

BOTSWANA'S RHINOS - A SAD TALE

The long awaited aerial census of rhinos in northern Botswana got underway on 17 September 1992 headed up by Peter Hitchins of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation (REF) with a team of support personnel from Botswana, South Africa and Namibia.

The survey, which took place over two weeks, covered an area of approximately 15 000 square kilometres. Funding of the project came from the World Wide Fund for Nature, Hong Kong.

A total of 7 white rhinoceros were counted. No black rhino were found.

It was felt that allowing for the errors in spotting, inherent in any aerial survey, that as many (sic) as 12 animals may exist. It had not been expected to find any black rhino as no sightings of spoor or droppings had been reported for some time.

Following this survey, REF submitted a report to the Director, Department of Wildlife & National Parks recommending that either the animals counted be de-horned and/or have radio collars fitted or, preferably, be captured and re-located to the bomas at the site of the proposed Khama Rhino Sanctuary near Serowe. The cost of the latter would be R120 000, as quoted by the Natal Parks Board and REF were prepared to put R40 000 towards this cost.

Finally, after much discussion, the Botswana Government agreed to the re-location option, using the Natal Parks Board animal capture unit.

They, however, declined REF's offer of financial assistance in the capture as REF had already agreed to contribute R25 000 to the construction of the bomas at Serowe and pay for the upkeep of the captured animals in the bomas for 6 months.

The capture operation took place in early February and took 15 days.

Only four animals could be found for capture (one not accounted for in the aerial census). Evidence found pointed to the fact that four of the animals counted in September had fallen to poachers since that time.

Of the four animals translocated to Serowe, one died shortly afterwards from a bullet wound inflicted prior to capture. The remaining three - a male, a female and a calf, have adapted well to the boma and show no ill effects from the move.

The sad part of the story is that OWLS arranged for the translocation of over 70 white rhino to Botswana in the 1970's.

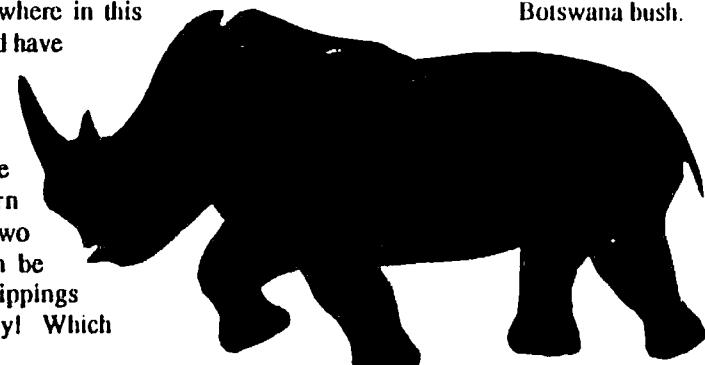
The population flourished initially and estimated numbers of 100-150 were being

bandied about even as recently as 1990 when the Department of Wildlife & National Parks supplied figures for the IUCN publication 'Biodiversity in Sub-Saharan Africa and its Islands'.

As you can see elsewhere in this issue, four rhinos could have been purchased from the Natal Parks Board for the same amount as it cost to re-locate them from northern Botswana. In fact, the two remaining adults can be seen from their ear clippings to be ex NPB anyway! Which

could explain why they settled down so quickly to their boma home.

Perhaps that's the only happy note in this sad saga? - The two rhino that managed to survive 15 years of freedom in the Botswana bush.



FUTURE EVENTS

Art Exhibition

(5937)

We are holding an Art Exhibition with original works of Art for sale, at the Floreum, Emmarentia Dam, from the 13th to 16th May. The official opening will be on Friday 14th as the 13th is a public holiday. This will be a cheese and wine affair, starting at 6.30 for 7.00 p.m.

This Exhibition will launch the selling of 300 numbered prints of Barbara

Jeppe's magnificent painting of a Sausage tree. The purchase of these prints will automatically enter you into the draw with three wonderful prizes as described elsewhere in the newsletter.

The artists selling works are Steve Risi - an incredible bronze sculptor; Claire Abbott, Jacqueline Castle, Jenni Song and Marianne Nicholls - all excellent artists.

Please diarise these dates and come and see and/or purchase some original works of art.