

# White Rhinos



*Top left; A female rhino in her crate before her release into the Nakuru holding bomas.*

*Above; The convoy of the first five rhino trucks on their way to Nakuru National Park.*

*Left; Two of the South African white rhinos, a mother and calf, in their holding bomas at Nakuru.*



Photographs courtesy of KWS Veterinary Department





**T**HREE MASSIVE CREATURES MOVE OUT OF the bush onto the open plain, eating the grass like animated lawn-mowers. They are southern white rhinos (*Ceratotherium simum simum*), the biggest land mammal after the elephant . . .

Nakuru National Park (188 kilometres square) is best known as the home of flamingos, but this beautiful Kenyan park is also a rhino sanctuary. It is true that up until now it has not been easy to see a rhino here, but with the efforts of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the financial aid of the Kenya Rhino Rescue the introduction of more rhinos has been a real success.

The project first started in early 1983 by establishing Nakuru National Park as a rhino sanctuary. The idea was to capture threatened rhinos and transfer them where they would be given 24-hour protection. A further important reason for translocation is to facilitate the exchange of genetic characteristics and to prevent inbreeding.

The park has a 74 kilometre long electric fence, and a rhino headquarters at Naishi in the south of the park to give full protection to the rhinos. Two adult indigenous black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*), a pair which have never bred, were known

to exist in the park at the time of installing the fence.

'Stocking' of black rhinos commenced in 1987 from Solio Game Reserve and Nairobi National Park. The Park may also come to be identified as a breeding area for white rhinos - a pair were introduced from Solio in 1990-91 and the female gave birth in March 1993. Further translocations of white and black rhinos were undertaken and today the population totals 54.

The number of white rhinos increased in September 1994 from eight to 18 as a result of a donation by the Natal Parks Board of South Africa. This donation is the most recent of approximately 3,800 white rhinos translocated to reserves and zoos throughout the world since the early 1960s. The Natal Parks Board gave 20 white rhinos altogether to Kenya. The other ten were given to 'Ol Choro Ouirua' in the Masai Mara.

The rhinos were transported by air from South Africa to Jomo Kenyatta Airport in Nairobi, and on to Nakuru and the Masai Mara by road. Mr Tim Oloo, the Rhino Programme Coordinator, organised the transportation and the construction of the holding *bomas* (Swahili for homestead).

The 20 rhinos had been captured in June 1994. The ground capture team had to catch each animal as quickly as possible and were guided in by a helicopter which was also used for

continued on following page

## Black and White Rhino Population Structure

AGE GROUP	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
7 yrs old and above (Black)	12	10	22
4-6 yrs old (Black)	4	3	7
0-3 yrs old (Black)	3	4	7
<b>Black Rhino Population</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>White Rhino Population</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Total Rhino Population</b>			<b>54</b>

# The Hunter's Hartebeest

Story by Jaspert L. Agatsiva

**S**EVERAL BELLS HAVE BEEN SOUNDED REGARDING the status and distribution of the Hunter's hartebeest or the Hirola (*Damaliscus hunteri*) in Kenya. The loudest of these bells indicates that this species is on its way to extinction for reasons not quite obvious to the conservationists. The greatest number of this species resides in southern Garissa and the adjacent Tana River and Lamu districts. Since the animals live in small dispersed groups, it is not possible to get the precise current ground population estimates by age and sex structure.

Recent surveys indicate that the Hirola is vulnerable in Kenya. There is a high probability that the Somali population, in a south west region close to Juga River, has been exterminated by persistent drought and the civil war in that country.

The Hirola, which weighs approximately 70 kilogrammes and measures about one metre at the shoulder, belongs to the family Bovidae and subfamily Alcelaphini which includes the topi (tsessebe) and various wildebeest and hartebeest species. It is the smallest member of this subfamily and possesses the general features of the hartebeest.

continued on following page

# White Rhinos to Kenya

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darting the rhinos. The cocktail drug of narcotic and tranquilizer took about five minutes to become effective, then the rhinos were given a quick check-up and an antibiotic to prevent any infection before being loaded onto a truck and carried to the bomas. They stayed in the South African bomas for a few months.

On 25 September 1994 ten rhinos were sent to Nairobi. Five went to the Masai Mara Reserve and the other five were taken to Nakuru National Park and released into their holding bomas the same day. Another ten followed a week later.

In Nakuru the rhinos were held in their pens for an acclimatisation period of two weeks. One of the rhinos arrived without her front horn, it had broken inside the bomas in South Africa. This same female really suffered on her trip. 'She gave birth to a premature male calf which died after only one hour', said Mr Josiah Mwangi, the KWS officer in charge of rhino surveillance in Lake Nakuru National Park.

The rhinos were released into the wild in mid-October, two at a time. Two young rhinos were retained in an electric pen to protect them from predators. Unfortunately one died in the early morning of 28 February due to chronic pneumonia. Dr Wambua, Veterinary Officer of KWS, said this young one was already weak and had a low resistance due to the worms discovered in his stomach soon after he arrived.

The work of the rhino surveillance team has not stopped at the translocation. Patrols cover the park every day to spot as many rhinos as they can. They also try to determine their social interaction, feeding habits and movements. The South African white rhinos have been seen side by side with the Nakuru resident rhinos. Initially having kept to the southern side of the park, they have now spread to the east and north.

Extensive studies have been conducted to see if the introduction of the rhinos has affected the Nakuru ecosystem. One finding is a lack of mineral substances in the diet of the rhinos so the Lake Nakuru Management now provide a mineral supplement at several different points in the park.

There is, at the moment, no project to translocate any other rhinos to the park. The breeding record and general health of the introduced rhinos has been excellent. One white rhino from Solio, a female called 'Jorie', gave birth to a male calf, 'Ajabu', on the 2 January 1995. This has increased the number of rhinos born in the park to 16, two of which are white and 14 black.

If the habitat and food reserves for rhinos in Lake Nakuru National Park can be maintained, the park could eventually provide rhinos for translocation itself.

Josiah Mwangi, who spends most of his time with the rhinos, says the successful increase of the rhino population is due to the security and protection in the park.

First and foremost, remember not to harass these wonderful, sensitive animals (who need some privacy and time to feed), and we will have this heritage to show our children and grandchildren. ●

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## The Hunter's Hartebeest

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The antelope is named after the sportsman H.C.V. Hunter who first recorded it in 1887. Locally in Somalia it is known as *Aroli* which probably has a bearing on the source of the name *Hirola*. The taxonomic position needs to be resolved as its present classification is based solely on morphological and fossil records.

The natural range of the *Hirola* in Kenya consists of a narrow strip running in a north-easterly direction from the Tana River, parallel to the coast but 40 to 60 kilometres inland. At its broadest point near the Tana River the strip is 130 kilometres wide but tapers to less than 70 kilometres at the Somali border. The major range of this species in Kenya consists of the area to the east of the Tana River between Bura to the north and Garsen to the south in Tana River District and all the way to the Somali border across southern Garissa and western Lamu districts. The south Garissa range makes up an area of about 13,000 kilometres square while the Tana River and Lamu constitute about 1,000 kilometres square each. In the wet season, the animals are widely distributed in the entire range whereas in the dry season, they get clumped around the Tana River and the vicinity of Holo and in Galma Galla area. This seasonal mobility is certainly governed by resource availability and abundance. The watering requirements and