

Kenya:

Rhino monitoring in Tsavo East

This quarterly report describes the progress made in rhino monitoring / surveillance undertakings coupled with law enforcement in Tsavo East National Park over the period 1st October to 31st December 2005.

In summary, during this period under review, there has been significant progress in rhino sightings, data collection and law enforcement. The monitoring team managed to get 20 rhino sightings of which three individuals were positively identified. Also, the Tsavo East security patrol did a commendable job by apprehending one poison-arrow poacher, two charcoal burners and warding off a three-man armed gang that encroached the rhino range. This quarter was occasioned by a long dry spell (less than 20 mm precipitation).

The rhino monitoring patrol was localised in permanent water sources where chances of rhino sighting were high. The favoured patrol type was foot / vehicle and night waterhole attendance observation. The governing premise was to discern individuals; record sex, age and companions; and trying to establish their respective territories. No unusual behaviour among the rhinos was observed. The monitoring patrols were extensively carried out between xxx, xxx, xxx, east of xxx and xxx [the locations have been blanked out for security reasons]. In addition to foot / vehicle patrols, enhanced aerial patrols were undertaken and drastically improved the ability of the ground monitoring team in spotting the rhinos.

Security and law enforcement still remain a formidable hurdle, but the recent beefing up and drawing up of more personnel to secure Tsavo East is a promising gesture. The security set-up consists of foot patrol sectors and strategic observation posts; they are manned all around the clock. The entire quarter was characterised by tranquillity except on 24 December 2005, when fresh foot marks of a three-man gang were sighted at xxx. They were cracked down after an ensuing operation and repulsed away before they could inflict any loss.

The newly donated vehicle (KAR 775L) is in good condition and deployed in resupply duties. Vehicle registration KAK 078X (the Friends of Conservation vehicle) is also operational and dedicated for the rhino monitoring team; while vehicle registration KAC 996G is grounded at Park headquarters (Voi) awaiting repair. We still continue to receive and relish the monthly fuel allocation for the above vehicles from SRI / Chester Zoo.

We haven't received any equipment this quarter; however, all the previously donated equipment is in fair condition and good use. We have also prepared an inventory of all the equipment donated, to ensure proper use and tracking of the equipment.

I am passionately grateful to you and your organisation [SRI] for the contract you offered to me and the unrivalled support you have given to me. Your support has been instrumental in achieving milestones in the conservation of black rhinoceros in Tsavo East National Park. I would also like to extend my sincere appreciation to the following: KWS Rhino programme coordinator; Assistant Director Tsavo East; Rhino Warden Tsavo East; and all rhino staff.

Richard Kech

Field Research Officer, Tsavo East

Good News!

David Stirling and Cathy Dean visited Tsavo East National Park in January 2006 with Roger Wilkinson and Mark Pilgrim from Chester Zoo. Together, we agreed to extend Kech's contract as Field Research Officer for a further year, up until March 2007, in recognition of the excellent work he has done in the field. We are also paying for four new two-man tents, a new mess tent, and three 1,000 litre water tanks, as well as continuing to pay for fuel for the three vehicles used by the rhino monitoring team.

Above:
The monitoring team managed 20 rhino sightings

Right:
Learning how to ID a rhino

Above right:
Thankfully, there have been no shoot-outs with poachers recently