

# AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALISTS AT HOME IN OL PEJETA CONSERVANCY, KENYA

The 11th IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group meeting was held in February 2013 in Laikipia County, Kenya.

It was a prime location to show off the contribution of the private sector to Kenyan rhino conservation so, on Day 4 of the 6-day meeting, we escaped the confines of the conference room of the Naro Moru River Lodge for a field trip to nearby Ol Pejeta Conservancy where **Martin Mulama**, **Batian Craig** and **Ben Okita** had organised a fantastic series of demonstrations of their rhino monitoring and security work.

Cathy Dean | Director

Ol Pejeta Conservancy has a fully functional dog unit, comprising bloodhounds for tracking and Belgian Malinois attack dogs. The attack dogs are trained to bite a poacher's arm and hold on, effectively immobilising him and preventing him from being able to use a gun

We began the day at the Capture and Translocation Facility at the Morani Centre: a truck and lifting crane, new and reconditioned crates and a lockable store for all the veterinary equipment used during rhino operations

ALL IMAGES SRI UNLESS NOTED

We'd like to thank Ol Pejeta Conservancy very much indeed for hosting us, as well as the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, Ol Jogi and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy for lending us their environmental education buses for the day.

## Grants

USFWS RTCF awarded \$32,542 towards the costs of the meeting; WWF-SA and WWF-ARP between them allocated £10,512, Defra \$10,000 and we gave \$17,511. This covered a total of 62 people attending the whole meeting, and a further 17 people joining us for a special Kenya-focus' day. Our grateful thanks to all the donors and the participants for another very successful meeting.

**Raoul du Toit**, winner of the 2011 Goldman Environmental Award and Director of the Lowveld Rhino Trust in Zimbabwe



Three of Ol Pejeta's rangers talked us through all the kit they use for rhino monitoring, camping, security (including a thermal-imaging camera), first aid and veterinary for the dog units. This was a particularly interesting session that provoked a lot of discussion—rhino people like gear!

Watching the bloodhound at work was amazing. The ranger in charge simply scooped up some soil from where the target had been standing, put it into a plastic bag, and then held the dog's nose in the bag. Then the bloodhound was off and running.

The wind was blowing strongly, so the dog was perhaps 50–75m downwind from where the target had been standing, where the pretend poacher had holed up in a bush, the dog turned straight into the wind and pointed the direction. And then the Belgian Malinois attack dog took over...



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Three of the Kenyans with whom we work very closely: Above, left-to-right: **Ben Okita**, National Rhino Coordinator, who is due to complete his PhD this year; **Geoffrey Chege**, Secretary of the Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries, as well as Lewa's Conservation Officer; and **Martin Mulama**, Chief Conservation Officer at Ol Pejeta Conservancy

**Cindy Harper** of the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory of the University of Pretoria, **Rod Potter** of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and **Rusty Hustler** of the Rhino and Elephant Security Group gave us a talk and demonstration on how to collect DNA samples, whether for genetic analysis or for wildlife forensics at a crime scene



One of the four Northern White Rhinos that was sent to Ol Pejeta from Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic in December 2009 (below). All four animals have rediscovered their mating instincts; as yet there is no confirmed pregnancy, but hopes remain...

