

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy

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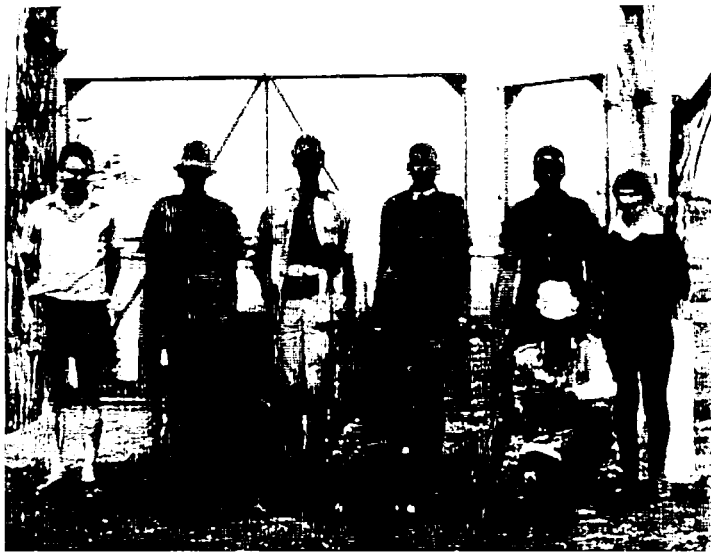
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Wildlife and Security

Lewa's black rhino – Past and present

By the early 1980s, Kenya's black rhino population had plummeted from over 20,000 to a mere of 230 animals. Peter Jenkins, a long standing Kenya National Parks Warden, at this time was in charge of the newly established Rhino Rescue Program, under the Kenya Wildlife Conservation and Management Department. Peter was very instrumental in establishing rhino sanctuaries on private land, a new and untried concept in Kenya, in an attempt to try and save the black rhino's decline. Lewa was one of his chosen pilot sanctuaries and the following few words prove that his ideas and foresight are true to his word. Kenya's black rhino decline was halted and today the estimate is over 500 animals of which 50% are to be found on private rhino sanctuaries.



Ian and Anna with the first security team

In 1984, the Craig family, owners of Lewa Downs cattle ranch, agreed to set aside 5,000 acres of land purely as a rhino sanctuary and the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary was born. Through the very generous funding and hard work from Anna Merz combined with the vast experience provided by Peter Jenkins, as advisor to this project, the foundations were laid for a truly top quality rhino sanctuary. Steered by Ian Craig, Fuzz Dyer and many other kind supporters, a further 5,000 acres was added in 1988 and the success of the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary in turn cast the foundation for what Lewa is today. 1995 saw Lewa Downs and the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary amalgamate to become the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, casting cattle aside and providing 42,000 acres as a safe haven primarily for rhino, but also to many other species of wildlife.

Over the past 22 years, Lewa, along with its many supporters, can be proud of its hard work and huge effort as a major contributor in bringing Kenya's black rhino "Back from the Brink". The following summary shows this:

Introductions: 15 Black Rhino were first introduced in 1984, with a further 10 spread over the following decade, totaling 25 introductions.

Births: Since 1984 there have been 54 births, the best years being 2003 (5 calves), 2004 (6 calves) and 2005 (5 calves). Of the total births, 75% have occurred in the last 10 years.

Deaths: Since inception there have been 22 deaths of which 55% were recorded during the first decade. During these initial few years, as with many other new rhino sanctuaries, there were numerous, depressing setbacks and unimaginable events, such as deaths through fighting, falling over cliffs, drowning, calves being killed by other rhino, stillborn calves, slow rates of breeding and so on.

Translocations out: Nine black rhino have been moved out of Lewa both to National Parks and other rhino sanctuaries.

