

Working together for BLACK RHINOS IN KENYA

News of conservation successes are few and far between in today's climate, especially when referring to rhinos.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Kenya experienced a rhino-poaching epidemic that reduced the estimated 20,000 Eastern black rhino population to fewer than 300 individuals by 1985.

Jamie Gaymer

Chair, Association of Private and community Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS)

In a desperate bid to save the species from becoming locally extinct, the Government of Kenya endorsed the formation of rhino sanctuaries on private, and latterly community, land. The strategy proved to be successful. Kenya has seen a slow but steady increase to 794 Eastern black rhinos today. But today, we are close to reaching full capacity in existing secure habitat.

In 1989, the APLRS was established as a platform for private sector rhino conservancies in Kenya to work together. In 2013, we changed the constitution of the APLRS to include community land and, subsequently, the Association has become an integral part of Kenya's rhino recovery plans.



The APLRS now acts as the interface between the private, community and government sectors, and collectively hosts 62% of Kenya's rhinos.

Without room to expand into, it would be impossible for rhinos to grow in population size. Such a situation is arguably as detrimental as poaching, especially when the objective is to reach at least 2,000 black rhinos thriving in Kenya. In recognition of this aim (from Kenya's Black Rhino Action Plan 2017-2021) and the space deficit with which we are faced, the APLRS – together with Save the Rhino and with the support of the Bently Foundation – organised a Laikipia Rhino Range Expansion Workshop in 2019.

Partners and stakeholders were invited to share their experiences of rhino-range expansion, encouraged to volunteer historical rhino range for capacity development and to strategize concerning the necessary steps to avail more land for rhinos. Ecological issues are pertinent, and security is fundamental, but social, political and economic considerations are no less important. How do we develop secure space for rhinos that is environmentally suitable, politically and socially robust, and economically viable?



ALL IMAGES APLRS

The workshop was a tremendous success. Whilst "Rome was not built in a day", we have embarked on a series of tangible outputs from the meeting. Thus far, we have developed new site-selection criteria, new

private / public "Guardianship Agreements", guidelines for new rhino conservancies and an APLRS private and community rhino endorsement matrix for potential new sites.

We're working closely with the Kenyan Wildlife Service to undertake several projects that will hopefully lead to more space becoming available for rhinos, including the collection and banking of scientific data that will be invaluable for rhino-range expansion. Within the next three to five years, we hope to create new, connected areas to host black rhino populations.

The APLRS would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that have participated in this work so far, in particular: Save the Rhino International, the Bently Foundation and the Kenya Wildlife Service, as well as the support that we have received from countless others.

