

The whole kit and caboodle in Tsavo East

I've just come back from yet another busman's holiday to Kenya and, as usual, (thanks to the kindness of Kenya Airways in giving me extra baggage allowance), I went out laden.

As the five Kili climbers and I went through customs, we fervently hoped that we wouldn't be stopped. Our inconspicuous holdalls, bought from a dodgy stall in the Elephant and Castle, contained 20 pairs of military boots, 12 camouflage tents, some uniforms, four GPSs and five pairs of binoculars. I was relieved that, in the end, the request for two night vision scopes had been sent to the USA rather than to me, as I was worried about being charged with mounting another coup in Equatorial Guinea. At least, in prison in Kenya, I'd have had friends to visit me. This was my fourth trip to Tsavo East National Park, and it was great to see Richard Kech and Linus Kariuki from the rhino monitoring team again.

KENNETH DONALDSON



NICKY SPRINGTHORPE



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Kech, Kariuki and co are doing well, but the last six months have been hard. In November, a vehicle taking rangers from the special operations unit to the far north of the Park was swept away while crossing the Galana River in full flood. Six of the men died. Ordinary rangers are paid only a couple of dollars a day, and yet they face armed poachers, natural disasters and the tedium of carrying out repetitive tasks in difficult conditions. Our heartfelt condolences go to the men's families.

A couple of months previously, some of the huts at the Rhino HQ were also flooded, and equipment, including digital cameras donated by Chester Zoo, was irrevocably damaged. Chester immediately replaced these, and Nicky Springthorpe was able to hand over new cameras when she visited with another Kili group in October 2004. Kariuki has been putting them to good use, with a giggle-inducing shot of two rhinos mating now stored as his screensaver. As he showed us, the monitoring teams have become adept at taking photos to ID each rhino, zooming in on distinctive horns, ears and profiles.

A major frustration has been the non-delivery of the new vehicle for the rhino monitoring team. The two 4WDs currently in use are now pretty old and

showing their age. "996" needs a couple of thousands of pounds' worth of repairs. We're questioning whether it's worthwhile continuing to patch it up, when it'll need the same again before long, and that's why we approached Chester Zoo last summer for funds to buy a new Landcruiser. Chester promptly agreed, and the money was duly transferred over to the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in September.

But politics intervened, and the KWS's then-Director (the fifth or sixth in three years), Arthur Evans Mukolwe, was suspended, following allegations of corruption. It appears that he had been leant on by ministers to put their own family members and friends onto the prestigious ranger programme at Manyani field training camp. Twice as many recruits turned up as were expected. So not only was Mukolwe investigated for fraud, but all procurement tenders instigated during his leadership were put on hold while they, too, were re-examined. So here we are, at the end of February, with no vehicle. We're putting on as much pressure as we can, but it's not easy.

All we want is for the KWS rhino monitoring team to be able to do their job effectively. For that they need kit, vehicles and a regular fuel supply. Thanks to the support of Chester Zoo, and to the two Rhino Climb Kilimanjaro teams and all the people who funded them, the money is there. We just need the KWS to be allowed to do its job too.

Cathy Dean
Director



NICKY SPRINGTHORPE

Chester Zoo gave £655 for new boots and tents for Tsavo East, and £16,609 for the new vehicle. Save the Rhino International is using approximately £10,000 raised by the Rhino Climb Kili teams to fund fuel and maintenance for the patrol vehicles, and to pay Kech's salary for a further year.