



**Lewa Wildlife Conservancy**

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Bowling for Rhino's Contribution to the Lewa  
Wildlife Conservancy Kenya

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The aim of this presentation is to brief the audience on the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's experiences in conserving black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) in northern Kenya; to discuss the current poaching threat to rhino in the region; and to demonstrate how vital the Bowling for Rhino (BFR) funding through the American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) is to combat this threat.

The presentation will briefly cover Kenya's historical and present black rhino population showing just how "close to the brink" rhino came. It will cover Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (LWC), how it all began and how it stands today with regards to its contribution to rhino conservation in Kenya, showing the counter measures we have put in place to the increasing poaching threat, rhino recruitment statistics, rhino security measures, veterinary back up, daily rhino monitoring capacity and finally a plan for the future of LWC's increasing rhino population. It will portray the reasons for the continual demand and current threats to rhino in northern Kenya. Particular emphasis will be placed on the use of the extremely important funding that BFR has provided over many years and just how this supports LWC's core objective – that of rhino conservation.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY**

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is a private, not for profit wildlife conservancy of 62,000 acres located in northern Kenya on the Laikipia plains and northern foothills of Mt Kenya, just north of the Equator.

Lewa is really the story of one incredible woman called Anna Merz. The Conservancy was originally a cattle ranch owned by the Craig family. In the 1983, when rhinos were being slaughtered in Kenya, Anna Merz approached the Craig family and convinced them to put 5,000 acres of their land aside to create a rhino sanctuary. In 1983, 5,000 acres were set aside as a rhino sanctuary (the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary), later another 5,000 acres were incorporated into the sanctuary. In 1995, under the leadership of Ian Craig, the entire ranch was turned into a wildlife conservancy, with particular emphasis towards rhino conservation. The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy was born.

LWC's mission is to work as a *catalyst for conservation of wildlife and its habitat through the protection and management of species, the initiation and support of community conservation and development programmes and the education of neighbouring areas in the value of wildlife.*



One of the fundamental objectives is to conserve threatened species within its area of operation and provide protected habitats for other species under pressure. The Conservancy supports abundant wildlife including a population of 68 endangered black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) – over 10% of Kenya's black rhino population – making it one of the most important sanctuaries for this species in East Africa. Lewa also holds over 14% of Kenya's white rhino population; over 400 bird species and more than 70 mammals; as well as providing refuge to the largest single population of Grevy's zebra (*Equus grevyi*) in the world. LWC also holds varying numbers of elephant (*Loxodonta Africana*) numbering between 100 and 400 animals at any one time.

LWC is a key conservation area within the Samburu/Laikipia ecosystem in northern Kenya. It is a source of water for the region, a migration route to the North and a model for conservation in Kenya and East Africa.

LWC promotes conservation both within its boundaries and in the ecologically important community-owned areas to its north. LWC has been instrumental in the creation of community-conservation areas which has increased the amount of land under integrated conservation management in northern Kenya to over 7,000 square kilometres since the mid 1990s. LWC has adopted an ecosystem approach to conservation through the protection of large areas of land allowing for the continued migration of wildlife throughout their natural and historical range.

## **BLACK RHINO STATUS IN KENYA**

### **PAST AND CURRENT STATUS**

In the early 1970s, the estimated population of black rhinos in Africa was believed to be in the region of 100,000 animals. The current estimated population is 4,200 individuals. This represents a global decline of approximately 96% from 1970–2007. The reason for this decline is mainly to poaching but also to habitat loss and human encroachment on rhino areas. During the 1970's and 1980s, black rhinos were poached almost to extinction because of man's relentless pursuit of the animals' horn. In Kenya alone, the numbers of black rhino dropped from an estimated 20,000 in the early 1970s to about 280 animals in 1983. This represents a reduction of 98% in just 12 years and equates to a staggering loss of 4.5 rhinos per day, every day, for 12 years!

Reacting quickly to what was happening in Kenya during that time, the Kenyan government along with private individuals, created highly secured sanctuaries (under the "Rhino Rescue Program"), where the few remaining individuals could be caught, moved and kept under close surveillance from poachers. These sanctuaries, such as the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, are probably the only reason that black rhinos still



exist in Kenya today.

The black rhino population in Kenya is recovering slowly. But we are still very far from the numbers we had in the 1970s. Today, Kenya counts about 609 rhinos, all within protected areas. With 68 individuals, Lewa holds over 10 percent of Kenya's population and continues to be a critical sanctuary for the survival of the species. But the threats are constant and poaching is very much present in Kenya today. Rhino horn is still used as a dagger handle in the Middle East and is also believed to have medicinal value in the Far East. Rhino horns are sold on the marketplace for about US\$ 3,000 per kilo. Given that each rhino horn is about 3 kgs, this puts the price of a horn at about US\$ 9,000. The poachers in Kenya get about \$500 to \$ 1,000 per kilo. This is a very lucrative business for all involved. Given the level of poverty in rural parts of Kenya and the constant increase of human population, it is also not surprising that some of the local populations are involved in poaching these animals.

