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AFRICA RHINO CONSERVATION

The plea worldwide to save the Black Rhinoceros (*diceros bicornis*) often falls on deaf ears and into the hands of unscrupulous poachers and overseas traders for financial gain, especially for the rhino horn.

Since the turn of the last century, the Black Rhinoceros has declined dramatically in both the extent of its range and its numbers in sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years, the Black Rhino has become extinct, or is nearing extinction, in 12 African countries. Its numbers have dropped 90% across the continent in the last 17 years and a recent survey shows that substantial numbers of Black Rhinos are now found only in Kenya (500), Namibia (390), South Africa (600), Zambia (100) and Zimbabwe (400). Without proper conservation management, these beautiful mammals will disappear and become extinct.

Poaching for the horn has been and continues to be the major cause of the decline of the Black Rhino. Despite sustained efforts to control the trade of rhino products, there has been little reduction in the poaching pressure on the Black Rhino population remaining in Zimbabwe. They have been sought after by Zambian poachers since 1985, particularly for their horn, which is used in drugs as an aphrodisiac. In general, government awareness and international help from conservation organizations has resulted in less poachable rhino horn reaching the world markets, and has minimized the incentive to poach. The poaching of the horn brings less than 5% of the retail price to the poacher; whereas, the same horn in overseas markets will fetch high revenues for the trader.

The decline in the Black Rhino has been particularly severe in eastern Africa where the very large national parks and reserves used to hold more Black Rhinos than currently exist on the whole continent. Tanzania's Black Rhino may number less than 60 and Uganda and Somalia probably have less than 10 of the animals between them. The Black Rhinoceros dropped in numbers in Kenya from an estimated 20,000 in 1970 to probably under 500 animals in the early 1980s.

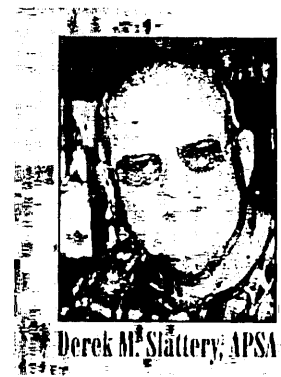
Kenya eventually recognized that the only hope for protecting the remaining Black Rhinos lay in concentrating groups within smaller areas that have the resources and anti-poaching security, which had previously been spread too thin to be effective. In 1984, the Wildcard Members Development embarked on a policy of translocation of Black Rhinos into specially protected areas, which now come under the general heading of "Sanctuaries." Many of these relatively small areas are completely enclosed by specially designed



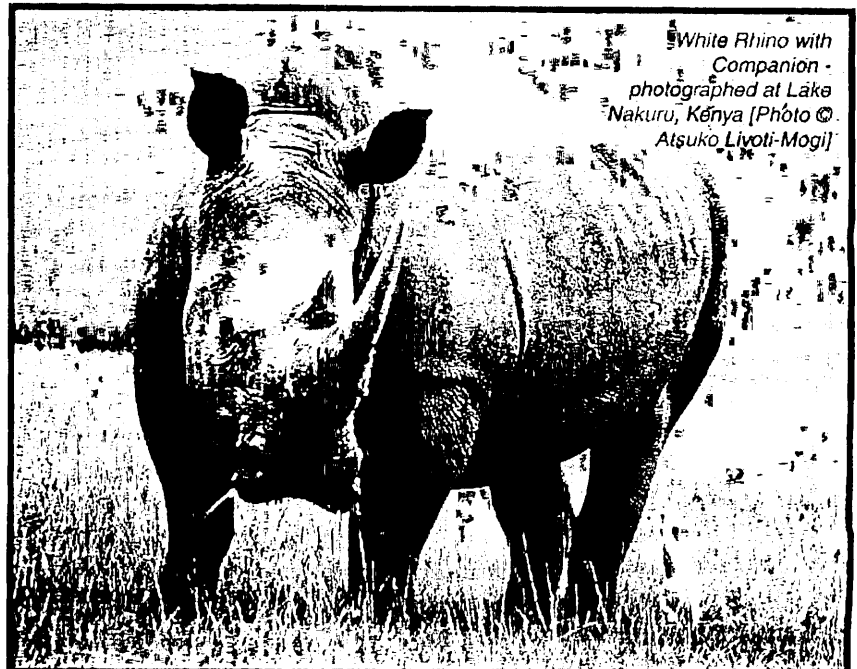
electric fences with alarms, resulting in an increase in numbers and protection from poaching. These sanctuaries allow the animal to roam over a vast area in a natural habitat, which is different from zoos and animal game farms where the animal is confined, although zoo and game farm habitats also play an important part in animal conservation and survival of the rhinoceros species.

