



By, Laura Hartstone

# Serengeti Prepares for Rhino Return

*In 2010 Serengeti National Park will welcome thirty-two Eastern Black Rhinoceros (Dicerobicornis michaeli) currently residing in South Africa. The rhino fell claim to severe pressure from poaching in the late 1970's to early 1990's and many that existed in Tanzania were quickly eradicated.*

Estimates from the International Union for Conservation of Nature suggest that only one hundred twenty three black rhino living in the wild remain in Tanzania. Approximately 4,230 live in the wild worldwide, an alarming decline from the some 65,000 that once existed. Efforts to protect the species included removing them from their native habitat and moving them to other locations, such as South Africa. The repatriation of the rhinos into Serengeti in 2010 will mark a significant attempt to bring them back to their natural habitat.

Resources and Tourism, including Tanzania's Wildlife Division, the Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority and Tanzania Wildlife Research Institute. Financially, the project is being funded by a private donor with additional support from TANAPA, FZS and SGR.

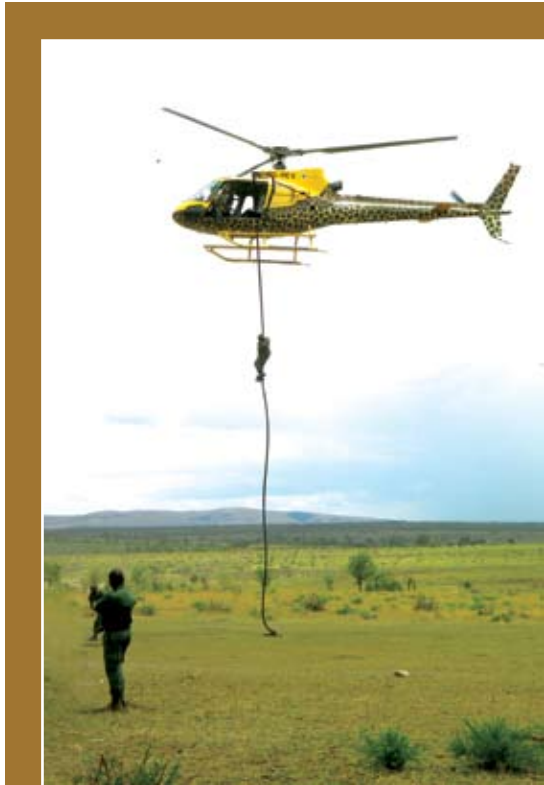
In preparation for the arrival of the rhinos, training sessions have been held for one hundred forty nine rangers working within the Serengeti Ecosystem. They were expected to attend the six week training sessions and attain a level of competency based

and evened out the playing field for both rangers and park wardens alike. The skills set taught were seen as both imperative and informational for both groups. Training sessions will be ongoing and continue to build on their map skills, firearm knowledge, shooting ability and fitness.

*"...the men encountered poachers, abandoned poaching camps and several snared animals..."*

Protection for the rhinos is not being taken lightly. Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA) is working in collaboration with Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and Signita-Grumeti Reserves (SGR) to enhance training and operations of the current ranger task force. It is a wide scale operation that is incorporating involvement from the Tanzanian Ministry of Natural

on standards across Africa throughout the various levels of status; from private to park warden. The sessions incorporated trainings that had not been taught to rangers or wardens previously, and allowed them to use live ammunition and engage in other activities for the first time. The training sessions consisted of an array of basic skills aimed at creating a foundation



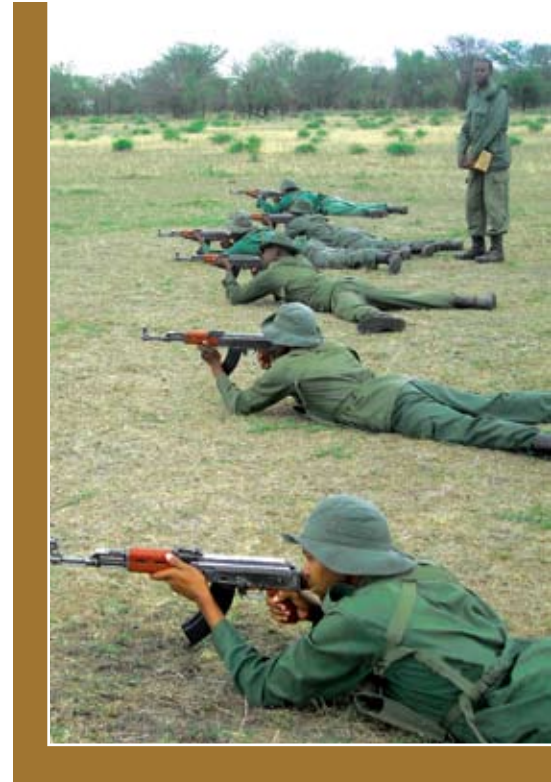
Sixty men from the initial basic training sessions were chosen to partake in a one week selection process aiming to find an elite team to act as the Serengeti Rhino Protection Unit (SRPU). The week long selection forced the men to undergo incredibly difficult field conditions, testing both their physical capability and mental aptitude. From the sixty men, thirty passed the selection process and then continued on to an advanced training course whereby the learned tactical firearm handling and movement, how to approach a night ambush or road block, and penetrate houses/buildings as a secure unit. The men engaged in helicopter fast-rope training and began specialising in extended foot patrols. On several of the training days the men encountered poachers, abandoned poaching camps and several snared animals – all of which were perfect textbook examples of their work ahead.

“These guys are fortunate to have such intense and thorough training,” remarked Emile Smidt, Technical Advisor of the SRRP. Having worked in conservation across Africa since 1993, Emile has seen some of the best and

worst trained men in the field. Emile has worked diligently over the past year to help with all preparations for the arrival of the rhino from transportation logistics to ranger training. He has given oversight into the building of bomas in northern Serengeti where the rhinos will be situated while recovering from the trauma of translocation and adapting to local natural browse. After this process is complete, they will be released into the park and monitored closely by TANAPA rangers and ecologists.

The project is quite extensive and will take at least five years to complete. Those involved hope that the rhinos will not only thrive off being in the natural habitat, but furthermore, create a stronghold for the future of black rhino within the entire Serengeti Ecosystem. Their success could be beneficial for their species serve as a monumental achievement in the field of conservation.

*Photography courtesy of  
Frankfurt Zoological Society  
[www.zgf.de](http://www.zgf.de)*



**TOP LEFT:**  
The elite ranger team

**BOTTOM LEFT:**  
Helicopter training

**THIS PAGE:**  
Practising marksmanship