Today's population: Lewa has 48 Black Rhino as at the end of March 2006 with a sex ratio of 1 male : 1.3 females. The present biological growth rate is 12.5% and the inter-calving interval is 2.7 years. Considering that experts in this field regard 8% as an excellent growth rate and 2.5 years an excellent inter-calving interval, it looks like Lewa is firmly on the "right track". Although this all sounds very rosy, we continue to assume at all times a vigilant guard over our rhino, especially given the fact of some serious rhino poaching that has occurred in some areas of Kenya as recently as last year.

Richard Moller – Wildlife and Security Coordinator



The Kikwa Black Rhino Story

Over the years there have been some very interesting and exceptional stories regarding Lewa and its rhino and I think you will find the following account of one of these not just coincidental but quite amazing. I am not superstitious, but after hearing this story I question that belief.

In early 1990, Lewa received reports of a sole rhino in the North-Eastern part of the Mathews mountain range. It was imperative that this animal be found and moved to a safer area following rampant and unchecked poaching in this area by *Shifita* (armed Somali bandits). All the necessary plans and logistics were quickly put in place and within days a team consisting of vets, capture staff, drivers, pilots, a helicopter, supercub aircraft, lorry with rhino crate and many other helpers assembled at the base of the Kikwa valley.

Now let me take you back in time a little. It was a known fact that there were pockets of rhino remaining in the Mathews and local game scouts had been promised money in these areas by some NGO conservation groups if they monitored and kept an eye on them. Some had been paid and some had not. One such scout lived near Kikwa and he looked upon the rhino that was about to be captured as his own and was not happy about the plans he could see unfolding before him. In his eyes, it was he that had looked after this last remaining Kikwa valley rhino all these years, and had not been rewarded. At the same time the Lewa team was unaware of this history. His name was Lemageroi Le Nanyuki and was known by all in the area to have powers of manipulating the future, and in Samburu and Rendile tradition he was known as a "Lais".

Back to the team at the base of the valley. At this time, the Northern part of Kenya had been experiencing a severe drought. This had made it easier to trace the rhino as water holes were now few. However the day after the team's arrival, the heavens opened. Day after day sporadic rain interfered with finding fresh tracks then losing them due to down-pours and the rhino was not confined to a few water holes as before. Aerial reconnaissance in the supercub ended in disaster when Will Craig was forced to make an emergency landing into a dry river bed, following an engine failure. He did a very good job with little damage. Now an aircraft engineer had to be flown up from Nairobi to join the team. Everything that could go wrong seemed to be going wrong. Little did the team know that there was far worse to come, even following the rhino's capture! The "Lais" continued to look on.

The male rhino, called Kikwa after his home valley, was eventually located and captured successfully and moved to Lewa. The fun and games were far from over! Will, in the now mended supercub took off out of the river bed and seconds later had another engine failure and had to crash land. He was again unharmed but this time the cub was badly damaged. A truck now had to come to Kikwa and carry the aircraft all the way to Nairobi for repairs. Believe it or not, the truck, loaded with the dismantled supercub, lost a wheel on this journey not far from Lewa and the entire contents of a supercub were written off completely! And there's more bad news to come.

Over the ensuing months back on Lewa, there was one rhino fatality after another. Things were not just going wrong, but horribly wrong. Kikwa's life on Lewa was short lived. Within a year of being moved he was involved in a fight with another male rhino and during the fight they both plummeted over a cliff to their deaths! The final straw came when a rhino died of a compacted esophagus, this may not be significant to us but it was to Kinyanjui, Ian's head security man, and his tracker, Nisoto (both men still actively involved with Lewa), and who had spoken with the "Lais" whilst capturing Kikwa. They realized and suggested to Ian that they must go back to the Kikwa valley to find Le Nanyuki, the "Lais", speak with him and try anything to influence the situation, for it was he that could solve the present fate. Nobody knew where he was, it could be like looking for another rhino in the forest, and he certainly did not have prior knowledge that a small group from Lewa was coming to the Kikwa in search of him. On arrival at a small village called Donyo Wasin, close to Kikwa valley, Ian, Kinyanjui and Nisoto were astounded to see Le Nanyuki waiting for them at the entrance of the one street village. He said that he knew they would come back to him at some stage and that he knew they were experiencing all sorts of problems with rhino back at Lewa, the written off supercub and not to mention the continued drought.

