



CHARGING INTO THE FUTURE

Two greater one-horned rhinos free-ranged at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve

WWF-INDIA

The thumping of the rhinos, as they ran out of the wooden crates into a grassland at the core of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve in Uttar Pradesh, was a sight to behold, especially for the team of 100-odd members who have been working with clockwork precision to free-range the unicorn in Terai.

On 27 March 2025, two greater one-horned rhinos were translocated from a crash of around 40+ animals in containment for over four decades inside the 27-sq km fenced rehabilitation area of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.

The exercise was a mammoth task completed due to the collaborative efforts of the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department, WWF-India, vets from India and Nepal, rhino experts, camp elephants, and mahouts.



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History is not made in a day; therefore, the preparation for rhino translocation began months ago.

Massive crates with more than 3000 kg carrying capacity were made using wood and metal parts to contain the rhinos during translocation.

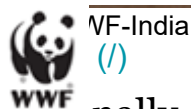
As the crates were being checked for their strength to perfection, other teams were deployed to monitor the rhinos to select and shortlist the suitable individuals. The teams rode on trained camp elephants to wade through the tall grass and dense forest covering the 27 sq km rhino rehabilitation area.

Mahouts played a crucial role in this process and helped teams to monitor and identify the rhinos. Various parameters, such as the health, age, gender and history of the animal, were kept in mind while selecting them.



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Finally, it was the day of the rhino translocation. Teams started very early, buzzing with enthusiasm and excitement with one collective mission. Mahouts and rhino experts on elephants were the first to be in action. They monitored the area to locate selected rhinos. They were constantly in touch with the park officials, vets, radio collaring team, logistic teams, and others to provide real-time information on the location of the rhino.

In the meantime, the veterinarians prepared a dose of anesthetic drugs that would subdue the selected rhino so that they could conduct thorough medical tests and fit a radio collar to its neck for future monitoring.

Once the rhino was located, the entire operation went into full swing.

The rhino was darted with the medicated syringe, and after it was subdued, the team conducted the complete health checks within 10-15 minutes.



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A radio collar was fitted to monitor its movements, behaviour, and health post-release.



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The team then shifted the rhino onto a sledge and dragged it into the crate before it was injected with an antidote to awaken it.



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The crate was transported to the release site carefully on a slow-moving vehicle and placed at a favourable location for the release.



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As soon as the vehicle rolled out with the rhino in the crate for release, the team moved towards the second rhino nearby.

The second rhino was also successfully tranquilised, radio-collared, and moved to the release site.

The release site for the two rhinos was about 7 km away from the rhino rehabilitation area and in the core of the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve. The excitement of the teams and their 100-odd members working tirelessly for weeks was sky-high.



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The front door of the crates with the rhinos was lifted, and the rhinos stepped out carefully, sensing their surroundings before scooting free into the wild.

A giant leap for rhino conservation, as a male and a female rhino aged between 15 to 20 years were free-ranged at Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.

They joined the two female rhinos free-ranged in a similar operation in November last year at the Dudhwa Tiger Reserve with support from WWF-India, Assam Forest Department and other experts. The rhinos are regularly monitored for their behaviour and health, and early findings have indicated their suitable adaptation to the area. The learnings from the first translocation and the promising results have been the backbone of the second translocation exercise.

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BRINGING RHINOS BACK TO TERA

A growing population of free-ranging rhinos will benefit the larger Terai region, which is known as the country's 'food basket' for its robust agricultural production. Browsing rhinos keep grasses trimmed, clearing the way for smaller mammals. Rhinos also spread seeds through their dung, which enriches the soil and helps plants flourish. So when rhino numbers increase, other mammals, birds, insects, and fish also thrive.

Dr H. Rajamohan, Field Director of Dudhwa Tiger Reserve, said, "Bringing rhinos back to India's Terai region has been our vision for decades. We have been working to conserve and secure the rhino habitat to reintroduce them in the wild. This exercise to free-range rhinos has set a precedent for similar rhino conservation efforts in India".

WWF-India is grateful to Manpower-Experis Ltd. and WWF-UK for their generous support for our work on rhino conservation in Dudhwa Tiger Reserve.

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