

2,000 Southern White Rhino to be Released into the Wild Over Next 10 Years

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA, September 4, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- African Parks has purchased the world's largest captive rhino breeding operation in a bid to rescue and rewild the rhino to safe and well-managed protected areas across Africa.

African Parks, a conservation NGO that manages 22 protected areas in partnership with 12 governments across Africa, announced that it will rewild over 2,000 southern white rhino over the next 10 years. African Parks has stepped in as the new owner of the world's largest private captive rhino breeding operation, "Platinum Rhino", a 7,800-hectare property in the North West province of South Africa, which currently holds 2,000 southern white rhino, representing up to 15% of the world's remaining wild population.

As a result of financial stress, Platinum Rhino was put up for auction on the 26th of April 2023, but did not receive any bids, putting these rhinos at serious risk of poaching and fragmentation. Given African Parks' experience in effectively managing protected areas and carrying out wildlife translocations at scale, including bringing rhino back to Rwanda, Malawi and the Democratic Republic of Congo, African Parks was



Several of the 2000 white rhino that will be rewilded over the next 10 years © Brent Stirton/Getty Images

approached by numerous concerned individuals from the conservation sector to provide a solution to prevent a potential conservation crisis, and to help secure the future for a species in decline.

After conducting a thorough due diligence and with the support of the South African Government, as well as having secured emergency funding to make the transaction possible, African Parks agreed to purchase the farm and all 2,000 rhinos. African Parks has one clear objective: to rewild these rhino over the next 10 years to well managed and secure areas, establishing or supplementing strategic populations, thereby de-risking the future of the species. The breeding programme will be phased out and the project will end once all the rhino are released into the wild. This is one of the largest continent-wide rewilding endeavours to occur for any species.

“African Parks had no intention of being the owner of a captive rhino breeding operation with 2,000 rhinos. However, we fully recognise the moral imperative of finding a solution for these animals, so that they can once again play their integral role in fully functioning ecosystems,” said Peter Fearnhead, CEO of African Parks. “The scale of this undertaking is simply enormous, and therefore daunting. However, it is equally one of the most exciting and globally-strategic conservation opportunities. We will be working with multiple governments, funding partners and conservation organisations, who are committed to making this rewilding vision a reality.”

For over 20 years, African Parks has worked with governments and local communities to ensure that protected areas, and their vital ecosystem services, are secured for the future. “On behalf of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment, I would like to congratulate African Parks and Mr. Hume for reaching this important agreement which facilitates a conservation solution for the rhino currently in a captive facility,” said Ms. Barbara Creecy, South African Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment.

“Our Government is guided in our approach to conservation by the UN Convention on Biodiversity and our own white paper. In this regard we are ready to support African Parks and other partners with technical and scientific advice in developing a conservation solution that includes translocating the animals over a period of time to suitable parks and community conservancies in South Africa and on the African continent.”

The white rhino as a species is under extreme pressure, especially in South Africa, because of poaching. Rhinos historically consisted of two subspecies: the southern white and the northern white. The northern white rhino is functionally extinct, with just two non-breeding females in captivity in Kenya. Southern white rhino reached an all-time low of 30 to 40 animals in the 1930's, but through effective conservation measures, increased to approximately 20,000 individuals by 2012. However, with the dramatic rise in poaching for their horns for the illegal wildlife trade, their numbers have fallen to below 13,000 today.

“The conservation sector is delighted that African Parks can provide a credible solution for this

important population, and a significant lifeline for this Near Threatened species,” said Dr. Mike Knight, Chairman of the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group. “This acquisition provides the unique opportunity to re-wild these 2,000 white rhinos for the benefit of people and rhino conservation in Africa.”

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About African Parks

African Parks is a non-profit conservation organisation that takes on the responsibility for the rehabilitation and long-term management of protected areas, in partnership with governments and local communities. African Parks manages 22 national parks and protected areas in 12 countries covering over 20 million hectares in Angola, Benin, Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Sudan, Zambia and Zimbabwe. For more information visit www.africanparks.org.

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