

Rhino Watch

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Zimbabwe Update

The rebuilding of rhino numbers in Zimbabwe continues to progress well. A total of 35 births have been recorded in the last couple of years, no deaths due to poaching and mortalities have only occurred as a result of natural causes. Rhinos are now found in six private conservancies and four intensive protection zones. The conservancies are Bubiana, near West Nicholson, Save Valley in the Lowveld, the Midlands, including Iwaba and Twin Springs, near Kwekwe, Gourlay's Ranch near Turk Mine, Chiredzi River and Imire Game Ranch near Marondera. Intensive Protection Zones are Sinamatella (Hwange National Park), Matusadona on the shores of Kariba, Matobo south of Bulawayo and Chipinge in the eastern highlands.

Within the above areas the main concentrations are in Bubiana, Save valley, the Midlands and Sinamatella and they are all experiencing plentiful births, particularly in Bubiana and Sinamatella. The total numbers have increased from an all time low of 275 to approximately 310.

When the rhino war first began in late 1984, there were an estimated 2 500 black rhinos in Zimbabwe. Populations in the Zambezi valley, Chete, Chizarira, Matusadona and almost everywhere else where they were found were subsequently devastated. The new policy of relocating them in the 10 strategic areas has proved to be a windfall. (Save Foundation of Australia, Inc June 1996, Volume 9)

had failed. With the advent of 1996 we decided together with Ernst Greylung and Wayne Anderson to capture the rare event on camera. At that stage, two rhino cows were in the late stages of pregnancy. With the support of Ed Hem, we set out to do what, to our knowledge, had never been done before. After four months of John and I following the first cow, Queenstown, she gave birth on 29 March, to the first female calf to be born on the reserve. Due to circumstances, bad timing and plain bad luck, the process was not filmed.

Not to be deterred by the setback, we made plans and arrangements to start following the second cow, Ouvrou, immediately. A 24-hour duty roster was drawn up: John and Ernst kept an eye on her during working hours and I came into the reserve twice a day to make research notes. At night, we have two shifts, one from 6.00pm to midnight and the second from midnight to 6.30am.

By this time, the seasons had changed and winter was upon us. With the dearth of information available on the subject, we had very little idea of any tell-tale signs to look for, other than the research we had compiled from watching the previous cow. Ed Hem, who had seen five other cows through their pregnancies gave his advice and opinion where he could.

During June, it became apparent from Ouvrou's behavioural patterns that she was reasonably close to giving birth. She had also started discharging and became extremely erratic.

(Continued on page 2)

White Rhino Birth Captured On Film

In 1981, well-known Johannesburg business man Ed Hem, decided to convert his 1000 ha dairy operation in Krugersdorp, in the Kromdraai area, into a game reserve. Over the next ten years, an infrastructure was slowly but surely built up to accommodate a substantial amount of tourists in search of wildlife close to the Johannesburg city centre. By this time, the Rhino Park officially opened its gates with the introduction of white rhino into the area.

Over the next few years, the breeding programme moved forward in leaps and bounds. Five rhino calves (all bulls) were born during this period. Several attempts to film and photograph the births

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It was now mid-winter on the highveld, with temperatures plummeting below zero virtually every night. It was freezing but we kept our vigil. Ed graciously offered us the use of his 4x4 vehicle which we accepted gratefully. Unfortunately, the vehicle had no heater, so there we were - ill-equipped, getting on each other's nerves, freezing and very tired - following a cantankerous cow who, I'm sure, eventually thought of us as her extended family. We often followed her on foot with little more than the full moon to guide us.

Finally, in the early hours of 2 July, our patience was rewarded - Ouvrou's waters broke. Three hours late, just as the sun was rising over the cold highveld, five rhinos and four people looked on in amazement, and sometimes ran for our lives, as Ouvrou gave birth to a beautiful, healthy female calf. Nothing can equal the elation and relief that we felt as the calf took its first hesitant steps.

As far as we know, this was the first time that the entire birth process of the white rhino in nature has ever been captured on film.

(Shelby Anderson)

STOP PRESS

Six rhinos have been killed since January this year at the Etosha National Park in Namibia, and there have been reports that a further rhino was killed in June. While suspects have been arrested and some horns recovered, these incidents stress the need for tougher enforcement of anti-poaching regulations.

(Save Foundation of Australia, Inc, June 1996)

Managing Free Ranging White Rhino

The area into which rhino are introduced must be at least 400 ha, and an enclosure this size can cater for about four animals. Under ideal conditions, i.e. savanna, on flat to gently undulating terrain, regular rainfall of about 600 - 700 mm, warm winters (minimum seldom below about 15°C), and sweetveld with good species composition of grasses, the density of rhino can be as high as 1 per 40 ha. In less suitable habitat, 1 per 100 ha to as low as 1 per 300 ha can be expected.

The far northern area of the Northern Province (north of Louis Trichardt) is considered unsuitable for rhino, as are most areas of the Cape and certain parts of the Free State. It is thus important that the nature conservation departments of these provinces are contacted for advice prior to the introduction of rhino. To ensure successful breeding, it is advisable to introduce a minimum of four rhino, two of which should be males - competition between males appears to stimulate their interest in mating the females.

