

Lewa Wilderness Conservancy - by John Gripper

I first visited Lewa Downs on the northern slopes of Mount Kenya, fifteen years ago and met the remarkable Anna Merz who had founded the rhino sanctuary in 1983 on five thousand acres of land leased from the Craig Family.

Anna Merz now lives in South Africa but remains a trustee of the Lewa rhino conservancy which has expanded under the direction of Ian & Jane Craig into the Lewa Wilderness Conservancy. This extends over 45,000 acres and as well as black and white rhino, has abundant wildlife including Giraffe, Lion, Cheetah, Sitatunga and the endangered Grevy's Zebra. Visitors can stay at the safari camp or at Lewa House, which can accommodate 16 guests in thatched cottages and has its own airstrip.



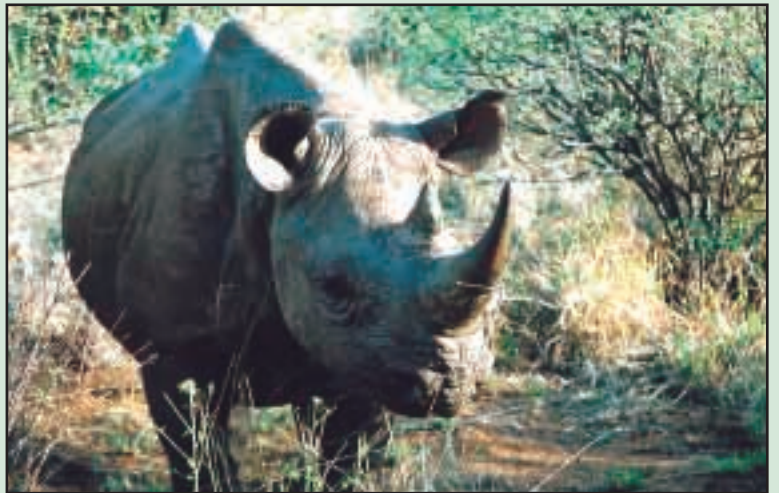
We stayed one night at Il Ngwesi lodge which is run by the local Maasai community and were privileged to accompany Anna Merz and Ian Craig to look at the two white rhino which had been translocated and introduced into a large fenced area of the neighboring community land.

Omni, the five year old black rhino from Lewa, was hand reared because its mother Mawinge is partially blind, also lives in this enclosure and shares watering points and the mud wallows with the white rhino. His younger sister, Tula was born in May 2004 and is being hand reared at the Craig family home.



Lewa's experienced capture team has assisted in the translocation of giraffe from Bamburi's Haller Park near Mombasa to Nguuni Nature Sanctuary and they have helped move eleven eland from Lake Mburu National Park to Kidepo Valley National Park in Uganda.

Other projects are the establishment of the Lewa Clinic to help the Leparua community, and the Mutani irrigation scheme to provide overhead sprinkler irrigation to help 300 local farmers. The Northern Rangelands Trust is a wider institution which brings all the communities together.



Lewa Wilderness Conservancy is an example of excellent and practical rhino conservation work combined with protection of the habitat and the involvement and support of local community development projects.

Further details can be found on their website: www.lewa.org