchment area for water, and also because of the wide variety of plants, animal and insect species found in the Chyulu Hills.

Large mammals recorded in

Chyulu Hills NP include:

elephant, buffalo, lion,

leopard, cheetah, Hyena,

jackal, wild dog, eland, giraffe,

hartebeest, wildebeest, zebra,

oryx, klipspringer, lesser kudu, duiker, reedbuck,

steinbuck, bushbuck, serval, wild cat, caracal, genet,

vervet monkey, Sykes' monkey and baboon.

To everyone's surprise, in 1995/96, information reached Tsavo West National Park that there were black rhinos in the Chyulu Hills. A small team from Tsavo West's rhino unit was dispatched to the area to confirm the report. After extensively patrolling the area, the team positively confirmed the presence of rhinos, having encountered numerous signs such as active wallow points, feeding sites and spoor. However, no physical sighting was made (sightings remained elusive for years). The KWS immediately set up a small camp to monitor and provide security for these rhinos.

The local Kamba communities are renowned as effective and competent hunters and they continue to trespass into the Park and surrounding areas to hunt for meat on both a subsistence and commercial level. Although no fresh carcasses have been found in the area since mid 1980s, it does not necessarily follow that no rhinos have been poached; poor visibility on the ground and from the air makes it difficult to be sure. The following incidents targetting the black rhinos of Chyulu Hills NP have been recorded:

→ In 1998 a gang of armed Somalis moved through the area and raided some agricultural small holders on the Park boundary. While there, they demanded

information on known rhino in the area.

KWS security personnel acted fast and the gang disappeared.

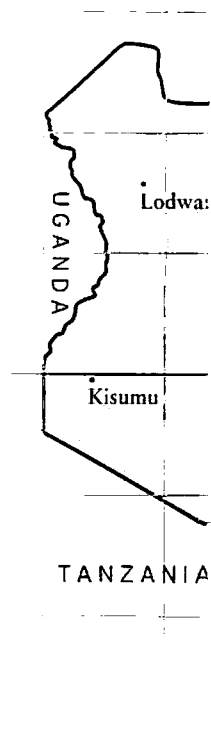
→ In 2000 the Imbirikani Game Scout intelligence network received information that 2 Maasai had moved into the area to spear rhino. The poachers became aware that they were being followed and escaped, however follow up identified the culprits and they admitted to having been given an order to supply rhino horn.

→ In 2001 KWS rangers and Imbirikani community scouts recovered over 200 snares set for bushmeat within the rhino range alone and four heavy snares obviously set for rhino were also recovered from a rhino trail. These are usually foot traps: nails are hammered through a piece of 6x1 wood, sharpened, poisoned and left on regular trails.

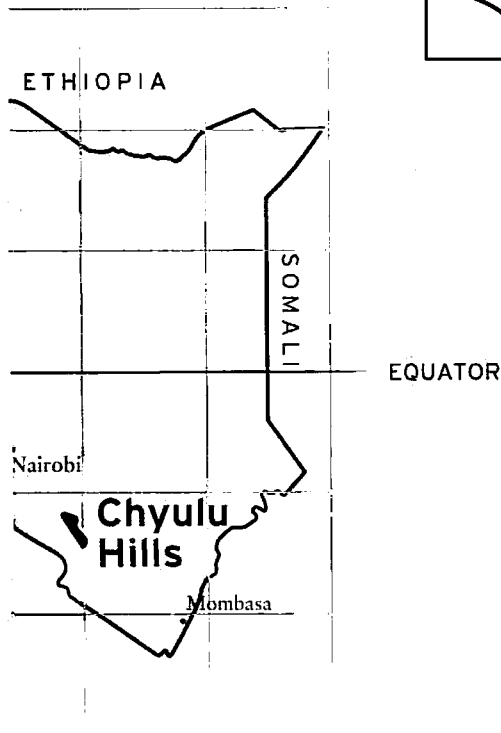
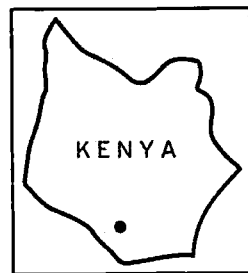
→ In October 2002 the KWS rhino unit arrested two poachers who had set up an ambush at a well-used rhino dust wallow. The KWS also recovered three cable snares set for rhino and apprehended the culprits, who admitted they were targeting rhino. They were subsequently charged and received a Ksh 3,000 (£25) fine.

At the beginning of 2003, Richard Bonham, who runs a safari business and who has a lodge within the Chyulu Hills, and Martin Mulama of the KWS contacted Save the Rhino. The small rhino camp at that time just had one officer, one driver, one corporal, and six rangers, together with one very old Toyota Landcruiser, which has outlived its economic usefulness. There was no lightweight camping gear that would enable the rangers to sleep out on patrols, thus necessitating their return to base camp each night. Could Save the Rhino help?

We were really excited about this lost population of rhinos, and in January David Stirling went to visit the Chyulus. Dave subsequently recommended that Save the Rhino make a major contribution to new plans drawn up



the Chyulu Hills



to protect and monitor these rhinos, and we also turned to our long-standing co-funders of many in-situ conservation projects, Chester Zoo.

We're delighted to report that we have each contributed £15,000, making a total grant of £30,000. This money has paid for a brand new Landrover, which is about to leave the garage in Nairobi bound for the Chyulus, for a year's worth of fuel, insurance and maintenance, for the salaries of four community scouts, and for some camping equipment so that the rangers can go out on extended patrols.

Despite the incursions into the National Park, despite the inadequate security, the black rhinos have somehow managed to survive. The existence of this isolated remnant rhino population is a miracle and their survival can largely be attributed to the nature of their habitat: extensive thickets and lava flows, and inhospitable country that makes tracking difficult and in many areas impossible. These rhinos have also developed secretive habits and are extremely wary. But how much longer can they survive without proper funding.

We still need to raise another £19,000 to pay for monitoring equipment, to buy flying hours for aerial patrols and surveys, to pay incentives for information leading to the capture of poachers, and to buy the rest of the camping equipment and rations needed for the 14-strong team. If you can help, please contact me: cathy@savetherhino.org

Some of the information in this article is deliberately vague. We cannot tell you how many rhinos there are, or where their ranges are, as this might lead to an increased poaching threat. Only when we have all the security in place adequately to protect these rhinos, can we tell you the full story of the lost Chyulu rhinos.

