

Nakitoma (Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary), 20 July 2005

Rhinos set foot on Ugandan soil

After three years of preparations, fund raising, training and construction, the first rhinos have now arrived at Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary!

The four rhinos that were captured at Solio Ranch in Kenya last February, arrived early this morning at Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary in Nakitoma, Nakasongola.

The two males and two females, of the Southern White subspecies, were kept in a boma (enclosure) at Solio Ranch after their capture. During the boma period, usually 6-8 weeks, rhinos are trained to be relaxed in their crates, in order to facilitate the transport to their new location. Without proper boma training, the rhinos might stress and hurt themselves while in the crate during the long journey to Uganda. Due to a delay in obtaining the necessary Kenyan export papers, the rhinos overstayed their boma training period with more than 3 months. They received good care from two Solio rhino keepers plus two Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary rangers.

The four rhinos were moved into their crates and loaded onto the trucks on Monday. Each truck carried one rhino. The convoy, escorted by a vehicle from Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (contracted for the capture and transport of the four rhinos), set off from Solio Ranch near Nanyuki on Monday 4 PM. Two vets, from Ziwa Ranchers Ltd. and from the Kenya Wildlife Service, were travelling with the rhinos. The convoy reached Malaba border post at 4.30 AM on Tuesday, and once the customs and immigration offices opened, it took 8 hours to get the animals cleared. A vehicle from Uganda Wildlife Authority with two veterinary officers, joined the convoy at the Ugandan side of the border.

After a 920 kms long journey that took 34 hours in total, the animals reached Ziwa Rhino sanctuary at 2 AM today. They were off loaded into their receiving bomas in the morning.

All four animals underwent the long journey well, and are in excellent health. There were some concerns during the journey because they refused to drink water, but the moment they leaved their crates they started drinking. They also seemed to enjoy the Ugandan grass very much!

The purchase of the four rhinos was made possible by funding from European Union, who also played a major role in the establishment of the sanctuary. Other donors that provided funding to Rhino Fund Uganda for the construction work at the sanctuary, were UNDP GEF/SGP, DAS Air Cargo, Wasmoeth Wildlife Fund and the Dutch Government, US Fish and Wildlife, International Rhino Foundation, Disney Animal Kingdom, Save the Rhino International and others. With their support, a 40 kms long, 2 meter high electric fence was erected, an airstrip, a visitor centre and rhino bomas were built, and a ranger force was trained. Rhino Fund Uganda and Uganda Wildlife Authority work closely together in the rhino reintroduction program.

The sanctuary aims to import 10-15 more rhinos, in order to create a viable founder population and start breeding. Donations of white and black rhinos have been requested from the Kenyan and South African governments. In total, 50 rhinos can live at the 7000 ha sanctuary. Ziwa Ranchers Ltd. has given Rhino Fund Uganda the right to breed rhinos on their property in 2002, and they have since then played a major role in setting up the sanctuary.

The rhinos will be under quarantine regulations during 30 days after arrival. After this period, Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary will open its doors for visitors. The sanctuary also runs an education program, and schools interested in visiting can contact the sanctuary's education manager, David Bakeine.

Photos: - The first step on Ugandan soil! (Y.Verkaik)



. Rhinos in their bomas (Y. Verkaik).



Additional information and photo material can be obtained via email address
info@rhinofund.org.

Yvonne C. Verkaik
executive director
Rhino Fund Uganda
Plot 31 Kanjokya Street – Kamwokya
PO Box 71020
Kampala
Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary
Nakitoma - Nakasongola District
Uganda
phone +256 77 713410
sat phone +88 216 5117 4314
phone/fax +256 31 263275/6
www.rhinofund.org