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Historic return of rhinos to Mozambique

The Governments of Mozambique and South Africa are pleased to announce the planned reintroduction of rhinos to Zinave National Park in 2022. After becoming locally extinct more than 40 years ago, diversified resources company Exxaro Resources, is spearheading a project to reintroduce both the critically endangered black rhino and the near threatened white rhino to the park. Zinave, which is co-managed between Mozambique's National Administration for Conservation Areas (ANAC) and Peace Parks Foundation, will not only host the first founder population of both rhino species in a national park in Mozambique, but is also set to become the first "big five" national park in the country.

In 2002, the Governments of Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe entered into a Treaty to establish the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, spanning over 100 000 km² and incorporating five national parks, including the iconic Kruger National Park. Now, 20 years later, it is fitting to celebrate two decades of continued rewilding and restoration of this globally important cross-border conservation landscape with the introduction of these keystone species.

Since 2016, through the long-term co-management agreement between ANAC and Peace Parks, an intensive rewilding programme has reintroduced more than 2 300 game animals representing 14 different species into Zinave National Park. This has included rewilding the park with buffalo, elephant and leopard. In September last year, the first lions were also recorded in Zinave after a 40-year absence. It is assumed that the lions are migrating from one of the other parks within the transfrontier conservation area: a good indicator that nature is returning to health, and affirming yet again the vital role of connectivity between safe havens within a conservation landscape.

After a careful evaluation process by Exxaro Resources, that included in-depth feasibility studies of potential recipient sites, the Governments of Mozambique and South Africa approved the reintroduction of approximately 40 white and black rhinos to a specially constructed, 186 km², high security sanctuary within the 4 000 km² Zinave National Park. The rhinos are being donated by Exxaro Resources — a longstanding donor and supporter of conservation and a Club 21 member of Peace Parks. Previously, in 2014, Exxaro Resources relocated 10 white rhinos to Botswana to bolster an existing small population, amongst its other biodiversity practice activities.

South Africa's Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE), the Mozambique Ministry of Land and the Environment, and Exxaro Resources, with additional funding provided by the German Postcode Lottery and MAVA Foundation, are joining hands with ANAC and Peace Parks for the translocation.

"Establishment, management and relocation of wildlife species are all being done as part of Exxaro's responsibility to these species — particularly where they are of special conservation concern," said Mr Mxolisi Mgojo, CEO of Exxaro Resources.

"Responsible environmental stewardship is about protecting and preserving natural resources for the greater good of all our stakeholders. Water scarcity, air pollution, biodiversity threats, hazardous waste, and climate change all pose significant environmental and financial risks that we need to manage while delivering on other business objectives. Biodiversity loss has been identified as being at significant risk in the context of climate change.

"Considering this, Exxaro has been implementing several projects to ensure that its mines coexist in harmony with the natural environment. These include an Alien Invader Eradication Programme, a Wetland Rehabilitation Project, and Biodiversity Relocation Programmes. These initiatives and programmes aim to protect indigenous flora and fauna species and support local ecosystems," Mgojo added.





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Rhino populations have plummeted in all nine remaining rhino range states in Africa since 2008 with over 8 000 animals being killed for their horns in South Africa alone. The horns are prized for mythical medicinal properties and as a symbol of status in some Asian countries. To counter this, an intensive campaign has been launched to save the species by increasing protection efforts and relocating rhinos to safe havens where they have a chance to act as founder populations. A rigorous process was embarked upon by Exxaro Resources to identify a suitable site which has the best potential to increase the range of rhinos in the Southern African Development Community region, and facilitate the growth of these populations under strong security measures and good conservation management.

Through donor funding and enhanced management by ANAC and Peace Parks Foundation, supported by Exxaro Resources, security infrastructure and counter-poaching capacities in Zinave's sanctuary have been strengthened to such an extent that keystone, high-value conservation species are well protected.

"Over the past two decades, we have worked towards the vision of restoring iconic African landscapes in this vast area, by bringing countries together to reinstate wildlife populations and strategically develop protected areas where wildlife and people can co-exist in harmony," said Mr Werner Myburgh, CEO of Peace Parks Foundation.

"The rewilding of Zinave in partnership with the Government of Mozambique, has been an extraordinary success story. Stepping into the park in 2015, few would have imagined that the decimated wilderness would become a thriving protected area roamed by the big five and thousands of other animals in such a short time span. The project to reintroduce rhinos is especially significant and the culmination of enormous dedication in building relationships with communities, governments, donors and passionate private sector organisations such as Exxaro Resources."

Under the co-management agreement, activities over the past five years have included the establishment of a joint park management team, the upgrading of the park management infrastructure, training and appointment of additional rangers, wildlife reintroductions and various community development programmes.

To further ensure the safety of the rhinos, significant investment is being channelled into additional protection efforts. This includes the recruitment of 32 additional rangers who will undergo specialist training on rhino protection, bringing the number of rangers deployed in the sanctuary and surrounding areas to 72. A further 20 sanctuary guards will also be deployed for first-line detection of incursions. A helicopter and fixed-wing aircraft – integrated into a rapid response unit – have been secured to boost surveillance and counter-poaching reaction capabilities, while all operations will be coordinated through a dedicated rhino control centre with advanced technology that connects central command seamlessly with those in the field.

