

# Royal rhino's relocation breeds success

A calf has been born in Tanzania after a British wildlife park released three animals in Africa

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The Duke of Cambridge visited rhinos in Kent who were released in Tanzania, where Grumeti gave birth to Mobo (Chris Jackson/Getty Images)

After spending her first few years living in relative luxury in Kent, Grumeti was probably not best pleased to be sent to Africa, to be plagued by flies and threatened by poachers. However, now she is celebrating becoming a mother and being part of a conservation success story, cheered on by her British friends, who include the Duke of Cambridge.

Grumeti gave birth in Tanzania last month to Mobo — the first eastern black rhino to be born back in the critically endangered species' natural home to a mother who was reared in Britain.

Prince William, who campaigns to save rhinos, elephants and tigers from poaching, visited Grumeti at Port Lympne wildlife park near Folkestone in 2012 shortly before she and two other rhinos were loaded on to a specially adapted Boeing 757 and flown to Tanzania.

The three rhinos spent their first few months in an enclosure becoming acclimatised to the heat and flies and learning to wallow regularly in pools to give themselves a protective layer

of mud. They were then released into the heavily guarded Mkomazi reserve in the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Captive-born rhino breed less successfully than those in the wild but, early last year Grumeti mated with Jamie, who had been sent to Tanzania after being born in a zoo in the Czech Republic. Mobo, a female weighing 36kg (5st 9lb) at birth, the average weight of an 11-year-old child, arrived 15 months later. She will stay with her mother for up to five years and can expect to live for up to 50 years, if she manages to evade the poachers.

More than 1,300 rhinos were killed by poachers in Africa last year, the highest number since a surge in their slaughter began a decade ago. Poachers target rhinos for their horns, which are used in traditional Asian medicine in the belief that they cure hangovers, fevers and even cancer. Rhino horn can be worth more than gold on the black market.

Black rhinos are much rarer than white rhinos, with only about 5,000 in the wild, compared with 70,000 in 1970. Africa has fewer than 750 eastern black rhinos, the rarest of three sub-species.

Mobo's birth is a triumph for a rhino reintroduction scheme run by the Aspinall Foundation, led by the casino tycoon and wildlife park owner Damian Aspinall. His father, the late John Aspinall, a friend of Lord Lucan, the peer who mysteriously disappeared, founded Port Lympne and Howletts, a wildlife park near Canterbury, and funded them with profits from his gaming clubs. John Aspinall encouraged his zookeepers to have close contact with animals, even though three were killed by tigers and two by elephants.



Grumeti with her newborn son, Mobo, in Tanzania

Damian Aspinall said: "Mobo's birth illustrates perfectly our passionate belief in the true role of modern conservation as being committed to the survival of threatened species in their natural territories. We believe this is preferable, wherever possible, to simply keeping them caged in an existence which does little for prospects of long-term survival."

Adrian Harland, Port Lympne's animal director, said that his ultimate goal was to make himself redundant by returning all the animals to the wild. However, he said the fragility of wild populations meant that captive breeding programmes would be needed for the foreseeable future.

Mr Harland said Grumeti and a female rhino called Zawadi and male named Monduli had been sent to Tanzania under an agreement that they would be protected for their full natural lives.

He said they should not suffer the fate of some elderly rhinos in Namibia, where the government last week offered licences to hunters to kill three for trophies. Namibia claims that the licences, expected to fetch several hundred thousand pounds, are necessary to help to raise money for conservation.

The duke was criticised by some conservation groups in March for saying that commercial hunting in Africa could help to save endangered species.

He said: "So when [an animal] is infertile, he's at the end of his life. If somebody out there wants to pay that money — and it wouldn't be me — but if somebody did, then as long as that money goes back into protection of the species then it is a justifiable means of conserving species that are under serious threat."

A spokesman for the duke said he had been informed of Mobo's birth and was pleased to hear that the rhino breeding programme was going well.