

# **KENYA WILDLIFE SERVICE STATEMENT ON THE DEATH OF SUDAN: THE LAST KNOWN MALE NORTHERN WHITE RHINO**

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) is saddened that we are getting closer to extinction of the rare Northern White Rhino after the death of the 45-year-old only remaining male named Sudan which occurred yesterday, Monday March 19, 2018 in Kenya at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia.

Sudan's death leaves the world with only two female white rhinos, all in Kenya at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy.

The Northern White Rhino (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) is currently the world's rarest rhinoceros species. The Northern white Rhino is a sub-species of white rhino, which used to range over parts of Uganda, Chad, Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Years of widespread poaching and civil war in their home range have devastated Northern White Rhino populations, and they are now considered to be extinct in the wild.

The translocation of the last individuals from Zoo Dvůr Králové Zoo in Czech Republic to natural conditions in order to evoke normal territorial and social behaviour essential for regular breeding was thought to be the only conservation option available then. All

previous breeding attempts in the Zoo had been futile, and the hope was that the climate and rich grasslands of Ol Pejeta, a native habitat for the animals, would provide them with more favourable breeding conditions.

Kenya was chosen to host four individuals due to its proximity to the former ranges, that is, DRC and Sudan and the rhinos were repatriated in December of 2009 through a project dubbed "Back to Africa" spearheaded by The Back to Africa organisation based in South Africa. One of the males named 'Suni' died in October 2014 with no prior history of illness. This left an old male, Sudan that had no ability to reproduce naturally.

The four Northern White Rhinos had been kept in two groups with four southern white rhinos which were introduced to stimulate reproduction. To keep the northern white rhinos safe and in good health, Ol Pejeta dedicated 24-hour armed security, a 700-acre enclosure, and a nutritious diet supplemented with fresh vegetables.

Various matings were noted over the period they have been at Ol Pejeta but with no successful conception.

In early 2015, health assessments by veterinarians from KWS and the Czech Republic revealed that neither of the females was capable of natural reproduction, and Sudan's sperm count was low due to his age. In July 2015, Dvur Kralove Zoo in the Czech Republic lost Nabire.

An examination of the remaining three northern white rhinoceroses at Ol Pejeta Conservancy was conducted from 29<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2014 following the sudden death of Suni (Male) in the night of October, 16<sup>th</sup>/17<sup>th</sup>, 2014, nearly 5 years after introduction in December 2009.

A contingency plan has since been put in place as it was noted that technology can still save the species. The northern white rhinos steering committee in collaboration with KWS has been assessing the best way forward to save this great sub species from extinction. Since natural reproduction had failed to bear the desired results, the only last hope to try to salvage the sub species is through assisted reproduction techniques. While this does not come without risks (and significant costs) – all other options have been exhausted and time is running out.

Towards preparing for assisted reproduction techniques, a team of experts both local and foreign collected semen from the remaining male northern white rhino on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> October 2015. A plan to harvest Oocytes from the female NWR is underway.

The two northern white rhino females have been paired with two southern white rhinos for companionship.

### **Sudans' condition prior to death**

In September 2017, Sudan was reported to have developed some superficial cutaneous wounds on several parts of the body particularly on the joint prominences, thighs, shoulder and distal parts of the front and hind legs. The wounds were open, circular in shape and of varying sizes ranging from 3 to 10cm in width with occasional secondary bacterial infection. They did not respond well to wound management procedures. Despite the cutaneous wounds, the animal remained strong, active and with good appetite as the wildlife veterinarians continued to treat the animal.

As treatment progressed, one of the cutaneous wounds on the right thigh got infected and extended deeper into the thigh muscles, this affected the movement of the animal and it could only move slowly with a lot of difficulties. It was becoming quite difficult for Sudan to support its weight on the affected leg and preferred lying down most of the time.

On Saturday March 17, 2018, Sudan's health condition deteriorated and it became recumbent, and could not stand on its legs even after being supported. On animal welfare consideration, a decision was made to euthanize it to stop further pain and suffering.

A post mortem was conducted and it was found that Sudan died due to age-related complications that led to degenerative changes in muscles and bones combined with extensive skin wounds. Specimens have been collected for gene preservation and propagation.