

**TRANSLOCATION OF 7 MAMMAL SPECIES TO
RUBONDO ISLAND NATIONAL PARK IN TANZANIA**

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Abstract: Rubondo National Park is a densely forested island of 240 km² in Lake Victoria, northwest of Mwanza, Tanzania. Since 1964, 16 black rhinoceroses (Diceros bicornis), 12 giraffes (Giraffa camelopardalis), 5 roan antelopes (Hippotragus equinus), 14 suni antelopes (Nesotragus moschatus), 17 chimpanzees (Pan troglodytes), 25 colobus monkeys (Colobus abyssinicus), and 6 African elephants (Loxodonta africana) have been introduced. Although there is no data available on suni antelope survival, all other species have increased in numbers. The black rhinoceroses, chimpanzees, colobus monkeys, and elephants have all done well, despite some poaching. The giraffes and roan antelopes have reproduced, but these species have suffered from marginal habitat and poaching.

Key Words: Tanzania, Rubondo Island, translocation, mammals.

Rubondo is an island in Lake Victoria, situated at an altitude of 1100-1300 m, northwest of Mwanza, Tanzania. Rubondo was decreed the 10th National Park of Tanzania in 1977, after having had a status of a game reserve since 1965. The island is about 240 km² and is surrounded by a dozen smaller islets that also belong to the park. More than 90% of the island is covered with dense deciduous forest. The following larger mammals are indigenous: hippopotamus (Hippopotamus amphibius), sitatunga antelope (Tragelaphus spekei), bushbuck (Tragelaphus scriptus), vervet monkey (Cercopithecus aethiops), fish otter (Lutra maculicollis), marsh mongoose (Atilax paludinosus), genet (Genetta tigrina), and cane rat (Thryonomys swinderianus). (Nomenclature is after Dorst and Dandelot, 1978). The only potential predators of larger mammals occurring on Rubondo are: crocodile (Crocodylus niloticus), python (Python sebae), and eagles (Polemaetus bellicosus) and (Stephanoaetus coronatus).

Mammals Introduced on Rubondo

With the exception of the chimpanzees, all translocated animals were caught in the wild in various areas of Tanzania (Table 1). Unfortunately, the exact place of origin and the sex ratio are not known for all species. Animals released immediately after their arrival on Rubondo were left to themselves, with the exception of the chimpanzees, which were fed during the 1st 8 weeks. Occasional sightings were noted, but no proper follow-up studies were undertaken following translocation. Data therefore are very incomplete.

Present Situation

The rhinoceroses seem to have done well (Table 2). The habitat is suitable, especially in the south of the island. If poaching can be controlled, this population of rhinoceroses stands a good chance of survival.

The giraffes have bred, but slowly. The habitat is suboptimal for giraffes, with only 2 areas of open forest and bush savannah. They are under some poaching pressure, but if they are better protected they might recover.

The roan antelopes have bred, but the habitat is even less suitable for them than for the giraffes. Until 1980, it was possible to observe roan antelope regularly in the southern open savannah area, and we estimated at least 10 animals. Since then, they seem to have fallen victim to poaching, and only a few scattered individuals remain.

The chimpanzees have done well. After initial difficulties, the half-tame rehabilitants adapted well to the environment. We estimate at least 20 chimpanzees on Rubondo today, most of which were bred on the island. A 2nd generation of apes born on Rubondo can be assumed by now (Borner 1985, 1986).

The colobus monkeys seem to have done well. However, because the exact locations of their releases are not known, only 2 groups of 10-20 animals each have been located so far. Both are in the south of the island.

The suni antelopes have not been positively reidentified. The location of their release is not known, yet it seems unlikely that they should have disappeared altogether.

The elephants, which were still youngsters at the time of their releases,

bred for the 1st time in 1983.

Conclusions

Rubondo Island seems a suitable park for the translocation of forest species. No large predators occur, and the island could be easily protected from poaching. All released forest species have done well. Of the suni antelopes, nothing is known. The introduced savannah species, giraffe and roan antelope, have not done well due to suboptimal habitat and poaching. The elephant, although a savannah species, seems to have done well. Because it is feared that the elephants will damage the forest when their numbers increase, they should be removed again. The most interesting animals are the chimpanzees, which came from European zoos and had to rehabilitate themselves with practically no help from humans. Although some of them died in the event, the rest bred and produced a healthy, wild chimpanzee population on the island.

We are considering future translocations of other endangered forest species to the park, such as the Zanzibar red colobus (*C. badius kirkii*) and the Zanzibar red duiker (*Cephalophus natalensis adersi*). Both are severely endangered. The translocation of endangered species seems worthwhile for reasons of conservation, but only if suitable, well protected habitats can be found. However, such actions should be better monitored than were the Rubondo translocations reported herein.

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Table 1. Mammals introduced on Rubondo Island National Park, Tanzania.

Species	<u>N</u>	Sex ratio	Background	Translocated
Rhinoceros	16	?	NW of Serengeti Natl. Park	1964-1965
Giraffe	12	?	?	1965
Roan	5	2 M/3 F	?	1967
Chimpanzee	17	8 M/9 F	European zoos	1966-1969
Colobus	25	6 M/19 F	SE slope of Mt. Meru, Arusha	1967-1970
Suni	14	4 M/10 F	SE slope of Mt. Meru, Arusha	1971
Elephant	6	2 M/4 F	?	1972-1974

Table 2. Present situation of introduced mammals on Rubondo Island National Park, Tanzania.

Species	Breeding records	Deaths	Distribution	Remaining
Rhinoceros	1st calf in 1966. Since then calves and/or their tracks seen.	Several rhino were poached, but probably by chance, as forest cover is too dense for rhino poaching.	Throughout the island, but mainly in the south	30
Giraffe	1st calves in 1967. Since then calves seen regularly.	2 dead calves found in 1978 and 1979. Reasons for deaths unknown. Poaching probable.	Only in the Acacia-Albizia woodlands in the south.	20
Roan	1st calf in 1969.	No dead animals found, but poaching probable.	Mainly in the grass lands in the south, individual males ventured farther north.	10
Chimpanzee	1st infant in 1968. Since then, infants seen regularly.	At least 2 males were shot by rangers. Unknown number died after release, no bodies found.	Throughout the island	20
Colobus	No records	No records	In at least 2 groups in the south.	30
Suni ^a				
Elephant	1st calves in 1983.	1 dead bull found in 1979. Reason for death unknown.	Throughout the island.	9 ^b

^a Because place of release is unknown, no observations or records of breeding, deaths, or remaining number exist.

^b 1 bull, 4 cows, and 4 calves.