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120 rhinos moved from breeding program to South African reserves

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20 JUL 2024[AFRICA](#)

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In a significant milestone for rhino conservation, 120 southern white rhinos were recently [relocated to reserves](#) adjacent to South Africa's Kruger National Park. The rhinos were moved from Platinum Rhino, a privately run breeding program.

In [September 2023](#), conservation nonprofit African Parks announced it had purchased Platinum Rhino and its herd of 2,000 white rhinos (*Ceratotherium simum simum*). It said it planned, with partners, to move the rhinos to wild habitats.

However, finding safe locations has been a challenge due to poaching. Rhino horn, made from keratin, like human fingernails, is falsely believed to have medicinal properties in traditional Chinese medicine. At times, demand has driven the price of rhino horn higher [than gold, diamonds or cocaine](#), fueling a well-armed, well-funded international criminal syndicate.

According to [government data](#), 499 rhinos were poached in South Africa in 2023, 51 more than the year before. In the same period, Kruger National Park saw a 37% decline in poaching; a recent [study in Science Advances](#) suggests this trend is because there are fewer rhinos left to poach.

"The key to the survival of African rhinos as a species lies in the protection of as many rhinos as possible in small and well-monitored 'safe havens' while focusing on long-term demand reduction," the study notes. The reserves where the rhinos have been released are seen as such safe havens.

"The rhino population has grown in the last three years in the private reserves," [Sharon Haussmann](#), CEO of the Greater Kruger Environmental Protection Fund (GKEPF), told Mongabay by phone. The GKEPF is a nonprofit alliance of parks and private reserves around Kruger National Park. "At the moment, they are safer in private reserves than in the national parks. It is a much smaller area to control so the management is much more intense," she said.

However, the open borders between Kruger and the private reserves allows rhinos to migrate, potentially exposing them to higher poaching risks. News travels fast and poachers can become aware of the new rhinos in the area.

“It might spike interest,” Haussmann said. She added the GKEPF has significantly increased the number of armed guards and surveillance technologies in the area. The newly introduced rhinos have also been dehorned, a controversial move that requires each 3-ton animal to be sedated. Despite the risk, Haussmann said, removing the prize poachers seek makes the rhino safer.

The 120 newly introduced rhinos will bring much-needed genetic diversity to the local population and help maintain grasslands, as white rhinos are grazers.

“They are literally ecosystem engineers, we need white rhinos,” Haussmann said. “We are excited to, with African Parks, to give these rhinos a free wild space to roam and be rhinos.”

This is the second batch of rhinos moved from the Platinum Rhino breeding program to the wild. [Over the next 10 years](#), African Parks plans to relocate all 2,000 rhinos and their calves to safe natural environments.