WITRENOSTERTJIE MAAK GESKIEDENIS

HISTORIC BIRTH OF WHITE RHINO

Deur/By

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HY is so ras-eg as wat 'n witrenoster maar kan wees, sy naam is Pretoriuskop en hy is 'n baie belangrike nuwe aankomeling in die Nasionale Krugerwildtuin. Daar kan met reg gesê word dat hy die suksesvolle eindproduk is van lofwaardige ondernemingsgees en volgehoue pogings aan die kant van die Nasionale Parkeraad om witrenosters in die Wildtuin hervestig te kry en wat al in 1928 'n aanvang geneem het.

Die groot opgewondenheid oor die geboorte van 'n klein witrenosterbulkalfie op 27 Oktober verlede jaar is te danke daaraan dat dit die eerste volbloed Krugerwildtuin-renoster is wat in byna 'n eeu in dié streek gebore word, vertel distrikveldwagter Thys Mostert van die Pretoriuskop-afdeling. Volgens beskikbare gegewens is die laaste witrenosters in die Laeveld

HE IS as true to type as a white rhino can be, his name is Pretoriuskop and he is a very important new arrival in the Kruger National Park. He is the ultimate target of praiseworthy gumption and sustained attempts by the National Parks Board to re-introduce white rhinos into the Park. This matter was discussed as far back as 1928.

The birth of this white rhino bullcalf on October 27, last year, caused great excitement due to the fact that it was the first out and out Kruger Park rhino born in this area in nearly a century, according to district ranger Thys Mostert of the Pretoriuskop division. The last white rhino seen in the Lowveld was by the hunter-author Vaughan Kirby during 1895.

In spite of his historical importance, Pretoriuskop did his utmost last month to avoid publicity. In the

So effens verskuil agter grashalms en in die veilige nabyheid van sy moeder, bekyk Pretoriuskop sy omgewing.

Somewhat concealed behind the grass and mom safely near him, Pretoriuskop examines the surroundings.

Witrenosters volg altyd hul kalfies soos op hierdie foto gesien kan word. Wanneer hulle van gevaar af vlug, word die kleintjie in die regte rigting gestuur deur die horing van sy moeder. Wanneer swartrenosters vlug, volg die kleintjie weer kort op die hakke van sy moeder.

White rhino always follow their calves, as seen here. When fleeing danger, the calf is directed by means of his mother's horn. When black rhino flee, the calf follows the mother closely.

in 1895 deur die jagter-skrywer Vaughan Kirby gesien.

Sy geskiedkundige vernaamheid ten spyt, het Pretoriuskop vroeg verlede maand sy bes gedoen om die kollig van publisiteit te vermy. In die renosterwaarnemingskamp naby Pretoriuskopruskamp waar hy en sy moeder gehou word, het hy elke keer op 'n stywe draffie die bosse in koers gekry as ons bakkie te na aan hom beweeg het. Sy lywige moeder het hom ook nie 'n sekonde onder haar waaksame oog laat uitgaan nie en soms blaas-blaas met 'n skerp horing na die bakkie gemik as sy meen haar spruit is in gevaar. Soos die gebruik by witrenosters is, het sy altyd die agterhoede gedek.

Die hervestiging van witrenosters in die NKW het reeds in 1928 ter sprake gekom toe daar ernstige planne beraam is om die hele witrenosterbevolking van Natal na die Wildtuin oor te plaas. Die Natalse witrenosters se voortbestaan is destyds bedreig deurdat hulle nie in 'n beskermde en omheinde gebied veiligheid teen jagters en landbouers kon kry nie. Die Parkeraad wou toe die renosters verskuif.

'n Vorige Opsiener van die Nasionale Krugerwildtuin, mnr. Louis Steyn, het 'n volledige plan van optrede vir die beoogde verskuiwing opgestel. Daarvolgens het hy voorgestel dat die diere eers per voet in 'n kleinerige kraal gejaag moes word waar hulle verdoof kon word. Daarvandaan kon die diere per vragmotor na die Wildtuin vervoer word. Hy het beraam dat die hele operasie sowat 42 uur sal duur. Dit sou beteken dat die vragmotors hul maksimum snelheid van 10 m.p.h. (16 km/h) sou moes handhaaf!

(*Vervolg op bladsy* 11)

rhino camp near the Pretoriuskop rest camp where he and his mother are kept, he disappeared quickly into the bushes time and again on the approach of our bakkie. His bulky mom did not let him get out of sight for one second and repeatedly aimed at the bakkie with a sharp horn whenever she thought that her progeny was in danger. As the habit of white rhinos is, she brought up the rearguard.

The re-introduction of white rhino to the Kruger National Park was raised in 1928 when serious plans were devised to transfer the whole white rhino population from Natal to the Kruger National Park. The survival of white rhino in Natal was threatened because they could not get sanctuary in a protected and fenced area from hunters and farmers. The Parks Board thus wanted to translocate the rhinos.

A former Warden of the Kruger National Park, Mr Louis Steyn, drew up a plan for the contemplated move. He suggested the animals be driven on foot into a small enclosure where they could be drugged. From there the animals could be transported by lorry to the Park. He estimated that the whole operation would last more or less 42 hours. The lorries then would have to maintain their maximum speed of 10 m.p.h. (16 km/h)!

