



I am more convinced than ever that local management is essential to balancing resource use and conservation. I am drawing on Dahari's local experience of community-based approaches to rural development and forest conservation; and also invaluable support from colleagues in Madagascar, where coastal communities face challenges similar to those I see here in Comoros.

Empowering communities

In Madagascar, BV has developed multiple programmes to empower coastal communities to take steps to reduce resource pressure, including fisheries management, alternative livelihoods, access to health and family

planning resources, and environmental education. All programmes are developed based on community requests and form a holistic, integrated, community-based approach to marine conservation that supports local communities to rebuild their fisheries. Since BV led the first, experimental, periodic coral reef fishery closure in southern Madagascar in 2004, there have now been over 200 community-managed closures. These closures have resulted in over 80% increases in catch and 136% increases in income in the month following their reopening.

This has catalysed unprecedented bottom-up (or local) management in Madagascar and BV now partners and supports over

75 communities (managing over 5,857km²) to develop locally led marine conservation initiatives, including the Western Indian Ocean's largest community marine protected area in the Barren Isles, western Madagascar.

On Anjouan, we hope to replicate some of the successes in Madagascar and are working with local communities to identify suitable approaches to help support them in their efforts to balance resource use and conservation. Although in the early stages of our work here, we have already gained substantial fisher participation, and are building trust with the local communities, which will prove invaluable in future when discussing possibilities for fisheries, and marine management. In one community we have worked alongside over 70 fishers to collect vital fisheries data and gain a better understanding of the current state of Comoros' small-scale fisheries.

During our meetings the fishers discuss the benefits of improved management, including better catches and ensuring their children will inherit a healthy environment. With the help of funding from Tusk, we look forward to strengthening existing relationships with local communities and spreading this hope to a greater number of communities over the coming years. Personally, I am excited to be working with the Comorian community to help restore the joy of island life for future generations, in this place I have come to know as home.

Brian Jackman Journalist and Author

Return of the rhino

After an absence of 25 years the black rhino is back where it belongs in northern Kenya's Sera Community Conservancy. Brian Jackman reports on a unique community-led conservation initiative.

Sera is the roughest, toughest, and most physically challenging of all the wildlife conservancies established in Kenya by the Northern Rangelands Trust, a not-for-profit organisation with an impressive record in promoting wise governance and wildlife conservation through mutual cooperation.

To get there you drive north from Nanyuki on the Equator along the new blacktop highway built by the Chinese. Beyond Archer's Post the flat-topped massif of Ololokwe looms into sight, its soaring cliffs spattered with vulture droppings; and on the opposite side of the road stand the twin rock steeples called the Cat and Mouse, marking the gateway to what old Kenya hands used to call the NFD — the Northern Frontier District — a fathomless sea of commiphora scrub with Sera in the thick of it.

I went walking there three years ago and discovered that Sera is a place where you can drop out of the 21st century and hide in 300,000 acres of nothing but thorn trees,

lizards, and echoing silence broken only by the insane clucking of hornbills. The landscape is mostly low-lying, rising in places to form long lava ridges known as merti, veined with seasonal watercourses and scattered with red rocky kopjes.

All around in every direction rise the tombstone shapes of faraway mountains: Longtopi, Ol Doinyo Lenkiyo and Warges, the highest peak in the Matthews Range. On foot in Sera, they are the signposts you steer by, following elephant trails across wild meadows of sun-bleached crows' foot grass.

In these harsh semi-deserts water is the key to life, and the most precious oasis for miles around is a place called *Kisima Hamsini* — a Swahili name meaning Fifty Wells. Here the local pastoralists — Samburu, Rendille and Boran tribesmen — have dug deep holes through the rock to reach the natural reservoir



beneath, and for as long as anyone can remember Kisima Hamsini has been home to one of the great, unsung spectacles of the avian world, when upwards of 40,000 black-faced sandgrouse fly in to drink during the dry season.

Sightings of animals are few, mostly dik-dik, and gerenuk, but tracks in the sand reveal where lion and leopard have passed by in the night, their pugmarks mingled with fresh elephant dung and the distinctive tracks of Grevy's zebra.

Back in the 1960s Sera was also renowned for its black rhino. Even in 1970 some 20,000 of these famously cantankerous beasts roamed freely across much of Kenya and these remote northern rangelands formed a crucial part of their stronghold.

Then, in the 1980s, came the shifta — wild men armed with AK-47's hell-bent on poaching, who decimated the elephant herds and killed Sera's last black rhino 25 years ago.

By 1990 poachers had reduced Kenya's black rhino population to fewer than 400 individuals — a catastrophic 98% loss in just 20 years, driven by the black market value of rhino horn which changes hands in the Far East at more than its weight in gold.

Since then a sustained effort has been made to haul Kenya's rhino back from the brink.

With greater protection their numbers are



Supporting Communities PREVIOUS PAGE A black rhino being translocated from Lewa Wildlife Conservancy to Sera. ABOVE One of the black rhino in the Sera Community Conservancy. INSET The first baby rhino born in Sera to Ntaimany in March 2016. BELOW A water hole in Sera for rhino and other wildlife.

slowly recovering and now stand at about 640, but not without fatalities among the rangers who have given their lives to save the rhinos in the never-ending war on poaching.

Sera Rhino Sanctuary

The animals in question are eastern black rhino (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) and endemic to Kenya where the only significant population of this critically endangered sub-species remains. The long-term aim is to have 2,000 eastern black rhino in protected sanctuaries throughout the country including Sera, where the re-introduction programme is already under way.

The Sera Community Conservancy confirmed their desire to participate in this ambitious scheme by establishing a 107km² sanctuary with support from the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) and Tusk Trust, who have helped to fund the establishment of a new ranger post manned by 24 fully trained rhino rangers who will also provide data on other wildlife species within the sanctuary.

When I was there in 2012 I saw the first fence posts being erected. Now the security fencing is complete and the first black rhino to be seen at Sera for a quarter of a century have settled into their new home.

A total of 10 animals were translocated last year from the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and from Lake Nakuru National Park, making

this the first community-owned black rhino sanctuary in East Africa.

Community-based conservation has gained momentum in the last decade, particularly in northern and coastal Kenya where there are now 33 community conservancies under the umbrella of the NRT, and there is a growing recognition of the role these conservancies are playing, particularly in the conservation of endangered species.

The hope is that the diversification of rhino sanctuaries from existing government protected areas and private reserves to community-managed sanctuaries such as Sera will spread the risk, with success more likely to be achieved in areas where there is strong

local support for wildlife conservation.

As the first community-based black rhino sanctuary in East Africa, the Sera Community Conservancy is breaking new ground and will undoubtedly provide the best prospects for contributing to the future protection and growth of Kenya's black rhino over the next 25 years.

"Black rhino are among the most endangered of all Africa's large mammals," said Charlie Mayhew, CEO of Tusk. "The effort being put into protecting and conserving them through this exciting community-led relocation initiative is unprecedented and that is why we are proud to be supporting it."

