

CONTACT US TODAY!

GET IN TOUCH AND GET YOUR DSTV HD DECODER

Fully installed with one month's complimentary DSTV Compact package subscription

SMS "Buy" and your name (e.g "Buy Michael") to 081 988 0000, or email: [telesales@na.multichoice.com](mailto:telesales@na.multichoice.com)

FOR ONLY N\$ 1199



DSTV

## Understanding rhino conservation in Namibia

News - Environment | 2020-07-02

Page no: 7

"... SHOT nine rhinos in one day ..." sounds like a report of yet another horrific poaching incident.

In reality, it's a historic note in the section on black rhino in GC Shortridge's 'The Mammals of South West Africa'.

It reads in full: "Andersson (1850-54) shot nine rhinoceros in one day at no great distance from Walvis Bay."

Today, Namibia has the healthiest black rhino population on earth, and the only large, free-roaming population outside national parks. The country also has a stable white rhino population.

It's important to know that it wasn't always like this – the government, local communities, NGOs, the private sector and international agencies have made a huge investment in rebuilding Namibian rhino populations from historic lows.

The black rhino, a frugal browser of herbs and shrubs, was once distributed across most of what is today Namibia. It penetrated the Namib down to the coast along all larger ephemeral and perennial rivers. Its distribution extended from the Nama Karoo in the south to the broad-leaved woodlands and rivers of today's Zambezi region.

Here the famous hunter Frederic Courtney Selous shot a rhino cow and calf on an island in the Chobe Marsh in 1874 – while lamenting that rhinos had become "rare in these parts". From the Chobe to the Orange, wanton killing wiped out much of the population, leaving only remnants in remote areas.

As a grazer preferring flatland savannahs, the southern white rhino had a more limited distribution across the less arid and less rugged parts of the country. This made it much more susceptible to the relentless persecution by European shooters. By the time Shortridge published his treatise in 1934, white rhinos had been extinct in South West Africa for at least 50 years.

In South Africa, less than 50 survived in 1895. The species was on the very brink of not only local, but total extinction.

A number of game reserves were proclaimed during German colonial rule of South West Africa prior to World War I, and a variety of laws regarding the protection of fauna and flora were enforced by the police after the war. Yet formal conservation structures were only established in the country during the 1950s, when a Game Preservation Section was created by the administration, which became the Department of Nature Conservation in 1963.

Over the next decades, the department proclaimed a suite of protected areas and sought to safeguard wildlife populations. The focus was on large mammals – the concept of biodiversity conservation had not yet evolved.

'Game preservation' was carried out via strictly controlled game parks with an 'island mentality' of keeping wildlife in and people out.

The recommendations of the 1964 Odendaal Commission cemented the apartheid homeland structure across the country. Development was sorely neglected and people were denied rights to natural resources.

The land-tenure changes also resulted in the deproclamation of part of Etosha, which at the time reached to the coast.

These conditions motivated government conservationists to move black rhinos still surviving in Damaraland to Etosha – where there were few rhino at the time.

By the early 1980s, drought and poaching were pushing the last rhinos in Kaoko to the brink. Deeply concerned, Blythe Loutit and Ina Britz founded the Save the Rhino Trust in 1982.

Aiming to protect not just rhinos, but all wildlife, the late Garth Owen-Smith and Chris Eyre worked with local headmen to find a lasting solution.

The community game guard system was born, which over time evolved into the national community conservation programme active today.

It embraces wildlife management through communal conservancies and plant resources through community forests – jointly known as community conservation areas.

Poaching in the northwest was stopped and the black rhino population recovered. In the northeast, where poaching by the South African military was rampant prior to Namibia's independence, rhinos fared worse.

The last black rhino in north-eastern Namibia was recorded along the Kwando River in 1990.

With independence, Namibia was able to implement a new and innovative approach to conservation that included people, and moved away from conservation islands. The black rhino custodianship scheme was implemented in 1993, starting on freehold land.

The aim was to reclaim historic rhino range throughout Namibia to rebuild the national population.

Rhinos were translocated as far as the Orange River and Red Kalahari. Once communal conservancies had established themselves, rhinos were also translocated to communal lands – showing a trust in community conservation unheard of prior to independence.

Today, 25 freehold reserves and around a dozen communal conservancies protect an important portion of the national black rhino population.

A huge area of former range has been reclaimed and subpopulations have been successfully established.

White rhinos were first returned to Namibia from South Africa in the 1990s.

Seeing them on the brink of extinction, South Africa had taken decisive action and successfully rebuilt numbers to a national population of around 20 000 animals. During the past quarter of a century, Namibia has been able to establish a viable white rhino population, spread across national parks and private reserves.

Earlier this year, the global conservation union, IUCN, revised the status of the south-western black rhino subspecies (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) from 'vulnerable' to 'near threatened', meaning that it is considered less vulnerable to extinction. Namibia is home to over 90% of this population.

The revision is a momentous acknowledgement of Namibia's successful conservation efforts.

The global status of black rhinos nonetheless remains 'critically endangered', while that of the southern white rhino is also 'near threatened'.

Although poaching obviously continues to pose a major threat, Namibia's positive results in combating wildlife crime are central to success.

## Mokuti Etosha Lodge - Na Safari Lodges

Whether you crave solitude or adventure, Mc Lodge offers a unique experience mokutiето