It was however decided that it would be better to protect the animals in their natural habitat by enclosing the area. Thus only many years later in 1961 was the first rhino re-introduced into the Kruger National Park. Four bulls and two cows were brought from the Umfolozi reserve to the Park and put into the camp near Pretoriuskop.

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Uiteindelik is daar toe besluit dat dit beter sou wees om die diere in hul natuurlike habitat te beskerm deur die gebied toe te span. Daarom het dit toe so gebeur dat die eerste witrenosters eers in 1961 in die Wildtuin hervestig is. Vier bulle en twee koeie is vanaf die Umfolozi-reservaat na die Wildtuin gebring en in die kamp by Pretoriuskop geplaas.

Hierdie groepie was dus klein Pretoriuskop se voorouers. Besonderhede oor hul wel en weë en oor hul nageslag is tot in die fynste besonderhede deur Thys Mostert gehou. Die witrenosters lê hom baie na aan die hart en omdat hy hulle so noukeurig dophou, is hy seker van sy saak as hy beweer dat Pretoriuskop inderdaad die eerste volbloed Krugerwildtuin-witrenoster in meer as tagtig jaar is.

Hy verduidelik dat die renostertjie se ma Matupa heet en dat die pa, Manung, op sy beurt die eerste kalf was wat in die Wildtuin gebore is (13/11/65) ná die aankoms van die Umfolozi-renosters in 1961. Matupa was die eerste verskalf (29/3/69) wat uit die teelgroep gebore is.

Hoewel daar intussen by die 300 witrenosters in die Wildtuin ingevoer is, is die kanse dat hulle 'n egte Krugerwildtuin-spruit kon voortbring, feitlik 'n ronde nul.

Matupa was na 6½ jaar geslagsryp en is toe gedek. Soos dit soveel kere by die skaarser diersoorte voorkom, het sy egter haar eersteling verloor. Hierdie keer was haar draagtyd presies 16 maande en 12 dae.

Aanvanklik was hy baie bekommerd oor die welsyn van Pretoriuskop omdat hy die kleinste kalfie was wat hy nog gesien het, vertel distrikveldwagter Mostert. Op vyf weke was hy egter duidelik blakend gesond en steeds aan die groei.

Sy ma hou hom nou nog eenkant todat hy sterker is en sal mettertyd weer met die ander koeie in die kampie kontak maak. Elkeen het egter 'n eie loopgebied. Pretoriuskop sal tot so op ses maande aan sy moeder drink, maar hy het al gesien dat kalfies tot op agtien maande drink. Die ma lê op haar sy wanneer die kalfie drink, vertel "peetpa" Mostert.

Die kalf is baie ma-vas en loop saam met haar totdat sy weer 'n kalfie het. Dan verjaag sy haar ouer kalf en mag hy of sy nie naby haar en haar jongste kom nie.

Hoe kom die nuutste aankomeling aan sy naam? Hy is genoem na die koppie Pretoriuskop. Sy ouers en voorouers is ook na koppies en rantjies in die omgewing genoem en dit was altyd die taak van Helfas Nkuna, 'n ou veldwagtersersant.

Pretoriuskop sal saam met sy ma in die kamp aangehou word waar hy veilig is teen roofdiere. Waarskynlik sal hy eendag beskore wees om as teelbul gebruik te word voordat hy in die groter ruimte van die Krugerwildtuin uitgelaat sal word. □

This nucleus was little Pretoriuskop's ancestors. Thys Mostert having kept all available data on these animals and their descendents to the minutest detail, is convinced that Pretoriuskop is the first rhino in more than eighty years, conceived and born in the Park from parents born there.

He explained that Pretoriuskop's mother is named Matupa and his sire Manung, the first calf to be born in the park (13/11/65) since introduction of the Umfolozi rhinos during 1961. Matupa was the first heifer to be born (29/3/69) from the breeding group.

Although about 300 white rhino have since been resettled in the Park, there is very little possibility that they would have produced an out and out Kruger Park offspring.

At 6½ years Matupa was pubescent and then covered. But as so often happens with rarer animal species, she lost her first calf. Her recent gestation period was noted to be 16 months and 12 days.

District ranger Mostert says that he was very worried at first because Pretoriuskop was the smallest calf that he had yet seen. But when he was five weeks old, it became clear that the calf was in radiant health and growing well.

His mother will keep him apart until he is stronger and she will in due course make contact with the other cows in the camp. Each of them though, has their own area. Pretoriuskop will suckle until about six months of age but it is not unusual for them to suckle up to eighteen months. The mother lies on her side when the calf drinks, "godfather" Mostert said.

The calf stays very close to his mother and goes everywhere with her until she has her next calf. Then she chases him away and he will no longer be allowed to come near her or the new calf.

How did Pretoriuskop get his name? He was named after the Pretoriuskop hill. His parents and forebears were also named after hills and koppies in the vicinity and this was the task of Helfas Nkuna, an old ranger sergeant.

Pretoriuskop will be kept in the camp together with his mother where he will be safe from beasts of prey. Perhaps he will some day be used for breeding purposes before being let out into the vast space of the Kruger National Park. □