

# Expanding HABITAT for rhinos on Borana Conservancy

In 2013, in collaboration with Kenya Wildlife Service, 21 black rhinos were introduced to Borana Conservancy, a 2,000-acre conservancy located at the foothills of Mount Kenya. Ten of these rhinos came from Nakuru National Park in the west, and the remaining 11 from neighbouring Lewa Wildlife Conservancy.

**Michael Dyer** | Managing Director, Borana Conservancy



**Top to bottom:** Borana is home to black and white rhinos, as well as elephants, lion, reticulated giraffe, and Grevy's zebra.

Dedicated efforts have enabled the black rhino population to grow, and wildlife live in harmony with cattle owned by the local community.

**A** year later, once the rhino had established home territories, the fence between Lewa and Borana was dropped and the Lewa-Borana Landscape (LBL) was formed, creating one of East Africa's largest continuous rhino habitats. The biggest threat to rhinos at Borana is the lack of suitable, safe habitat. To reduce this threat, we work closely with our neighbouring community partners, such as the II Ngwesi Group Ranch. The 40,700-acre ranch is owned and managed by II Laikipiak Maasai, which directly translates to 'the people of wildlife'.

II Ngwesi community members have agreed to set aside 17,000 acres to become a fenced sanctuary for 20 black rhinos, expanding habitat and encouraging larger population growth for this iconic species. The area, as well as Lewa and Borana, was originally home to a significant black rhino population that was wiped out in 1970s due to poaching and changes in the landscape for agriculture. The re-introduction of black rhino will not only create a catalyst for a booming conservation economy, it will also generate employment for residents and increase the calibre of the wildlife

experience, encouraging tourism and fulfilling our aim of improving livelihoods.

Additionally, we're working to improve our knowledge about rhinos on our landscape, so that we can better protect them. In partnership with Space for Giants, Borana uses a tool known as SMART. SMART is a law enforcement monitoring tool that helps our management team to be more strategic about the deployment of conservation resources and to better understand the spatial distribution of wildlife across the Conservancy. Twenty six members of the Borana rhino monitoring team have been trained in SMART, enabling them to record all wildlife sightings, human-wildlife conflict incidents, fence voltages and carcass sightings on their dedicated smartphone during patrols.



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With SMART, we are able to understand more about each rhino's home range, popular rhino locations and the areas that rhinos tend to avoid. This has led us to learn more about water points used by wildlife across Borana. Our water supply is subject to seasonal rains and, although our larger dams hold water throughout the year, the increased pressure and intra-species competition (particularly between rhino) means that areas surrounding these water points become over browsed.

Through SMART, we can spot the areas that have a high number of rhinos (usually around water) and areas that are un-touched. Consequently, this has helped inform our plans to improve water distribution across the Conservancy. We will be establishing four new water points by constructing 18 km of pipeline and equipping two boreholes with solar power. Fundamentally, this will increase available habitat for young male black rhinos that are establishing new territories, as well as opening up habitat for other species.

Since they were reintroduced in 2013, the black rhino population has flourished at Borana. In 2019, we saw an incredible 17 black rhino births! The high number of new calves recorded across the landscape highlights the importance of continually expanding and securing habitat for this critically endangered species.

