

# Karoo National Park



## Black Rhino re-introduced in Karoo National Park

During the early morning hours of 9 March 2005, a Desert- or South-western black rhino (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*) was released in the Stolzhoek area of the Karoo National Park. The 5-year old male rhino, weighing in at 1100kg, was translocated from the privately owned Tswalu Desert Reserve near Kuruman in the Northern Cape Province in exchange for a male from Vaalbos National Park at Kimberley. This move forms part of a series of translocations of this endangered species by SANParks, aimed at ensuring a healthy gene flow and increased population growth throughout its natural distribution range. This co-operation between a private reserve and national conservation authority also represents a landmark agreement where the different sectors work together to ensure the survival of a very rare species.

This meta-population management action aims to improve the population structure of the various groups scattered through the region to ensure optimum population growth, while simultaneously extending its distribution back into its former range, from which it was displaced by human settlement and over hunting. The last black rhino disappeared from the Western Cape and Karoo regions during the second half of the eighteenth century. A record of the shooting of a black rhino in 1779 at the source of the Gamka River ironically indicates that the very last ones may have persisted in exactly the same area where they are now reintroduced.



During 1993 four rhino of this sub-species were in fact reintroduced in the Park, but they were moved to Addo Elephant National Park in 1995, when it was realised from data gathered over many years that population growth is faster when founder populations are larger (10 animals plus). Small groups of three to four animals were then combined to achieve a faster population growth rate.

A breeding project of the Eastern Black rhino (*Diceros bicornis michaeli*) was then launched in the Karoo National Park to assist East African countries in increasing their population numbers. The purpose was to

increase their numbers in this and other Parks like Addo, and then re-establish the increased number of animals in their home countries. The project was a success and the last two rhino of this sub-specie was removed from the Park in March 2004. It was clearly established by that time that the habitat in the Park was very suitable for Black rhino, and the Park identified as a future permanent home for these animals.

This latest release of a South-western black rhino into the Karoo National Park marks a new stage in the conservation of this species in South Africa, indicating that their numbers have increased to the level where it is slowly becoming possible to expand their current distribution, and putting them back into areas where they have previously thrived. More introductions are planned in the Park in the near future, and perhaps, with patience and dedication from both Private and Public enterprise, and the public at large, the time will come when *Diceros bicornis bicornis* can be taken from the "endangered" species list in South Africa.