

THE FUTURE OF BLACK RHINOS IN KENYA LIES IN THE EXPANSION OF THEIR HABITAT

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Mutane, a 23 year old male black rhino enjoys a stroll in his territory

The indiscriminate poaching of rhinos across their entire range in Africa is posing an undeniable threat to their survival. On top of the threat from poaching, black rhino populations in Kenya are also starting to stall due to lack of suitable and secure habitats for expansion; most of the established and enclosed sanctuaries have attained their ecological carrying capacity. In hopes of addressing these issues, the draft Black Rhino Strategy Plan in Kenya, 2012-2016, has identified protection of rhinos and acquiring of suitable habitat for rhino conservation as two of the main strategic objectives for the next five years. The aim of the Strategy Plan is to contribute towards achieving a metapopulation of 2,000 black rhinos in Kenya.

The threat of poaching has placed enormous financial burden on the state, private and community lands that hold rhinos with Mugie Rhino Sanctuary being one of the areas affected, having lost three rhinos in 2011 to poachers. A series of meetings between the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the management of the sanctuary were held leading to a joint decision to translocate all the 25 black and one white rhino to Ol Jogi Conservancy in Laikipia and to Ruma National Park - the new KWS Rhino Sanctuary on the shores of Lake Victoria. The rhinos' re-introduction into Ruma signified a historic moment as the area last held black rhinos in the 1950s.

The KWS and several other private conservation organizations, including Lewa, have renewed their rhino conservation efforts with plans to reintroduce black rhinos in the Borana Conservancy, immediately to the west of Lewa. This move will be additionally beneficial to Lewa as the black rhino population has reached maximum capacity at just over 70 animals.



Rhinotek and her calf. With 73 black rhinos, Lewa has already attained its ecological carrying capacity