## **CURRENT THREATS**

There is an enormous amount of illegal firearms in the region of northern Kenya. With a very porous border with Somalia, illegal firearms have become readily available across north and north eastern Kenya. Sadly, this proliferation of illegal firearms has not been kept in check by the authorities and so illegal activities have increased in recent years and one of those activities is poaching for rhino horn and elephant ivory. The poaching threat in Kenya today is very real, with too many illegal firearms present, too many people without jobs, not enough arable land for people to make a living from, inter tribal conflicts as well as corruption. In 2009 alone, we know of nine rhinos which have been poached in Kenya. This is the highest figure for the last four years. Rhinos are being poached not just with firearms but also with snares. There are organized gangs in Kenya, who have high level connections. This makes it very difficult for anyone to dismantle these gangs and to carry out a prosecution in a lawful manner.

## **LEWA'S COUNTER MEASURES**

### **▪ UNARMED AND ARMED TEAMS**

Lewa's unarmed rhino monitoring teams continue to patrol the LWC daily using the "Block Security Surveillance System", whereby LWC is split into 17 patrol blocks and each is covered by a 2 to 3 man surveillance team. This system has been successfully used for several years now. Close supervision from senior security officers has been maintained in all areas and at all times, with continued referral to the LWC Security Threat Assessment document. The main responsibilities of the rhino monitoring teams are daily identification of individual rhino (all relevant information is relayed via radio to the LWC radio room and recorded accordingly) as well as being the link between field information gathering and the LWC Research



Department. Very importantly, these monitoring teams act as the first line of defense to any potential security threat to LWC. They are the main reason why serious poaching threats have so far been kept at bay.

In addition, LWC operates 19 Kenya Police Reservist (KPR) men split into 4 teams. Each team comprises of 4 men in each patrol team with 3 senior men to coordinate their activities. In the last quarter of 2008, LWC applied for a further 5 men to join the KPR stationed at LWC so that the unit could be brought up to full strength of 24 men. Following high level meetings with the Commissioner of Police and the Provincial Police Officer (Eastern), this application was approved and the process is now following the correct protocol. These additional men should be armed by mid-2009. LWC is the only private organization in Kenya that enjoys KPR status and this is a good reflection of the strong partnership and recognition that LWC has with local authorities and the Kenya Government.

The LWC is in a unique position to be able to rapidly deploy these men to varying incidents: we enjoy excellent logistical back up, an effective and wide ranging communications system plus well-trained and motivated men to deploy to potentially dangerous operations.

During 2008, the demand for rhino horn and ivory has escalated and it is therefore vital that the LWC security personnel remain on vigilant 24-hour guard against this threat. It is not a case of "IF", but a case of "WHEN" an attempt will be made on our rhino. Anti-poaching and security operations continue to account for a large portion of the LWC annual budget. To-date LWC has not lost any rhino to poaching.

#### ▪ **KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE (KWS)**

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy continues to enjoy a very close working relationship with the KWS in all aspects of wildlife management: from joint anti-poaching patrols and poacher follow-ups, to wildlife capture, translocation and wildlife treatment. The LWC Super Cub aircraft is often used to support KWS in the form of aerial reconnaissance flights, as a back up to anti-poaching operations and aerial wildlife census. The LWC tracker dog team has also been used to augment operational work between the LWC and KWS in 2008.

LWC recovered several illegal wildlife trophies and made several arrests in connection with poaching of wildlife in 2008. All relevant trophies have been handed over to KWS (further details are provided under anti-poaching operations below).

LWC, through its two KWS Honorary Wardens (Ian Craig and Richard Moller), assisted KWS whenever requested with Problem Animal Control (PAC) situations in 2008.

Reporting all activities related to wildlife remains an ongoing activity and LWC provided the



relevant KWS authority with individual incident reports, monthly reports and annual reports for 2008.

#### ▪ **BACKUP**

The LWC continues to be the main “Hub” of radio communications, linking all the members of our team together, as well as the Communities Conservancies outside of LWC. The LWC in turn is linked by radio to the KWS, Kenya Police and the ASTU and this way an “all informed network” of shared information is effectively achieved to ensure a rapid response can be made to any incident that needs immediate action.

The LWC tracker dog team of two blood hounds and four highly trained dog handlers continues to be instrumental in responding in any anti-poaching threats. They are a vital part of our team.

