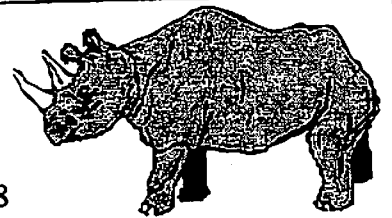


REALLY, RHINOS!



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Endangered Rhinos Survive War

[WWF Focus, 20(5):3, September/October, 1998]

In spite of military outbursts and widespread fears for its survival, the world's most threatened subspecies of rhinoceros, the northern white rhino, survived last year's civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire).

A survey of rhinos and their habitat carried out by WWF in Garamba National Park has shown at least 24 animals to have survived or been born since fighting broke out in 1996, when WWF conservationists had to be evacuated from the area. Garamba, located in the northeast region of the country, is the only known place on Earth where the northern white rhino still exists in the wild.

"We were afraid of what we would find," said Kate Newman, director of WWF's East and Southern Africa programs. "Given the instability in the area and lack of adequate security, it has been impossible to ascertain the situation until just recently." Among the 24 rhinos observed in aerial surveys done in Garamba in May, there were at least three young rhinos born within the last year.

WWF began its involvement in the conservation of Garamba's white rhinos in 1984 when the estimated total population of rhinos in the area was thought to be as low as 13 individuals. "That there are at least 24 rhinos surviving in the region is for us a great source of encouragement and a testament to the dedicated work over the years of scientists and conservationists working on the ground," said Newman.

To learn more about this volatile area, visit the WWF website: www.world-wildlife.org

Sand Rivers: Selous Game Reserve

[SWARA, 20:6 & 21:1, pp.8-11]

In the heart of Southern Tanzania lies one of the largest areas of protected wilderness in the world. Created by the German government between 1905 and 1912 and known today as the Selous Games Reserve, it is named after the famous adventurer and hunter who died and was buried there in 1917. In the 1980s the vast Selous, an area of 43,626 square kilometers, witnessed possibly the worst slaughter of wildlife, particularly of elephants and rhinos, in Africa. Two events halted this massacre: a fall in the price of ivory and a huge and successful crackdown on poaching. Now, elephant numbers are rising and tourism is on the increase - with it, a greater public interest in conservation.

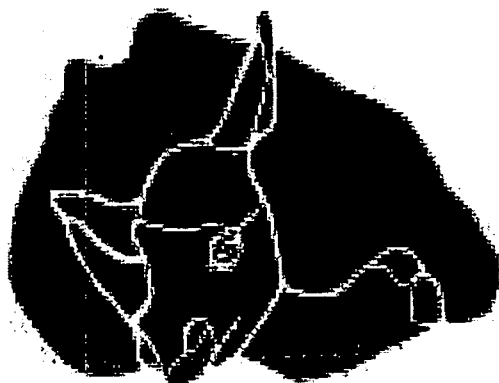
Rhinos, however, remain on the brink of extinction. The directors of a new lodge named Sand Rivers have initiated, along with the government, a rhino project to protect the black rhinos in their area, and a World Wide Fund for Nature technical adviser is currently surveying the whole of the Selous for rhinos. Hopefully, with this kind of support, the Selous rhinos, once one of the biggest populations in the world, will yet survive.

In 1981 there were about 2,000 black rhinos in the Selous Game Reserve, the largest population of any place in Africa. By the late 1980s, this figure dropped to less than 500. In 1989, Tanzania launched Operation Uhai - an anti-poaching campaign involving, for the first time ever, huge government resources to overcome the massive illegal hunting of rhinos. It was also the first time that Tanzania's armed forces were deployed in any part of the country to solve this immense problem. One



thousand soldiers surrounded Selous, an area well known for decades for rhino horn smuggling, while a thousand police and two hundred personnel from the Department of Wildlife and from Tanzania's National Parks swept the rest of the country. Between June 1989 and February 1991, 2,607 poachers and traders were arrested and prosecuted.

Since 1990 very few rhino carcasses have been found in the Selous. Although this appears encouraging, it may partly be because the carcass dismembers quickly, and unlike elephant bones which are white in color, rhino bones are grey and not easily spotted from an airplane. Benson Kibonde, project manager of the Selous Game Reserve, has 120 game scouts. He is now rehabilitating vehicles and graders and has increased the number of casual laborers. He wishes to map the Selous to decide where to concentrate his forces and wants to increase mobility on the ground, on the rivers and lakes and in the air as well as to improve overall communications. Kibonde says that the Selous' rhinos are so few and so scattered that unless he protects the whole of the reserve they will not survive. His long-term plan is to improve anti-poaching on the Selous boundary and hope rhino numbers will then rise.



What makes the Selous unique is that it is the largest game reserve in Africa. With its large quantities of big game the Selous offers a glimpse of life in Africa a hundred years ago - walking in silence, with every sense alert, and just a rifle for protection. It is a humbling experience and a huge privilege to be able to follow on foot the fresh tracks of hippos along a sand river, surprise a dozing buffalo in a pool, then hear the rumblings of an elephant, momentarily hidden by a tree on the bank, only several steps away. In our overcrowded world, few people will ever have such a chance to feel the power and exhilaration of Africa's largest wilderness.

Sand Rivers is unique in one more way, and perhaps the most important of all. It is the only lodge or permanent tented camp in the Selous putting significant amounts of money directly into rhino conservation. In November, 1995, the founders of Sand Rivers, Richard Bonham and Bimb and Lizzy Theobald, along with Tanzania's director of wildlife and the project manager of the Selous Game Reserve set up the Sand Rivers Rhino Project.

This enterprise is the first of its kind aimed at protecting one specific rhino population. These rhinos - at least six hundred in number and ranging over perhaps a hundred square kilometers - occur in the Kidai area which is west of Sand Rivers and just north of the Rufiji River. They have survived due to their remoteness and inaccessibility. However, when Richard Bonham found a poachers' camp in the area in 1994, he and the Department of Wildlife decided anti-poaching patrols were needed to save the rhinos. Sand Rivers raised funds for the Rhino Project and refurbished the abandoned rangers' post of Kidai. The Director of the Department of Wildlife, Bakari Mbanjo, allocated six game scouts in January 1996 and the Rhino Project doubled their salaries and paid them night allowances as incentives, and this continues today. The client to Sand Rivers paid for a leader's salary for a year, and this scout joined the others in March 1996 at Kidai Camp. Good leadership gives motivation which is vital to the success of patrol work.

As of July, 1997, Lizzy Theobald had raised nearly \$50,000 for the protection of these rhinos, not only for augmenting salaries for anti-poaching staff, but also for uniforms, and equipment, including VHF radios, GPS, rechargeable batteries, infrared cameras and night-vision binoculars. Sand Rivers also helped Kidai Camp with transport and fuel. The scouts' presence is an essential deterrent, not only to would-be rhino poachers, but also to fish and meat poachers who come up the old river course from Mloka village on the eastern Selous boundary, a day's walk away from this rich fishing area. No rhino has been poached recently in the area, and in 1997, a new calf was born, a fine tribute to the success of the Rhino Project.

Sand Rivers is an excellent example of how a private tourist lodge is working with the government to support conservation. For tourists staying there, it is good to know that the lodge is effective.