"In addition to enhanced counter-poaching strategies, it is generally agreed that one of the best options to stabilise rhino populations is to establish more viable breeding populations in alternative sites where they are safe, with the aim of increasing the overall growth rate of rhinos to exceed the rate of poaching," said DFFE Minister Ms Barbara Creecy. "After many years of dedicated cross-border collaboration between the governments of South Africa and Mozambique, together with public and private partners and donors, Zinave now provides just such a location, one that has the potential to contribute towards the survival of the species."

Mozambique's Minister of Land and the Environment, Ms Ivete Maibaze, added that: "With the host of stringent protection and monitoring measures in place, it is envisioned that this historic translocation will establish a viable breeding population of rhinos in a Mozambique national park for the first time in decades. In addition, conferring Big Five status to the park will be greatly beneficial for the emerging eco-tourism industry of this spectacular wilderness and for the communities around Zinave National Park."

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EDITOR'S NOTES

20 years of transboundary conservation

The translocation will take place during the 20th anniversary year of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA), which was established through the signing of a treaty by the Heads of State of South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in 2002, facilitated by Peace Parks Foundation. Encompassing the Banhine, Limpopo and Zinave national parks in Mozambique, the Kruger National Park in South Africa, and the Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, combined with various other privately and state-owned conservation areas, the TFCA measures almost 100 000km², an area larger than the country of Portugal.

Ministry of Land and Environment, Mozambique

The Ministry of Land and Environment (MTA) is the public entity that manages, plans, coordinates, controls and ensures the implementation of policies in the domains of Administration and Management of Territory and Geomatics, Forests and Wildlife, Environment, Climate Change and Conservation Areas. Guided by a vision of a healthy and climate-resilient environment, to ensure a better quality of life for the populations, the MTA's mission is to promote and implement development policies and programs that guarantee environmental quality, resilience to climate change and the sustainable use of natural resources. www.mta.gov.mz

South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment

The department seeks to facilitate environmental cooperative governance across all spheres of government and to provide geographically referenced environmental information for decision-making. This part of the department's work includes:

- Developing the State of the Environment Report (SOER) and appropriate indicators for the purpose of reporting on the state of the environment
- Promoting the incorporation of environmental objectives into strategic planning instruments at national, provincial and local government level
- Developing and maintaining the departmental research and development agenda to ensure informed and coherent policy-making, and
- Facilitating the development and implementation of the National Greening Programme.
- Environmental awareness
- To promote environmental awareness and education, the department has prioritised a school-based environmental education programme, as well as a community-based environmental awareness programme.

National Administration of Conservation Areas

Established in 2011, the National Administration for Conservation Areas (ANAC) of Mozambique is a government institution responsible for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable development of ecotourism in Mozambique. Its main functions involve the planning, coordination and execution of activities in conservation areas, in partnership with national and international organizations and local communities. The Mozambique's conservation areas occupy about 25% of the territory of Mozambique, including parks, reserves, environmental protection areas, controlled hunting areas, community conservation areas and game farms. www.anac.gov.mz

Exxaro Resources

Established in 2006, Exxaro Resources has grown to become one of the largest black-empowered diversified mining companies in South Africa. Exxaro has an asset portfolio, which includes coal operations and investments in iron ore, residual pigment manufacturing and renewable (wind and solar) energy (Cennergi). The organisation prides itself in being more than just a mining business and strongly believes that empowering local communities in which it operates and making a positive impact on the world is central to its purpose. The company assumes and actively practices a balanced approach for sustainable growth and impact to ensure that a future is secured for every one of its stakeholders. Exxaro's purpose to Power better Lives in Africa and beyond will be achieved by responsibly investing in resources that will improve and sustain life on the continent. In the last decade, Exxaro





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has established itself as an organisation that is respected by its peers for its innovation, ethics and integrity, and has been recognised as a leading performer in the FTSE Russel ESG Index. www.exxaro.com

Peace Parks Foundation

Founded in 1997, Peace Parks is a non-profit conservation organisation that facilitates the establishment and development of transfrontier conservation areas and provides co-management support to government conservation agencies for the restoration, protection and sustainable development of protected areas. In Mozambique, the Peace Parks portfolio include Maputo National Park as part of the Lubombo Transfrontier Conservation Area, and the Limpopo, Banhine and Zinave national parks as components of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area. Through its Rhino Protection Programme, funded by the Postcode Lotteries and various other donors, Peace Parks is also the largest financial contributor towards rhino poaching protection efforts in the Limpopo and Kruger national parks. Since 2015, the Foundation has provided equipment, training, technology development, capacity building, infrastructure, forensics, investigations, rhino management, and rhino orphan care and rehabilitation as well as awareness campaigns in China and Vietnam, along with key strategic and technical advice. www.peaceparks.org

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