

Are Kenya's Rhinos Recovering?

by Rob Brett

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"Although the black rhino was clearly a highly successful 'model' of a large herbivore for tens of millions of years of evolution, as is evidenced by its persistence over evolutionary time and the sheer numbers that are still remembered, it was not capable of adapting to snares, spears, dogs and guns. Its daily routine of movements within a relatively small area, returning often to favorite watering points, salt licks, or *Euphorbia* trees, made it such an easy target for man.

"Around 1984 when Kenya started its policy of creating specially protected rhino sanctuaries, it became clear that if anyone was to do anything to save the few rhinos that remained in poached-out areas like Tsavo, it was important to decide whether to capture the remaining animals and move them to sanctuaries where they could breed with other rhinos, or whether, in the knowledge that they were keeping in touch with other rhinos and breeding successfully, to leave them where they were and protect them *in situ*.

"The 100,000 acre Ol Ari Nyiro Ranch, in Laikipia, still has free-living black rhinos that live much as they always did in dense bush on the sides of impenetrable rocky gorges. Due to the effective anti-poaching work of the general manager of the ranch, Colin Francombe, and his security patrols, and the custodianship of owner Kuki Gallmann, over 40 rhinos still remain. The Laikipia project was largely conceived with the idea of developing the methods necessary to monitor rhino movements without seeing them, and training

up the personnel necessary for monitoring in other areas of Kenya.

"For the future of the Laikipia rhinos, it will be essential to build barriers on the ranch boundaries to prevent them from wandering off. This is one of several rhino projects for which Michael Werikhe is walking across the USA this year. If the rhinos continue to stray from Ol Ari Nyiro ranch, more will be poached, and the rhinos will thin out on the ranch so much that breeding will suffer further, and the population will not replace itself.

"For the present, we may have no choice but to maintain and breed rhinos in the fenced sanctuaries. Will there be practical and workable means of tying tourism revenues to improving the livelihood of people in the same area, so that maintaining that revenue is realized to be more beneficial than poaching, which would then become equivalent to killing a goose that lays golden eggs?

"If this comes about, then I believe there are prospects that there may once again be thousands rather than hundreds of black rhinos in Kenya. Success will only really be achieved when the sanctuaries become less important, and many fences are dismantled. Fewer rhinos will be given names, rhino studbooks would be put in storage, and there will be enough rhinos around for anecdotes to be told about how once again, rhinos have become a nuisance."

[Rob Brett is now Rhino coordinator for Kenya Wildlife Service]

DO YOU KNOW YOURIO?

(Rhino intelligence quotient)

FACT #1 People often think of rhinos as "living tanks" that have armor-plated skin. Indian and Javan Rhinos look especially like tanks. Their skin seems to be divided into plates, and the bumps on the skin look like rivets.

FACT #2 There is a large bump on the front of a rhino's skull that helps to anchor the horn to the head.

FACT #3 The horns of rhinos have two main uses. Rhinos use them to plow up the ground when they are looking for mineral salts to eat. And of course, they are used as weapons when rhinos fight.

FACT #4 The largest land mammal that ever lived was part of the rhino family. It was about 18 feet tall at the shoulder and 28 feet long - roughly the size of two school buses. Not triceratops, this giant is called **INDRICOTHERIUM**.

FACT #5 The first rhinos lived in North America. Over the course of time, some types of ancient rhinos migrated to Asia. All living rhinos are descended from these animals. The last rhinos in North America became extinct about 5 million years ago.

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Chonette's

PEOPLE



"I got you fixed up, Louie, but I had to do
and you'd have to fix it. I told her that you
were a wildbeast."