

Namibia:

Black and white rhinos in Waterberg

The introduction of both black and white rhino into the Waterberg Plateau Park has been a big success, thanks partly to the assistance of donors such as Save the Rhino International.

Waterberg, situated in the north central area of Namibia, was proclaimed a park in 1972. Covering 40,500 hectares, its purpose is the breeding of rare and endangered species. White rhino were introduced to WPP in the 1970s and desert black rhino in 1989. The Waterberg white rhino population is the biggest in Namibia, and the single most important donor population. Both the white and the black rhino populations in Waterberg are considered important by the IUCN.

To understand the dynamics of a population we need to know its size, birth rate and death rate. We have brought the security situation under control, and field observations indicate that the populations are performing well. Nonetheless, budget constraints hamper the effectiveness of the monitoring staff, as obsolete equipment needs to be replaced and the current monitoring programme needs to be upgraded. Save the Rhino is contributing funds to meet these needs.

A unique feature of Waterberg is the use of horses for monitoring and patrolling. Horses can spot a rhino long before any human, and are more mobile in the wilderness area. Save the Rhino has provided funds for four new horses. The daunting task of training them was given to Willipard, Efraim, Bethuel and Jefta, but a lot of schooling is still necessary before they can join the old stalwarts (Tango, Star, Nelson and Demoiselle) on a rhino patrol.

Almost 150 years ago, Charles Darwin wrote in the Origin of Species (1859):

"To admit that species generally become rare before they become extinct, to feel no surprise at the rarity of the species, and yet to marvel greatly when the species ceased to exist, is much the

same as to admit that sickness in the individual is the forerunner of death - to feel no surprise at sickness, but when the sick man dies, to wonder and to suspect that he died of some deed of violence."


In Namibia, we take Charles Darwin to heart, actively managing our rhino populations to ensure that they grow and that Namibia stands in the forefront of the battle to save these superb animals for the whole world.

When the park was set up, conservationists believed Waterberg's lush vegetation made it ideal black rhino habitat. A conservative estimate of the carrying capacity for black rhino was thought to be 75 animals. However the population was not performing well and it became clear that Waterberg could only carry 20 breeding animals (eight to nine breeding males and 12 breeding females). Since this important discovery, the population has been maintained at this optimum size and population growth has stayed above 7%. Waterberg has so far produced eight black rhino to start new populations elsewhere in Namibia and is now an important donor population.

After the initial introductions in the early 1970s, the white rhino were left alone. But these were the only white rhino in a protected area in Namibia, and in 1989, monitoring began. From an estimated 50 animals in 1997, 12 rhinos were translocated to Etosha National Park to form a founder population, and in 2003 another 12 animals will be translocated to Etosha. The Waterberg population continues to grow at over 9% per year.

You, the donors, should feel proud of your role in establishing viable breeding rhino populations on Waterberg. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism of Namibia is forever grateful. Looking to the future, MET envisages an active and beneficial partnership with Save the Rhino International, conserving rhino not only on Waterberg but also elsewhere in Namibia.

Pierre du Preez
Rhino Co-ordinator
Ministry of Environment and Tourism



In 2002, Save the Rhino made a grant of £12,000 to the Waterberg Plateau Park for upgrading, supplementing and replacing monitoring equipment, equipping the mounted unit, and for patrol camps.