dominance of tall unpalatable grasses such as *Eragrostis rotifer, Eragrostis plana* and *Sporobolus africana*. The results of this study indicate that the white rhinos mostly preferred the short grass communities with the grasses *Cynodon hirutus, C. dactylon, Enneapogon scoparius* and *Aristida spp.* being the most preferred species.

NOTES:

PLATFORM PRESENTATION: SEASONAL FLORISTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF FORAGING PATCHES OF WHITE RHINOCEROS (*CERATOTHERIUM SIMUM SIMUM)* IN THE SONGIMVELO NATURE RESERVE, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

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Forage patch selection by White Rhinoceros in the Songimvelo Nature Reserve was investigated during the late wet (January to March) and late dry seasons (June to August) of 2008. The aim of the study was to describe the floristic attributes of the selected patches in both seasons relative to neighbouring control patches.

Forage patches were identified by locating Rhinos and observing their feeding behaviour (n = 21 for wet season, n = 19 for dry season). Floristic information was recorded in both the experimental plots (feeding patch) and control plots (located 50 m from the experimental plots, situated within the same plant community). A two-way ANOVA, using three replicates, indicated that grass species density between experimental (Exp.) and control (Ctrl) plots were significantly different in the late wet season (Exp = 19 ± 25; Ctrl = 14 ± 12) and the late dry season (Exp = 15 ± 16; Ctrl = 12 ± 15).

The grasses with the highest densities in the late wet season and also selected by the White rhinoceros included *Heteropogon contortus*, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Eragrostis spp.* and *Bothriochloa insculpta* compared to *Heteropogon contortus*, *Setaria sphacelata* and *Hyparrhenia hirta* in the late dry season. The density (number m^{-2}) of grass species in the height class 0 - 10 cm in the experimental (18.60 ± 2.97) plots were higher compared to the control (13.81 ± 1.45). Grass phytomass showed a significant difference between the late wet (1313.71 ± 60.85) and late dry seasons (1060.92 ± 55.26) and a significant difference between experimental (1051.57 ± 58.38) and control (1332.42 ± 57.88) plots. The woody component showed a high proportion of dwarf shrubs (≤ 1 m in height) in both experimental (Late wet = 0.75; Late dry = 0.83) and control (Late wet = 0.70; Late dry = 0.71) plots across both seasons but showed a lower proportion of trees (> 2 m in height) in experimental plots (Late wet = 0.10; Late dry = 0.03) than in control plots (Late wet = 0.14; Late dry = 0.14).

This study shows that White Rhinoceros prefer foraging in open areas and select patches with an abundance of preferred short grass species. This requires a careful consideration of the carrying capacity of the area because that can have a significant effect on the vegetation composition and species diversity of the selected areas.

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