

Lapalala Wilderness



Black Rhino Update

A further five black rhinoceros were purchased at the Natal Parks Board Game Auction during June this year by Dale Parker, owner of Lapalala Wilderness. Despite the severe drought experienced in the North Western Waterberg region, these rhino have settled into their new home extremely well and are in good condition. The lesions, so typically found on black rhino from higher rainfall areas, have virtually cleared up completely.

This latest group is also unique in that they were captured in the Wilderness area of the Umfolozi Game Reserve and had to be airlifted by helicopter to their holding bomas for the auction. Not being used to vehicles where they roamed before, some of the rhino, when encountered at Lapalala, seem to be curious rather than frightened or aggressive, to the sheer delight of guests.

Stringent measures of patrolling the rhino sanctuary are taken in order that movements, feeding habits and positive identifications can be obtained and then fed into a computer for monitoring purposes. The programme was developed by Duncan Parker.

The news that one of the recently introduced females, Makoko, was pregnant, had only been revealed on the day of delivery to the Lapalala rhino holding bomas. This meant that her speedy release was imminent, once she proved to have adjusted to the change of food. A rhino normally explores a new-found home to establish a territory. It was one week after release into the reserve that she gave birth to a little male in the middle of one of the steep concrete reinforced game viewing roads behind Kolobe Lodge. (Black rhino favour dense thickets).

Returning from a bush breakfast on the Kgogong dam, on the morning of 11 July 1992, Rod Stokes, the Manager of Kolobe, suddenly saw what looked like a forlorn large warthog, without tusks, standing on the concrete strip. But ... lo and behold ... this was a small, newborn black rhino. Stopping in their tracks, expecting the mother to be around, the guests on the open vehicle enjoyed this very rare sight.

No mother appeared, and it was clear that she had abandoned her calf. After some frantic radio messages between the Lodge Manager, Rod Stokes, and the Reserve Manager, Clive Ravenhill, and telephone calls to Clive Walker in Johannesburg, Karen and Roy Trendler of the Animal Rehabilitation Centre (ARC), came to our aid. Dr Kobus du Toit, a veterinarian in private practice, who works in close liaison with ARC, accompanied the "ambulance" to meet the little Bwana Tshiwana - Mister Orphan - halfway between Lapalala and Pretoria in Nylstroom. The urgency for the speedy transfer lay in the critical factor that colostrum, the substance found in mother's milk, is administered in the early hours of a newborn baby's life, vital to build up resistance against bacteria.

Little Bwana arrived safely at the Onderstepoort Veterinary facility at 18h00. It was established that his birth was premature, causing concern for possible complications to follow, which duly occurred. He contracted umbilical cord infection, diarrhoea, constipation and polyarthritis, a bacterial infection which attacks the joints, causing severe pain, swelling and stiffness. A treatment of very strong drugs soon eased his vulnerable condition, and at 5 weeks of age he weighed in at 37 kg.

Bwana's nursery is Karen and Roy Trendler's home, where he found love and care during



Dale Parker with little Bwana.

the crucial first months of his life. Many anxious moments were had by his foster mother, who regarded it a privilege to hand-raise this little black rhino from birth, the first in captivity in South Africa. Bwana Tshiwana weighed 21 kg when put into Karen's care and at four months he is a healthy, bouncy, strong, too big to be weighed, well over 70 kg, young "boy".

The crucial factor in a black rhino's early life is the intake of quality low fat milk. Based on information derived from Anna Merz and Daphne Sheldrick, both of whom have raised

black rhino in Kenya on Lactogen, Bwana was soon thriving on a formula, specially made up by Nestlé, resembling black rhino mother's milk as close as possible. (Black rhino calves can suckle for up three years!) It has been a remarkable team effort which has pulled this little orphan through many critical moments—our praise to all concerned.