The LWC’s Super Cub aircraft remains one of the most essential tools for the LWC. The LWC Super Cub aircraft has been a vital tool in aerial reconnaissance to poaching and security threats as well as aerial backup to live armed follow-up situations, wildlife monitoring and distribution, wildlife censuses, routine patrols and for administrative purposes. The ability to rapidly deploy the KWS vet stationed at LWC to any serious situation such as an injured rhino elsewhere in the region of operations is another valuable contribution. During 2008, 32 flights of the above nature were carried out.

#### ▪ **INFORMER NETWORK**

As a result of the increased demand for rhino horn, LWC has made concerted efforts in 2008 to enhance its informer network by adding further individuals. All relevant information is shared with KWS and various other rhino sanctuaries in the area. Valuable and reliable information received in 2008 has undoubtedly helped the LWC to combat this increased threat to rhino and some attempts were foiled as a result of informer information received, notably a poaching attempt on Mugie Rhino Sanctuary.

#### **MONITORING – EAR NOTCHING , HORN TRANSMITTER**

LWC prides itself in individually identifying on average 85% of its entire rhino population of 113 rhino. Occasionally, 100% of LWC’s rhino have been sighted and identified in a single day. In addition to the field monitoring teams who patrol under the “Block Surveillance System” there is a dedicated vehicle and mobile patrol unit to bolster daily monitoring and relay of information to the LWC radio room, and in turn to the LWC Research Department. To make individual rhino identification easier for field teams, most rhino are ear notched (each one having a different notch) and these patterns are kept in a data base by LWC and KWS. Occasionally on LWC, rhino are fitted with horn transmitters so that they can be followed closely, but this is only on



individuals that frequent areas such as the Ngare Ndare Forest on LWC's southern section where they are difficult to locate. It is standard procedure that when translocating a rhino from LWC to another sanctuary that a horn transmitter is fitted, so that its movements can be closely followed in the recipient site.

#### ▪ **TRANSLOCATION AND RESTOCKING**

LWC, over the years, has translocated several rhinos out of LWC to other sanctuaries. These have mainly been white rhinos however some black rhinos have been relocated also to both State-owned National Parks and also to private land sanctuaries. The first black and the first white rhino to be reintroduced into Meru National Park (following the annihilation of rhino from poaching in the 1970's and 1980's) came from LWC in 2003. LWC has the logistical and infrastructure support to carry out rhino translocations, from rhino crates to trucks and staff that are experienced in this field. All moves are in conjunction with KWS and knowledge and equipment is freely shared between both organizations. Over the years we have been involved in moving many rhino. The largest move was that of 31 black rhino in early 2007, which was the largest rhino translocation in eastern Africa to date.

#### ▪ **VETERINARY INTERVENTIONS**

The demand for veterinary interventions increased dramatically in 2008. A full time veterinarian, Dr. Stephen Chege, is stationed on the Conservancy. The Mountain Region mobile veterinary unit has its base at the LWC and provides veterinary care to five National Parks, nine National Reserves and several other private and community managed sanctuaries and ranches in the northern and eastern part of Kenya. These areas hold 50% of Kenya's population of the endangered black rhinos, 97% of the global population of the endangered Grevy's zebra, mountain bongos, several thousand elephants, wild dogs among other endangered species. LWC covers all the costs and logistical support for this unit.

#### **LEWA'S OVERALL CONTRIBUTION – AND YOURS!**

- Lewa holds over 10% of Kenya's black rhino with 68 animals
- Lewa's annual growth rate is 12% - way above the KWS metapopulation target of 5%
- Lewa's animals have inter-calving interval of 2.5 years
- Translocation programme to stock other conservation areas
- Lewa is heavily involved in security of ~25% of Kenya's black rhino population
- Northern white rhinos plans

#### **WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?**

The future of black rhinos in Kenya and in Africa is still uncertain. What is certain is that only safe and secured sanctuaries such as the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy can provide full protection for black rhinos in Kenya.

Lewa is one of the most successful black rhino sanctuaries in Africa, thanks to the



support of organisations like Bowling for Rhinos and the American Association of Zoo Keepers.

In some ways, Lewa is also the victim of its own success. Our rhinos are growing so rapidly that we have now run out of room and are looking for places to expand. The evident answer is our immediate neighbours, Borana Conservancy and Il Ngwesi Conservancy. There are also plans to create the first Community Conservancy in the North (under the umbrella of the Northern Rangelands Trust) and plans are well underway. One rhino at a time, the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is working for the protection and the survival of this amazing species.

**THIS WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE  
INCREDIBLE AND LONG TERM SUPPORT FROM  
AAZK/BFR. THANK YOU ALL.**