

**Eastern Black Rhinos Return Home to Serengeti National Park
with Support from the Service and Partners**

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Last month, the first five critically endangered Eastern black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) were successfully returned to the Serengeti National Park as part of a bold initiative to boost the viability of Tanzania's rhino population. Their safe arrival is a remarkable achievement for rhino conservation and for cooperation between nations. During the next two years, a total of 32 Eastern black rhinos will be returned as part of the Serengeti Rhino Repatriation Project, more than doubling the number of rhinos in the Serengeti.

During the last century, Africa's black rhino population plummeted by over 90%, reaching an all-time low of 2,300 individuals in the wild. Concerted efforts to improve security in rhino areas have allowed recovery of some populations, but rhinos remain under serious threat. Today, all three living subspecies of black rhino are listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List, and one, the western black subspecies, is feared extinct. Fewer than 700 Eastern black rhinos survive in the wild, with Kenya having an estimated 600 rhinos and Tanzania having fewer than 100.

The 32 black rhinos destined for Serengeti National Park are descendants of animals which were taken from Kenya to South Africa in the 1960s. Originally kept in the national parks' estate, they were sold into private hands in the mid 1990s. During this time, illegal poaching of rhinos decimated Tanzania's wild black rhinos.

The Serengeti Rhino Repatriation Project aims to restore biodiversity in northern Tanzania by doubling the existing population of black rhinos in the Serengeti and by re-establishing connectivity among rhino populations in Tanzania and Kenya. The project is the culmination of years of work spearheaded by the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), Tanzania National Parks (TANAPA), the Singita Grumeti Fund, and the governments of Tanzania and South Africa. The May 21st flight and five future flights to deliver the rhinos to Serengeti National Park are sponsored by National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Nduna Foundation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Wildlife Without Borders* program.

Reports from the veterinarians caring for the repatriated rhinos indicate that the animals are adapting well to their new home in the Serengeti. All five rhinos are happily drinking water and beginning to feed on local vegetation: requirements that must be met before they are released from their temporary enclosures and granted access to the entire park.

Increased security efforts on private and public lands have helped black rhinos recover in some parts of East Africa. In preparation for this translocation, the Serengeti National Park strengthened security throughout the park and created an elite rhino protection force trained to safeguard the rhinos and their habitat for years to come.

The return of these rhinos is a significant landmark for natural resource conservation in Tanzania. Returning rhino populations to healthy numbers will help restore one of the Serengeti's flagship species, and will help ensure northern Tanzania's viability as a destination where tourists can see all of Tanzania's native flora and fauna. "These rhinos are a tiny piece to bring the Serengeti back to what it was a long time ago", commented FZS CEO Christof Schenck on a preliminary visit to congratulate the rangers in training to protect the rhinos.

To view photos from the rhino relocation project, please visit:

www.fws.gov/international/dic/species/rhino/rhino_relocation/rhino_relocation.html.

To learn more about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Wildlife Without Borders* Rhinoceros Program, please visit: www.fws.gov/international/DIC/species/rhino/rhino.html.

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The Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) was established in 1858 and is an internationally operating non-profit conservation organization based in Frankfurt, Germany. FZS is committed to the conservation of biological diversity and the preservation of the world's natural environments. FZS manages and supports 90 conservation projects in 30 countries across Africa, Asia (central and southeast), South America and Europe. For more information, visit www.fzs.org.