Today, Kenya holds the only substantial wild population of the north eastern ecotype/subspecies of the Black Rhinoceros numbering around 450-500 animals. Four-hundred of these are located in well-protected areas, including six national parks or reserves (Nairobi, Nakuru, Tsavo west, Aberdares,

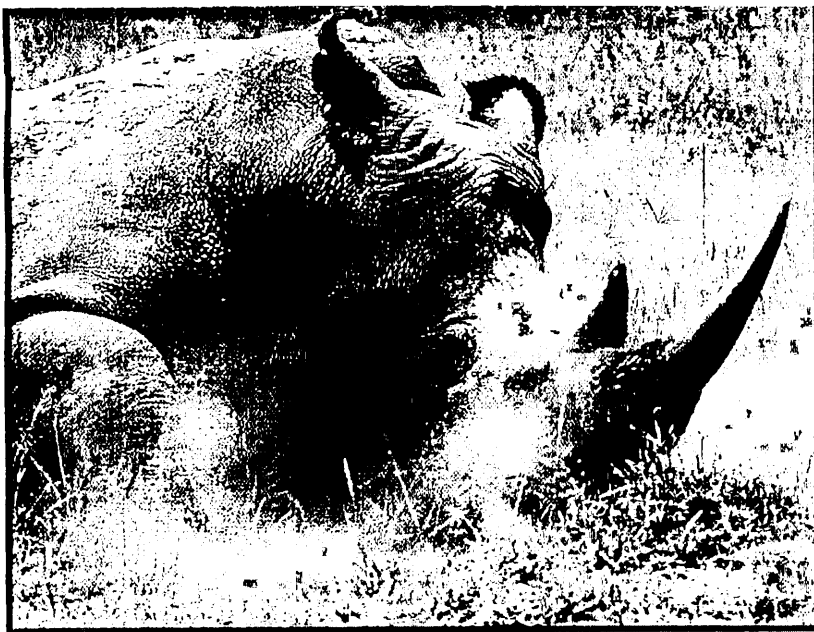
Fearsome - Black Rhino - photographed in the San Diego Zoo [Photo © Derek M. Slattery, APSA, PPSA]



Derek M. Slattery, APSA



White Rhino with Companion - photographed at Lake Nakuru, Kenya [Photo © Atsuko Liyoti-Mogil]



*Bull's Frustration -
photographed at Lake
Nakuru, Kenya [Photo
© Atsuko Livoti-Mogi]*

Acknowledgement:
Thanks to John
Mwangi, Rhino-
Warden of Nakuru
National Park in
Kenya who provided
useful information
and statistics for this
article. The Nakuru
Rhino Project is
worth supporting to
keep these beautiful
mammals from
extinction.
DMS

Amboseli, Masai mara and Ngulia rhino
sanctuary) and five private sanctuaries (Solio,
Lewa Downs, Ol-Jogi, Ol-Pejeta and Laikipia).

In Kenya, Black Rhinos located in sanctuaries have suffered little poaching and have shown an annual increase in numbers of about 5%, particularly in the fenced areas. Once all the sanctuaries have been stocked with a sufficient number of rhinos, especially females, the rate of increase could double.