Le Nanyuki explained his scout deal and that he had yet to be rewarded properly as promised by the NGO and that the removal of Kikwa the rhino had been unjust. Ian and his men in measure he received more than his dues and lengthy discussions followed, cementing a friendship. As the group parted company, Le Nanyuki explained that on arrival at Lewa they would be met by something very good. Le Nanyuki too, like Peter Jenkins, was true to his word, and on Ian's return to Lewa he found that the heavens had opened and the long awaited rains had finally arrived! To cap it all, Lewa's rhino have enjoyed a relatively clear run with excellent birth rates and few fatalities since this extraordinary event took place.

You can't say that is not an incredible story! Are you superstitious now?

Richard Moller – Wildlife and Security Coordinator

Lewa Community

Women Micro Credit Programme expansion

Our micro credit programme is expanding because of the increasing demand by women in our neighboring community to participate in development. In the last two and half years, the programme has helped four groups to improve their livelihoods. Out of this over 200 women have now ongoing small micro enterprises. To meet this development demand we are now expanding the programme by five more groups as part of our mission to decentralize the development within the community areas. Moreover, out of these expanding business enterprises within these areas the need for financial managing institution has led us to have a new exciting venture, the rural banking. The bank is now on three pilot areas around the Conservancy. The bank is strategic as it is giving a chance for the communities to have financial services within their areas. Our thanks go to those who have supported this programme - particularly Miami Metro Zoo and the Wallace Research Foundation.

Community Livestock

Recently it was a pleasure to see one of our community areas able to sell 234 steers to Ol Pejeta for a price better than they could get locally. This is a strategy to reduce the livestock overgrazing due to the prolonged drought and Olpejeta Conservancy offered to buy the animals from the community. In terms of monetary gain this translated to a total of Kshs 2.5 million channeled back to the community. In addition to reducing overgrazing it strengthens the communities' financial muscle to be able to counter the poverty escalating in the area. The community then banked 1.5 million with the pilot rural bank set up on Lewa for the benefit of the local people and groups.

John Kinoti – Community Development Officer

Lewa Logistics

As usual the Logistics Department has been busy with transport, construction and maintenance support. We have recently started a smaller sub-department to deal with the increasing water legislation and to evaluate and improve our current systems.

Since the last newsletter, the Works department has completed a security house at Namunyak and this has greatly assisted in maintaining a security presence in the area. In the last month we have just completed the new Sera HQ with a hand dug well and solar water supply. This project, despite the remote location has been extremely fulfilling and all our teams involved have enjoyed the challenge.

Back on Lewa, we have refurbished the accommodation areas and the mess at Lewa Safari Camp and also upgraded Lewa House pool area, kitchen, laundry and staff housing. The usual work of upgrading staff housing around the Conservancy continues and the Armed Security housing block is being worked on at present. A new office was built for the Logistics department, through the kind support of Manfred Mautner Markhof, and this has made all the difference, improving communication and working areas for those who needed it.

The Workshop is coping with the increased vehicle fleet now being managed on Lewa and we have added a new 4WD tractor to assist with road and game capture work. The HQ generator has just been replaced and the new one commissioned a fortnight ago. Not without sighs of relief from all as the old one has achieved nearly 30,000 hrs without any major work being required. We are also experimenting in manufacturing inverters to provide power back up systems to numerous areas with limited electricity supply.

Simon Dugdale – Logistics Manager



Pilale Lesenteria with her new glasses kindly donated by Tom Fey of Park City



Mawingo's fifth calf

'Jack' is the 'stable' name that Richard and Clare Moller's three year old daughter Tiva has given to Mawingo's fifth calf. He is still living at their house and is growing by the day. We still do not have a name for him so if you are interested in naming this special little rhino, please contact sara@lewa.org