



TANZANIAN RHINOS GET ARMED FEMALE ESCORTS

Female rangers are stepping up to the challenge and playing a role in the conservation of Tanzania's National Parks. More than 200 rangers currently work in the Serengeti National Park, four of whom are female. Two of the women, Deodithi Moshi (25) and Asteria Msingi (24), have been working with Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA) for over a year stationed in Seronera and Fort Ikoma respectively.

As Park Rangers, they are required to spend a great deal of time in the bush, often times camping overnight. Neither of the women has children, but both consider the idea for the future.

"I still want to have a family," Asteria Msingi noted, despite the fact that her job requires her full attention at the moment.

In preparation for the Serengeti Rhino Repatriation Project that will reintroduce 32 Black rhinos

Top: **Asteria Msingi saluting visitors at closing ceremony**

Pictures by: **Laura Harstone**

being brought from South Africa to the Serengeti, the women attended a six-week intense training session. TANAPA and Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) are working collaboratively to increase security and resource protection by providing training in the months prior to the relocation. Contrary to previous trainings, these sessions include firearm handling exercises, adaptive patrol techniques and junior leadership skills. Classroom sessions highlighting rhino behaviour, habitat overview, threats and effective monitoring techniques complement the field trainings.

Having worked as a Park Ranger in the United States, I felt drawn to the women and encouraged by their dedication. Kitted in green cargo trousers and matching long sleeve tops, the women stood tall and proud. There was a stiffness to their stature that portrayed strength and they clearly displayed that their gender had not inhibited their desire to work in the field. Though my duties as a Park Ranger entailed collecting water samples, harvesting apples and chatting with Park visitors, Asteria quickly put me to shame when she outlined her schedule during the training session.

"We wake up every day to a half-hour run. Then we have tea and a small breakfast before returning for more exercises. We break shortly for lunch and then continue with more intense training. Once the evening comes, we eat and then bathe before retiring for the night," she explained.

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“The training is difficult but we have learned a lot”, said Deodithi. Their persistence and ability will prove crucial to the success of the Serengeti Rhino Repatriation Project. Christof Schenck, the CEO of Frankfurt Zoological Society, was present at the closing ceremony for the training to witness their efforts. Demonstrations with live ammunition and hidden targets were action-filled and earsplitting. They displayed accuracy and dedication through various rounds of shooting. Christof shook hands with the women and congratulated them for their accomplishments.

“Your work is absolutely important, not only for the Serengeti but for the global community,” remarked Christof. “We have lost before to poaching but you are here so this won’t happen again. This is truly a new era for the Serengeti and the future of it lies in your hands.”

After receiving their certificates for passing the course, the women led me to a small canvas tent, their

home for the past six weeks. Apart from a separate tent and toilet from the men, they were treated identically. They had the same struggles any woman would have living in the bush, but were able to cope, given the privacy. The women were required to live in the bush with little assistance from vehicles. Foot patrols were a main focal point and incorporated ecological training on how to spot tracks and snares.

Although no women were chosen to undergo a selection of an elite team of rangers, all four passed the basic training. The first round of basic training gave them an excellent boost in expertise and will aid in their role of both rhino protection and overall park security.

The dedication and discipline of these women is an inspiration to conservation strategies across the continent. Not only can they lead by example, but in doing so, they will help protect and preserve one of the last remaining intact ecosystems on earth. ●

Above: Rangers preparing for firearm drill

Top right: The 3rd training session marches around their training quarters during final closing ceremony

Bottom right: Asteria Msingi leading her group during marching drills

Laura Harstone

A former U.S. Park Ranger, Laura now lives in the Serengeti and writes and photographs for international publications.