In addition to Kenya's Black Rhinos, there are approximately 58 Square-lipped (White) Rhinoceros. Evidence from fossils and cave paintings in Kenya and northern Tanzania suggest that the White Rhino was widespread and part of the east Africa savanna fauna until approximately 2000 years ago. Therefore, the reintroduction of White Rhinos into Kenya, all of which were imported from South Africa in the 1970s, cannot be judged as a case of

bringing in an "exotic" species. All White Rhinos are presently located on private land and are privately owned by the Kenya Wildlife Service like those photographed by us in the open savanna of the Nakuru National Park. The ring-fence around its boundaries is guarded by armed patrols against poachers. Observation showed that the Square-lipped (White) Rhinoceros are easy to photograph close up, as they have no fear of man and are content in their secure, natural surroundings. In contrast, the 48 Black Rhinos in Nakuru are shy, hide in dense thorn bush and are very difficult to locate for photographic opportunities. In the course of an 11-day stay in Nakuru, we only sighted one Black Rhino mother with calf, which passed quickly in front of our vehicle and disappeared into thick thorn bush.

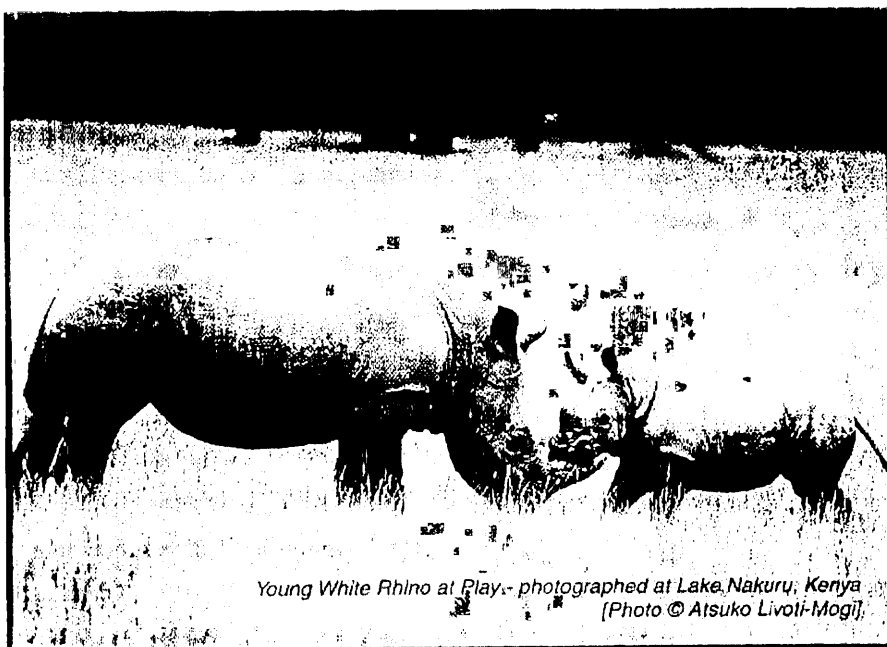
Black Rhinoceros

The Black Rhinoceros is 60 inches tall at the shoulder and weighs 2000 – 3000 pounds. It is distinguishable from the White Rhino by its smaller size, lack of nuchal hump, and by the smaller head which is carried high, giving a different silhouette. Also, it has a pointed upper lip, as it is a browser; the White Rhino is a grazer. The Black Rhino lives in dry thorn bush country and males are usually solitary. They have very poor sight, but a good sense of smell and excellent hearing, which sometimes makes them dangerous if cornered or if encountered during the mating season.

Square-Lipped (White) Rhinoceros

The White Rhinoceros can be up to 70 inches tall at the shoulder and weighs between 4,800 and 11,200 pounds. It is much larger and heavier than the Black Rhino, especially with regard to the height at the shoulder. It has a distinct massive hump on the neck; the middle of the back is slightly, but distinctly arched with horns that are generally longer, thinner and straighter than the Black Rhino. The White Rhino is the second largest land animal and possibly the largest pure grazer ever to have roamed the planet. The males are territorial and vigorously defend their territory against intruders. Females, on the other hand, permit members of the same sex within home range, but will not permit an individual intruder. The White Rhinos are very placid (except in the mating season or with a very young calf) and are easy to approach.

If you are the adventurous type, you will find the journey to Africa to be a rewarding one, but as a word of caution, it is strongly recommended that you travel in a small group with a guide who is well-versed with local conditions. The smaller the group, the better the photography. Also, select the season and location carefully. **Good Hunting!** 🍀



*Young White Rhino at Play - photographed at Lake Nakuru, Kenya
[Photo © Atsuko Livoti-Mogi]*