



# Rhinos resettled



**By Rick Matthews**

**B**ecause of its outstanding success in its rhino breeding programme, Bophuthatswana's National Parks Board can now claim to be responsible for the second most rhino captures south of the Limpopo.

Ten years ago Bophuthatswana saw its first rhino being introduced to Pilanesberg after a series of translocations, primarily from Natal. Over the years the breeding population grew and has been so prolific that the Parks Board can now translocate rhino from its bigger parks to other reserves as well as to private operators.

Through these translocations the chances of establishing new breeding groups are good. A suitable animal must however be successfully captured and transferred.

Rhino capture is not the easiest of tasks. Two methods of capture are normally employed, these being helicopter capture and ground capture. The type of capture method used depends upon the terrain the rhinos inhabit.

Helicopter capture is a quick and effective method, but very costly. It is usually used when access to an area for capture vehicles is difficult and the rhinos need to be driven to more accessible areas.

The animal is then darted and monitored until it drops. The vehicles then move in and the animal is loaded. The only problem connected to using helicopters is that it is costly and it puts a lot of stress on the animal which can lead to 'over-straining' disease. This is however rare.

The second and most common method is on the ground capture. A search by vehicle is



the first step. Once the animals have been spotted, a ground team gets to work on foot, to dart the animal. Although this method is commonly used there are problems – these being associated with the distance between the darter and the rhino. As one needs to get as close as 40 metres, there is a good chance of the rhino either seeing you or picking up your scent. If this happens, the rhino will run – and usually far away – and this means back to square one.

Procedures with both methods are the same. Before darting, a tranquilizing dart is prepared. The tranquilizer starts to take effect only after five to 15 minutes during which time the darted animal must be monitored. After it is immobilised, a constant check on its temperature is kept, the horn measured and any distinctive markings noted.

Once all particulars are noted, the antidote is administered and the animal guided into the transport crate. It is usually directed using a rope and once inside, the crate is loaded onto a truck and the animal is off to a new home.



*The white rhinoceros, Ceratotherium Simum, has an average height of 160cm and can reach a speed of approximately 45 km/hr. It has a potential life span of 45 years and is characterised chiefly by its broad, square upper lip, and not for its colour. A single calf is born after a gestation period of 18 months. In Natura no. 19, a complete profile of the white rhino can be found.*



- 1: The dart is prepared prior to darting the rhino. An immobilizing drug is injected by a charge which is triggered off after penetration. The needle is lubricated with a petroleum gel and a sterilizing agent. The dart is placed in a gas powered rifle and the search for rhino commences per vehicle.
- 2: As soon as the rhino is spotted, a suitable animal is identified. The pursuit continues by helicopter from which the rhino will be darted.
- 3: A downed rhino. A general antibiotic is administered both in the area of the dart's penetration and into a major muscle so as to minimize the risk of infection. The rhino's eyes are covered so that they don't get too dry. A rope is placed around the head for loading.
- 4: It is important to monitor the temperature of the animal: either the temperature can drop (in cold weather) or rise (due to a lengthy pursuit).
- 5: The length and base of the horns are measured.
- 6: The rhino is pushed and pulled into the crate after the antidote is given.
- 7: Inside the crate and on its way to a new home where a new rhino colony will be established.

