

WWF project sees crash of black rhinos moved to new location to help bolster numbers

WWF's Black Rhino Range Expansion Project (BRREP) recently managed the capture of 14 rhinos in KwaZulu-Natal parks, and their subsequent release onto a new reserve at an undisclosed location in the north of the country where it is hoped the animals will breed quickly and bolster their numbers. This is the 11th population of the critically endangered species that has been successfully relocated via the initiative.



Black Rhino Range Expansion Project coordinator Ursula Rusch administers antidote to sleeping rhino. ©WWF-SA

And, in what is a mark of the project's success over the years, some of the rhinos involved in this move are from early project sites

BRREP has been working since 2003 to increase black rhino numbers by increasing the land available on which they can breed. This is done by moving founder populations of rhino to new areas. The first group of rhinos was moved in 2004.

BRREP project leader Dr Jacques Flamand commented: "Some of our early populations have grown enough that some rhino can be moved from those sites. This is good news because it shows that the plan to increase black rhino numbers through the project is working."

There are now about 200 black rhino on BRREP sites across South Africa. This represents roughly 10% of the country's black rhino population.

Rhino champions

"Black rhino, and rhino generally, are under huge pressure. We really have to fight for them. If they don't have champions, they are doomed to disappear," said Flamand.

WWF-SA Wildlife Programme senior manager Dr Jo Shaw added: “We know it is as important to grow rhino births as it is to address losses due to poaching which is where BRREP comes into the equation. It’s a great example of what can be achieved when we all work together.”

Dr Morné du Plessis, CEO of WWF-SA, commented: “Projects like BRREP bring hope as they contribute towards rhino recovery and show what is possible. We are delighted that we have been able to see this 11th move through to its conclusion – and hope to establish many more breeding populations to safeguard the future of this iconic species.”

BRREP is a partnership between WWF, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency, with additional support from the Ford Wildlife Foundation.

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