



Too many white rhino?

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In ten years' time, there could be 4 000 white rhinos in the Kruger National Park. What are the limits to this population's growth?

It is National Parks Board policy to reintroduce animals that historically occurred in the conservation areas under its control. As the white rhino became extinct in the Transvaal in 1896, it was among the board's priorities to reintroduce this species to the Kruger National Park (KNP). On October 14, 1961, four white rhinos from the Umfolozi Game Reserve were released near Pretoriuskop.

Over the next 12 years a total of 345 white rhinos were reintroduced to the park, and a total of 1 232 white rhino were counted in the 1988 aerial survey. The re-establishment of white rhino in the KNP is a success story of which both the National Parks Board and Natal Parks Board can be proud. However, if the white rhino population in the KNP continues to increase at its current rate, by 2001 the KNP will be home to 4 000 white rhino.

Although census reports indicate that the KNP white rhino population is increasing, no detailed study has been done on the ecology of the animal. A major new study has therefore been

launched, aimed at answering several questions:

- Which areas did the rhinos colonise after their release and what was the rate of dispersal?
- What is their habitat use in the KNP?
- Do seasonal migrations occur and if so, why?
- What are the ecological constraints on white rhino in the KNP?
- Are there any major areas of suitable white rhino habitat in the KNP that are under-used at present?

This information will provide management guidelines for the white rhino population in the KNP. It is likely that in the foreseeable future the white rhino density in the southern part of the park will increase to the extent that it will become desirable to move some of the animals to areas where the densities are still comparatively low. With the information gathered from this study, it will be possible to suggest guidelines for realistic carrying capacities in different habitats.