

KENYA

Rhinos in Meru National Park

On the night of 30 October 1988, a gang of over 15 armed poachers shot and killed five southern white rhinos in Meru National Park, and removed their horns.

Black rhinos are the only indigenous species of rhino found in Kenya today, but in 1966 a group of six white rhinos were translocated to Meru from southern Africa. The black rhino, with its pointed prehensile upper lip, is a browser while the white rhino has the square upper lip and wide mouth of a grazer. It is their different shaped mouths rather than any difference in their colour which has given the two species their popular names, because 'white' is an English corruption of the Afrikaans word for 'wide'. (Reduced to relict populations early this century, the southern subspecies of white rhino has been re-established over most of its former range south of the Zambezi, but see the report on the northern subspecies on page 21)

The white rhinos had flourished in Meru over the last 20 years, and were popular with visitors. During the day they were allowed to wander in the park under the supervision of rangers, but at night were kept in a guarded enclosure. A large security operation was launched by the government to track down their attackers.

Rhinos in Nairobi National Park

And now for the good news: according to a survey carried out late last year, there are at least 47 rhino in Nairobi National Park, with probably another five in the forest, given the spoor and foot prints found there. When Frederick Waweru was studying the rhino in the park in 1985, he individually identified 30 animals (see *Swara*, July/August 1986). Although he thought that this was probably an underestimate of the complete figure, the latest survey indicates that the population is doing very well.

The park is generally in excellent shape. The entire boundary other than that adjoining the Kitengela, which is used by migratory animals coming in and out of the park, has been refenced with solar-powered electric fencing, and several of the dams have also been cleaned.

The Mount Elgon elephants are alive

After visiting Mount Elgon National Park in 1987, Ian Redmond was so horrified to discover the scale of poaching among the park's unique, rock-eating elephants that he launched the African Ele-Fund, an international appeal to raise funds for practical elephant conservation (see *Swara*, March/April 1988). In May of last year, Ian

Redmond and Dr Jeheskel Shoshani returned to Mount Elgon to make further observations. Dr Shoshani reports on their findings:

The sighting of the first herd of elephants (some with young) early on the morning of 26 May 1988 was very significant, for it provided us with vital information and rare photographs – the elephants of Mount Elgon are alive... and reproducing, contrary to early rumours in the United States that most of them had been killed by poachers. We saw elephants on two other occasions (30 and 31 May) – a maximum total of 65 elephants, 17 of which were young. In all three cases, the elephants were in the Sosio Forest Station area of

White rhinos in Meru National Park.

Mount Elgon, on the border with Uganda.

Since no live elephants had been observed by Ian Redmond (who had been studying the Elgon elephants since 1980) and me within the boundaries of Mount Elgon National Park (MENP) during the previous three weeks, it had been decided (with the advice of the warden, Mr Ben Amoko) to drive to the Sosio Forest, as elephants had been observed there. The Sosio area is just outside the park boundaries, some 15–20 km south-west of the main (Chorlim) gate.

Whether or not the elephants we saw around the Sosio area are the same as those that visit the Kitum and Mackengeny Caves at the park remains to be proved. This we

