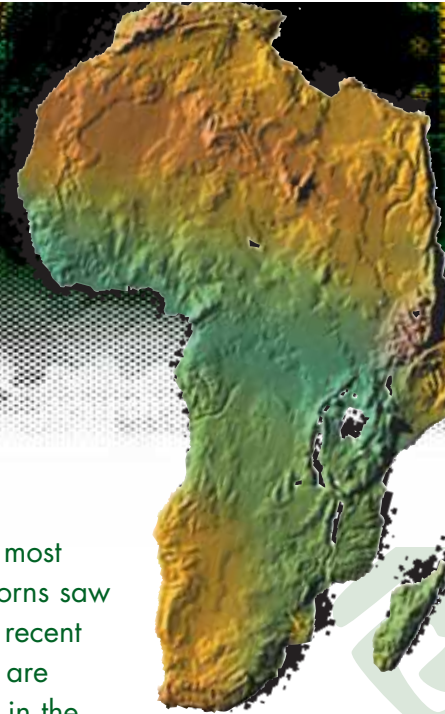


North of England Zoological Society

BLACK RHINO CONSERVATION PROGRAMME



The Current Situation

The critically endangered Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) has experienced the most dramatic decline in numbers of all rhino species. Severe poaching for their horns saw numbers plummet from around 65,000 in 1970 to 2,300 in 1992. With the recent introduction of dedicated protection and management programmes, numbers are slowly rising and there is now an estimated population of 3,600 Black Rhino in the wild. Poaching threats, however, still exist and the Black Rhino is still very much dependent upon conservation programmes.

NEZS Support

The Chester Zoo Black Rhino Conservation Programme focuses on the Eastern Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis micheali*), a sub-species that has been particularly affected by poaching. Only around 500 individuals of this sub-species survive in the wild, almost all of which are found in Kenya. The Eastern Black Rhino is also the sub-species that NEZS works with *ex situ*, housing a breeding herd in a world-class facility. NEZS is a member of the Black Rhino European Endangered Species

Programme (EEP) and has strong *ex situ* education and research commitments.

The Black Rhino Conservation Programme strives to strengthen and promote conservation

support by linking *ex situ* activities with a strong *in situ* programme of support. This is achieved by working in partnership with leading international conservation organisations including Save the Rhino International (SRI) and government wildlife personnel on a number of different projects within East Africa.

Tsavo East National Park, Kenya

Tsavo East NP is 11,000 km² of prime Black Rhino habitat. Before the poaching epidemic, the area supported a population of around 8,000 Black Rhino. The Kenya Wildlife Service's (KWS) new anti-poaching policies and progressive rhino conservation strategy, and the support and involvement of international agencies including SRI and NEZS have meant attempts are now being made to rebuild this decimated Black Rhino population.





In 1999, NEZS, in partnership with SRI and KWS, supported the translocation of 20 Black Rhino to Tsavo East NP and has continued to support the excellent ranger

teams who risk their lives daily protecting these rhino against the threat of poachers. Support has included fuel, equipment and wages and, in 2004, NEZS fully funded the purchase of a new patrol vehicle.

Since 2002, similar support has also been provided to rhino patrol rangers in the Chyulu Hills NP, helping to protect a "rediscovered" population of Black Rhino. Support for the rangers in Chyulu has included the funding of a new patrol vehicle for the project – essential equipment for protecting rhino over a large area with dense habitat and highly mobile poachers.

Mkomazi, Tanzania

The Mkomazi Game Reserve lies to the south of Tsavo NP. In 1988, the Tanzanian government invited Tony Fitzjohn of the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust to manage the reserve that was at that time in steep decline due mainly to poaching and overgrazing pressures. Since then, Tony has built up the infrastructure of the reserve, introduced wildlife protection measures, set up ecotourism facilities and, consequently, has seen the return of a healthy ecosystem. Major projects have included community outreach projects and a breeding programme for the endangered African Hunting Dog (*Lycaon pictus*). Due to major translocation efforts, one of Mkomazi's major roles is now also as a Black Rhino reserve.

NEZS has supported rhino protection work within Mkomazi since 2002. This support has included the



construction of a wallow, observation hide and guard camp – facilities that will help boost ecotourism as well as providing observation, research and management opportunities. NEZS also supports on-going essential infrastructure improvements, such as repairs and maintenance to perimeter electric fences.

Laikipia District, Kenya

The Laikipia District, Kenya, is an area rich in biodiversity and home to a significant population of Black Rhino. Sadly, it is also an area of increasing human wildlife conflict. In 2003, NEZS, in partnership with SRI and the Nando Peretti Foundation, sponsored the purchase and staffing of an environmental education bus for the Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF). The LWF is a conglomerate of individuals from a range of backgrounds but with a common conservation and development ethos. The education bus allows rural school children to visit surrounding wildlife areas and learn about environmental and conservation issues. Following on from this successful project, NEZS has also sponsored the purchase of motorbikes and salaries for community liaison officers so that this scheme could be expanded to include educational school visits.

NEZS supports research projects in Laikipia that have implications for the future management and conservation of Black Rhino. In partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and KWS, NEZS assists research into the management of large herbivores, particularly rhino, in enclosed reserves. NEZS has also supported Black Rhino genetics research. Much of this research has been in association with the Sweetwaters Rhino Reserve in Laikipia.

The Future

NEZS's growing partnership with the major rhino conservation organisations has been demonstrated through fundraising and awareness-raising events such as the "Rhino Weekends" held at Chester Zoo in conjunction with SRI and by Chester Zoo's "Tsavo Experience" rhino exhibit, opened in 2003 by Martin Mulama, KWS Rhino Programme Co-ordinator. This exhibit is themed to link with the conservation issues targeted by our *in situ* support.

The Chester Zoo Black Rhino Conservation Programme will continue to expand and develop, strengthening the close links we have with organisations such as SRI and KWS and using *ex situ* and *in situ* conservation opportunities to complement each other to the greatest advantage for Black Rhino conservation.