Female rhino first calve at six or seven years. The calving interval is 22 months, and gestation 16 months. Under ideal conditions the population can increase at 10% per annum and the reproductive lifespan can be as long as 36 years.

The rhino must have access to open water in rivers, dams or troughs throughout the year, and mud wallows should also be available.

To increase the chances of successful rhino introduction, sound veld management practices must be followed. Poor veld management - such as overstocking with other game, or burning the veld too often or not burning it at all - will result in good quality grasses being replaced by those of poorer quality. When this happens, the rhinos' condition will deteriorate and in extreme cases, they may even die.

It is advisable to keep a constant check on the rhino and if their condition appears to deteriorate in any way, the local nature conservation officer should be consulted. If the animals appear to be sick or injured, a vet should be contacted immediately.

Security is also essential and the rhino area must be patrolled regularly by game guards to reduce the threat of poaching.

(Natal Parks Board)

Rhinos Fetch High Prices at Game Auction

Six black rhino that were up for sale at the recent game auction held at the Hluhluwe Game Reserve by Vleissentraal, on behalf of the Natal Parks Board, were purchased by John Hume of Mpumalanga. This brings to seven the total number of private black rhino owners in South Africa. This is most encouraging, as the private owner is increasingly playing a major role not only in the conservation of white rhino - whose numbers are on the increase - but also of black rhino.



John Hume

1996 Rhino Survey - Update

Daan Buijs reports the following with regard to the rhino survey:

The majority of rhino owners in KwaZulu/Natal, Mpumalanga, the North West Province and the Northern Province have been contacted, either in person or by phone. The database has been updated and information is also being collated on the Free State and Cape rhino populations.

Preliminary analysis of the data indicates an increase of over 80% in white rhinos on private land since 1987. This figure excludes the reserves which have been incorporated into the greater Kruger National Park. Rhinos sold by the Natal Parks Board have also been deducted from the total. The increase has been achieved despite ongoing trophy hunting and is an excellent demonstration of the conservation awareness and responsible management of private landowners in South Africa.

If the white rhinos in Sabi Sand, Timbavati and Klaserie are included, close to 20% of the total South African population is managed by private citizens and organisations. This is a large proportion, which represents a considerable contribution to conservation, as well as a substantial capital investment.

Although policies regarding trade and other relevant issues are laid down by the authorities, AROA is in constant dialogue with policy-makers about matters which concern private owners. In this regard, both members and non-members of AROA benefit. To have the maximum impact on decision-making, however, it is essential that AROA is truly representative of the majority of -if not all - rhino owners.

On behalf of AROA, Theo Papenfus and myself, I would like to thank the rhino owners - both members and non-members, as well as their managers, for their co-operation during the 1996 survey. We would also like to acknowledge the various provincial nature conservation agencies whose assistance has been invaluable.

Upon completion, a general summary of the survey findings will be sent to all owners who have participated, with the assurance that all specific information will be treated as strictly confidential. It is, however, important that the authorities be made aware of the valuable contribution of private owners to the overall conservation effort, and that the needs and wants of the owners be taken into consideration when decisions are made on policies that affect them.



Theo Papenfus (left) with Clive Ravenhill of Lapalala Wilderness

Western Plains Zoo

Black Rhinoceros Conservation Programme

We thought our readers would be interested to hear more about the success of the black rhino conservation programme at Western Plains Zoo in Dubbo, Australia.

One male and seven female black rhinos arrived at WPZ in February 1993. These animals were caught in Chete Safari Area in Zimbabwe and spent two months in quarantine at Australia's high security quarantine station on the Cocos Islands prior to arrival in Australia.

The only male in the group died on arrival at WPZ as a result of trauma injuries to the head, leaving seven females and two older females who had been at WPZ since late 1991. These two animals came to Western Plains Zoo from Taronga Zoo where they had been for many years.

One of the females caught in the wild, Chunga, died in April 1993 as a result of a liver condition known as hepatopathy. The full cause of this condition, which is prevalent in recently captured black rhinos, is still unknown.

The remaining six wild caught females and two older females continued to do well until August 1994 when Dongajumu developed severe swelling in her forequarters and appeared jaundiced. Blood test indicated hepatopathy which had always proved fatal. However, Dongajumu responded well to treatment and reached 80% recovery after ten weeks. Her recovery is now 100%.

In October 1994, Pepe Kale was diagnosed with Johnes Disease, a contagious bacterial infection of the intestines which exhibits signs including chronic diarrhoea, lethargy and weight

loss. This animal has responded positively to treatment and her condition and demeanour have improved a great deal.

