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5.2.11 Southern white Rhino gifts to Aitong, Kenya - fly in the ointment?

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Abstract

Gifts of wildlife from Heads of State to other countries were once common as a part of diplomacy. In this context, whilst celebrating the opening of relations between South Africa and Kenya in the 1990s, 10 southern white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum simum* were gifted. The species is exotic to Kenya, a species out with National species legislation and responsibility therefore left to the private sector and local authorities. The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) vets advised against the move, based on risk of novel tsetse-trypanosome challenges, which even with the indigenous black rhinoceros, had caused mortalities. Exporting vet's opinion was conflicting and without any firm consensus, the move was approved with experts co-opted to address the tsetse risk. Initial fly trapping was employed, showing some suppression of flies in the grazing areas. This control was not sustained, despite the benefit, for initial trial introductions, and tragically followed by mortalities of South

African rhino. A few were saved by subsequent removal from the area. This whole unfortunate event was complicated by unclear responsibilities for the animal's health, comprehensive management was not possible, with samples only sporadically collected. What was done, came through collaboration between the KWS veterinary unit and the ICIPE scientists monitoring the translocation release site and where invited for some cases or mortalities. Diagnostics proved severe infection with *Trypanosoma brucei*, with variable symptoms from sudden death associated with intestinal atony, to a semi-paralysed animal responsive to treatment for trypanosomes. This paper provides a diagnostic summary, hitherto unpublished due to sensitivities around this event. The material can now be archived as a warning to future movements of this species that are planned or likely in Africa, for conservation or other purposes.

Keywords: Southern white rhinoceros, trypanosomiasis, translocation, tsetse, *Trypanosoma brucei*

