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Press release

Airlifts latest batch of rhinos to safe new home

The Rhinos Without Borders project has ensured a bright future for an additional 12 white rhino, which were recently airlifted to their safe new home in Botswana. In a bid to save the endangered species, the initiative removed the animals from a high risk area in South Africa, where rhino are being poached at the rate of one every eight hours. The project, which aims to translocate a total of 100 rhino, is spearhead by conservation-minded travel companies andBeyond and Great Plains Conservation.

“Watching the rhino set free in their new home was a very emotional moment,” says andBeyond CEO Joss Kent.

“I know exactly what Joss is talking about,” adds Dereck Joubert, CEO and Chairman of Great Plains Conservation and Great Plains Foundation. “As the helicopter lifted off with a rhino and slung it across the Delta, Joss turned and walked to me. We shook hands and embraced. Neither of us said anything, afraid perhaps that the lumps in our throats would betray exactly how emotional we both felt right then.”

The latest achievement was another milestone towards the project’s goal of bringing 100 rhinos across the subcontinent, from high risk areas in South Africa to highly protected safe havens in Botswana. It was a top secret mission during which the rhinos were deposited on a dirt airstrip in an undisclosed location by a Botswana Defence Force C130 airplane and under heavy military guard. The animals were then ferried to their ultimate destination suspended upside down beneath a helicopter. This dramatic method is regarded as the safest and easiest way of getting the heavyweight animals to their brand new home in remote and otherwise inaccessible parts of Botswana. This operation was also the first time that the technique had been used to transport rhino into a new habitat, rather than removing them from an unsuitable one.

Rhino are currently being poached at the rate of one every eight hours and it makes good conservation sense to move them away from clustered locations that are easier for poachers to target. With Botswana in need of genetic diversity in its national rhino population, the Rhinos Without Borders project has been getting the nod from all sectors for being innovative and proactive in solving a number of conservation problems.

The 12 animals that recently arrived in Botswana place the project exactly on target and well established to meet its goal of 100 rhino.

His Excellency Lieutenant-General SKI Khama, the President of Botswana, as well as TK Khama, the Honourable Minister of Tourism, both participated in the release. The minister expressed his conviction that the unique partnership, which combines government involvement with private companies such as andBeyond and Great Plains as well as private donors, proves that tourism can make a significant difference in the conservation of Africa.

“The number of rhino lost to poachers in South Africa is now higher than the rate at which the species can breed and there is an urgent need to create a new breeding population of rhino in a different geographic region. I firmly believe that we have taken a big step towards ensuring a safer future for the species and I am excited to do even more,” adds Kent.

“It’s not often that one gets the chance to rewrite the future history of a species. A few years ago the ink on the future of rhinos here was just about dry and it told a story of extinction. We’ve changed that and we’ve done it by collaborating with our friends and with like-minded people around the world,” concludes Joubert.



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