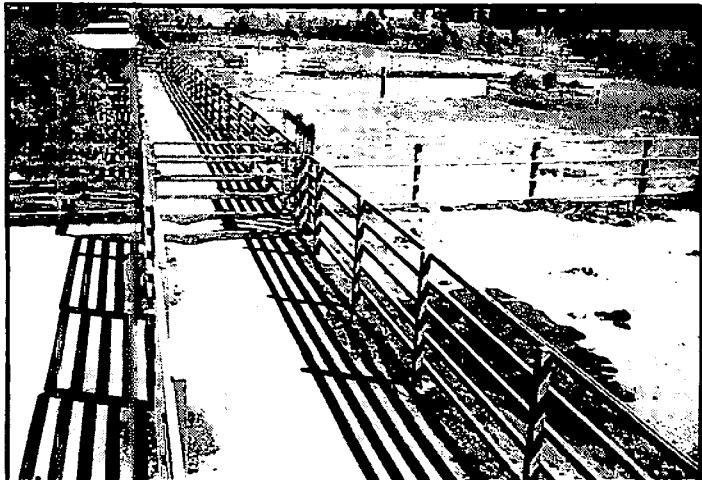
Four black rhino males arrived at WPZ on 29 November 1994 from Milwaukee, San Diego and Fossil Rim, Texas in the USA and all settled in to their new enclosures very well. This brought the size of the group to 12 - four males and eight females. One of the males, Siabuwa, was introduced to a number of the females on various occasions with a number of confirmed matings. In February and March 1995 he mated Kalungwizi. Utahwedande was also mated in March while Dongajumu was mated in May. Ultrasound examinations and tests on hormone levels in the faeces, urine and blood were carried out.

Dyna, a 49 year old female black rhino sadly had to be euthanased on 5 May 1995, due to weight loss and failing health. She was the oldest living black rhino in the world at the time and was caught in the wild near Mt Kilimanjaro in Tanzania in 1949.

A significant part of the black rhino conservation and breeding programme at WPZ and worldwide is the development and utilisation of assisted or artificial breeding technologies. These techniques include ultrasound as a means of tracking oestrous and pregnancy as well as measurement of hormone patterns in blood, urine and faeces. A number of these procedures are regularly employed at WPZ. In early November a programme aimed at testing hormone levels in saliva began. This is ongoing and there are hopes that it will lead to the use of salivary hormones to assess oestrous and pregnancy. The advantages of this are in the ease and low stress involved in collecting saliva, compared to blood, and results are yielded more immediately than with tests used to measure hormones in faeces.

The success of the breeding programme may be evidenced by the fact that Kalungwizi gave birth to a male calf, sired by Siabuwa, on 25 May 1996, after a pregnancy lasting 15 months.

(Western Plains Zoo, Black Rhino News, Vol 1, Issue 2)



A view down the main centre raceway of the complex. Grassed day yards are on the right of the main raceway, while night yards are on the left

Adult male Mwaniki in a chute. This forms part of a conditioning programme aimed ultimately at semen collection.



Male Siabuwa and female Dongajumu in a yard adjacent to the breeding yard (with earth mound). The drafting gate in the background allows separation of the animals when necessary.

Erwin Leibnitz

- A Distinguished Career In Conservation

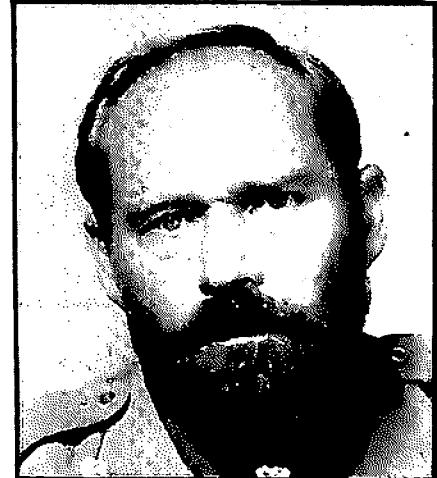
Following 22 years as Chief Warden of Klaserie Private Nature Reserve, Erwin Leibnitz will soon be taking up a challenging position as Manager of the Welgevonden Game Reserve in the Waterberg.

We traced the career of this committed individual whose duties in conservation management have ranged from introduction of rare and endangered species to alien plant control to public relations and everything in-between.

Erwin's family, originally from Germany, settled in the Lowveld and Erwin completed his schooling at White River. He went on to do a National Diploma in Nature Conservation and Ecological Management. He began his career at Mount Sheba Nature Reserve, from where he moved to Etosha National Park. It was during this time that he was offered the post of Warden at Klaserie Private Nature Reserve. On arrival at Klaserie, he was thrown in at the deep end and, for the first six months his main priority was the completion of the Reserves headquarters so that he could have a base from which to work - this involved making bricks to complete the building and laying on water.

His achievements since then include the Ossie Doyer Trophy as Conservationist of the year in 1992, and an Award of Excellence presented by the Game Rangers Association of Africa in 1993. Erwin is also a member of the executive committee of AROA and is an executive committee member and vice-chairman of the eastern and northern provinces of the Game Rangers Association of Africa.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish Erwin and his family every success for the future.



White Rhino Bull For Sale

A white rhino bull aged approximately 9-10 years is up for sale. He was captured by Natal Parks Board in Hluhluwe Game Reserve in April, has been in captivity since then and is therefore very well boma-trained. He is of an outstanding size and is ideal for breeding purposes. Price R50 000 excl. VAT.

For further information contact JJ Fourie, Tel: (015231) 4386, Fax: (015231) 4387, Farm: (0152312) ask for 71511, Cell 082 455-3373.