

Africa

Kenya Looks to Maintain Zero Rhino Poaching Record

By Victoria Amunga
June 08, 2021 11:41 AM

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NAIROBI, KENYA - Kenya's Wildlife Service says that for the first time in 21 years, not a single rhinoceros was poached in the country's national parks in 2020. To maintain the progress, it is conducting the first ever wildlife census and placing mobile container housing in parks for rangers.

Kenya's Wildlife Service credits intensified surveillance for the drop in rhinoceros poaching cases to zero last year.

The agency says it's also taking fresh measures to maintain the progress, such as conducting a wildlife census for the first time. Edwin Wanyonyi, the agency's director of strategies, says new approaches are being implemented.

"There is a new strategy. We are focusing on housing for rangers; we are focusing on buying them equipment, be it firearm[s], whatever they require, be it uniform, be it cold weather clothing, [so] that they can be able to respond at all times," Wanyonyi said.

In Nairobi National Park, rangers with the rhinoceros monitoring unit are receiving upgrades from old tents. Ranger Augustine Mutua says new container housing units will help them get to work protecting rhinos much faster.

"You have to wake up very early in the morning – you cook your breakfast, then you just walk out, going direct to the patrol. Not as earlier ... you come out of the tent, you go outside for water somewhere. You can see we [have] tanks," Mutua said.

More than two million tourists visited Kenya in 2019. Most, like Rahul Bede, go to see its rare wildlife, like the critically endangered rhinos.

"I think it's great that there has been no poaching. This park is very well protected, which, I would say, other parks are not very well protected."

Poachers kill rhinos for their horns, which sell for up to \$60,000 per kilogram in Asian markets as aphrodisiacs and status symbols.

Poaching reduced Kenya's black rhino population by 97% from the 1960s to the 1990s, from more than 20,000 to just a few hundred.

But conservation efforts have helped Kenya's wild rhino population recover to some 1,200, including the world's only two remaining northern white rhinos.

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By **Arash Arabasadi**