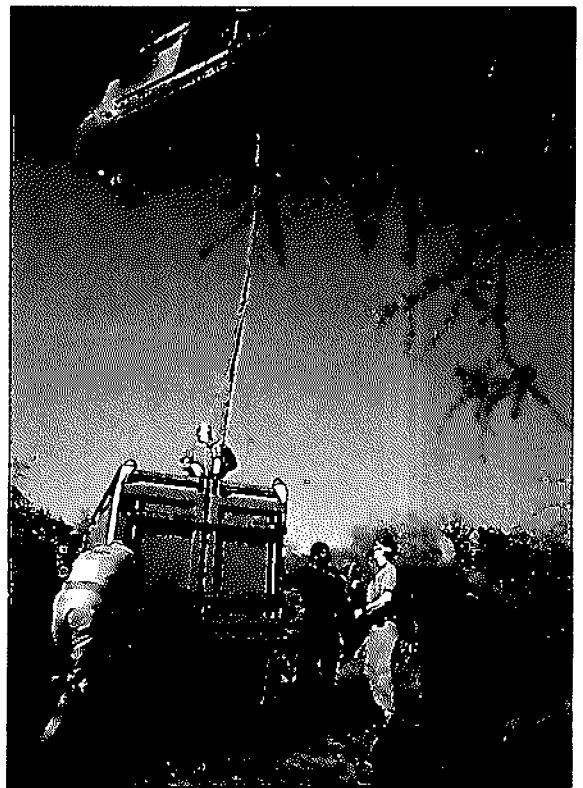
Bwana is to return to Lapalala from ARC at the end of February 1993 where the long road to his eventual return to the wild will begin.

On behalf of Lapalala Wilderness, Dale and Libby Parker, Clive and Conita Walker, all the concerned staff—Clive and Nikkie Ravenhill, Glynis Brown, Rod Stokes, Linda Martin, Peter and Sharon Morrison, our heartfelt appreciation is extended to Karen and Roy Trendler of ARC for their hospitality, love and care for Bwana Tshiwana. Grateful thanks also to Dr Kobus du Toit for his valuable medical advice and supply of crucial drugs whenever Bwana's ailments occurred.

Our appreciation is also extended to Dr Pete Rogers and Keith Meiklejohn of Natal Parks Board for advice.

An update on Bwana's progress will appear on a regular basis.

(Bawana is the swahili for mister and Tshiwana northern sotho for orphan).



The converted Puma helicopter of the South African Airforce prepares to lift the 1.8 tonne crate, together with one of the five black rhino caught in the wilderness area of Umfolozi, during March/April of 1992, prior to airlifting them across to the holding pens in Umfolozi Game Reserve. This first-time ever operation in South Africa involving the airlifting of rhino directly from the capture site, placed considerably less stress on these animals, which is evidenced by their relative calm nature in the presence of vehicles now that they have been released into the rhino sanctuary.

The Lephhalala River



For the past number of years, the Directors of Lapalala Wilderness have been involved in discussions concerning the proposal to dam the Lephhalala river, of which at least 65 kilometres passes through Lapalala Wilderness and a good portion of Touchstone Game Ranch. The effects of a dam within the wilderness area would be catastrophic and the outcome of the Steering Committee's two year investigation, has clearly revealed that this is not an option.

Working in close co-operation with the Department of Water Affairs, Lapalala made it very clear that any attempt to erect a dam within the length of the rivers of these two reserves would not only create major disturbance problems, but would seriously affect the wilderness character of the area. Whilst no definite decision has been made to go ahead with the construction of the dam, two potential sites still exist, namely one beyond the northern boundaries of Lapalala and one just upstream on the border of Lapalala.

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CONTENTS

Wilderness Trust

From the Chairman's Desk

Page

1

Eternal Enemies

2

On Trail

3

Did you know?

6

Special Acknowledgements

13

Lapalala Wilderness

Black Rhino Update

7

Lephalala River

8

Roan Antelope

10

Visitors to Kolobe Lodge

11

Tribute to Eric Rundgren

11

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COVER PICTURE: The 15 week old Black Rhino orphan Bwana Tshiwana enjoys his daily mud bath. (Photo: Libby Parker).

