

## Black rhino, charcoal & satellites

So what do black rhino, charcoal and satellites have in common? I will start in Namibia's Etosha National Park (ENP) in 2009, where above-average rainfall meant lush vegetation, mud-holes filled with water and fat, happy rhinos.

**Pierre Du Preez** | Chief Conservation Scientist: Wildlife Research, Rhino Co-ordinator, Namibian Ministry of Environmental and Tourism

**T**he rains continued through 2010 and even into the 2011 rainy season. Every year, more and more plant material built up and Park management did not realise they were sitting on a time bomb.

Adjacent to ENP, farmers produce charcoal, mostly for barbeques. In late 2011, a spark from a charcoal kiln ignited a field outside the Park. With the high fuel load from the dead plant material, there was no stopping the fire, which jumped the fire break on the Park's southern boundary and roared out of control.

The Park management had never been confronted by a fire of this magnitude and they made the fatal decision to stop the fire. As the fire was burning towards a fire break they decided to start

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a back-burn that would hopefully extinguish the field

fire. With flames leaping up in the air, the two fires met and – after a brief battle – both lost and died. Happy faces all around but then it dawned: rhino, giraffe, kudu, lion, elephant and numerous smaller species had tried to run away from the first fire and became trapped. Confused by the smoke and the flames, with nowhere to escape to, 30 rhino lost their lives.

After several discussions, a decision was taken for future fire management: ENP would use spot ignition to ignite fires earlier in the cold-dry period, to ensure a mosaic effect with burnt and un-burnt patches. This would result in significantly reduced fuel loads and, even with an accidental fire, the effects would not be as severe as the 2011 fiasco.

A year before the fire, MET's Wildlife Research, in partnership with African Wildlife Tracking, had started developing a satellite bracelet for rhinos. We decided to deploy one bracelet on a pregnant female and another on a mature bull in the area where the experimental burn would take place in 2012. It was important to test the new fire policy and determine the animals' reaction to a 'natural burn'.

One late afternoon, when temperatures and winds were declining, the fire-expert team from Etosha Ecological Institute (EEI) put a match to the grass on the Ekuma plains. The fire started moving west in front of a light easterly wind. Four hours later and approximately five kilometres away, the pregnant female detected the smoke in the light breeze and immediately took evasive action. She first moved north over a small saltpan and reached ENP's northern boundary. She then moved along the Park's (unfenced) boundary, first west and then south, keeping the salt pans between her and the fire the entire time. By this point, the fire had passed her position and she moved in behind the fire front.

Further south-west of the ignition point, the bull also detected the approaching fire. He moved immediately to the edge of a pan, kept in area with a low plant biomass and once the fire passed his position, he also entered the burnt area.

A week after the fire, one of EEI's rangers, Johannes Kapner, was tasked with finding the two animals. The bull, with his face blackened by soot, was found happily munching away in the



Far left: A black rhino and her calf

Centre: A rhino fitted with a satellite bracelet and VHF tag

Left and below: The devastating fire damage

burnt area. The female was located elsewhere; she also had a black face but was very content. Her new-born calf which must have arrived soon after the fire was standing next to her.

Satellite bracelets have helped study the rhino's behaviour towards fire. This has led to the new method of mosaic burning being used during ENP's future fire regimes, contributing to the safety of the Park's wildlife.

### Grants

Thanks to USFWS RTCF for grants of \$98,513 for 2012-13 Etosha rhino operations and \$86,860 for 2013 operations in the Kunene Region, Hardap Game Reserve and Waterberg Plateau Park. Opel Zoo gave €4,000, for an infra-red camera. SRI gave £9,647 for equipment used at annual rhino ops.



# Cycling fever

Sunday 4 August 2013 saw the first-ever Prudential RideLondon-Surrey 100 sportive take place in London. The 100-mile challenge was part of a whole weekend of cycling festivities hoping to inspire a new generation of cyclists, and to celebrate the cycling fever that has been sweeping the UK ever since Bradley Wiggins won the Tour de France in 2012, Chris Froome in 2013 and Team GB took their multiple Olympic Gold medals.

**Laura Adams** | Events Manager

**I**t couldn't have been a more perfect day as the sun beamed down on London: not too hot for the thousands of cyclists taking part, but warm enough to encourage many more thousands of spectators out onto the streets to watch it all go by and cheer on the riders.

The 100-mile route stretched from central London out to the Surrey hills, following closely the route chosen for the 2012 London Olympic road race.

Twenty-one cyclists took on the challenge for Save the Rhino and we were very pleased to meet nearly everyone at the finish in Green Park, where we had set up camp with a well-deserved post-ride picnic for the team.

Together our cyclists have raised over £11,000 (with more sponsorship money still coming in!) and we were incredibly proud of the passion they showed for rhinos and rhino conservation – not to mention their very handy skills on a bike. Many of the team completed the ride in under 5:30!

## Want to cycle for Save the Rhino in 2014?

Save the Rhino has places for Prudential RideLondon-Surrey 100 in 2014. Please email [Laura](mailto:laura@savetherhino.org.uk) [laura@savetherhino.org.uk](mailto:laura@savetherhino.org.uk) for more information on cycling for us.



## FUNDRAISING HIGHLIGHTS

As ever, we have been astounded by the commitment of our wonderful supporters who take on challenges big and small to raise money for rhinos! A huge and heartfelt thank you to everyone who has raised money for Save the Rhino over the past few months. Here are a few highlights from the year so far – no matter how much you raise, we can't do it without you.

**Bernie Duffy** (right) raised £675 by cycling the River Elbe from Cuxhaven to Prague – over 1,200 km in 15 days



**Diane Mitchell** took part in the 3 Cities Cycle challenge from Amsterdam to Brussels, raising £1,500

**Ian McQuade** raised over £3,750 cycling from London to Paris, in aid of Save the Rhino, Cancer Research and the Ninth Harpenden Scout Group



As we go to print, **Phil Hobson** (left) has raised over £1,300 for his Arch to Arc challenge: 87 miles running relay legs

from London to Dover, a 21-mile relay swim to Calais, and 180-mile cycle race to Paris

**Richard Keyser** raised £815 for Save the Rhino Trust as part of a team who cycled 350km across the hot, desert landscape of Damaraland in North-western Namibia. Simon Panos also completed the challenge, raising £380

## Inspired?

Please email our Events Manager, [Laura Adams](mailto:Laura Adams), [laura@savetherhino.org](mailto:laura@savetherhino.org)