

Pothole toll 'is getting worse' says RAC after 4,000 callouts

BY MARK ELLIS Transport Correspondent
POTHOLES led to the highest number of breakdowns in the second quarter of the year since 2015, the RAC said. It had 4,091 callouts over damaged shock absorbers, broken suspension or bent wheels from April to June. The RAC said extra funds for local roads – maintained by councils – meant it had hoped for a fall in the total after the worst first quarter

since 2006. It blamed the Beast from the East in March for roads getting worse. Chief engineer David Bizley said: "Councils are not winning the battle and the safety of too many drivers, cyclists and motorcyclists is at risk." It wants 2p a litre from fuel duty over 10 years to tackle the repair backlog. Council body the LGA demanded "fairer" funding, saying national roads got 52 times more than local ones.



RISK Pothole alert

Headers 'bad for balance'

FOOTBALLERS who head the ball frequently are more likely to suffer balance problems. The US research adds to fears about headers after ex-England star Jeff Astle died at 59 of brain disease. The study by the University of Delaware found they "undermined" balance. **TASTE OF HISTORY** A BAR of Cadbury's chocolate made in 1900 for Boer War troops may fetch £5,000 at an online auction by Eddisons of Scunthorpe.

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Poachers kill 3 rhinos a day... It is so painful when we lose those we are trying to save

- WWF CONSERVATION CHIEF MARTIN MULAMA



GOOD SHOT Vet fires dart as Jack runs



OPERATION Mirrorman Tom on scene as rhino's horn is microchipped



STRUGGLE Team help to load Jack up



ROAD TRIP In container ready to go

Rhino facts

- There are five rhino species: White & Black rhinos from Africa; Greater one-horned, Sumatran; and the Javan Rhino.
- Around 98% of Africa's rhinos are found in South Africa, Namibia, Kenya and Zimbabwe.
- The southern white rhino sub-species is the only conservation success story. It has been helped to get numbers back from under 100 in 1895 to over 20,000 in the wild today.

EXCLUSIVE BY TOM PARRY, Special Correspondent in East Tsavo National Park, Kenya

IT began at daybreak with the ping of a tranquilliser dart fired from a helicopter, a meticulously planned operation to save the black rhinoceros from extinction.

After decades of inhumane poaching in a region of eastern Kenya that had seen the animals' numbers plummet from 5,000 to just 10 in the wild, the vets, rangers and conservationists were determined to get it right.

The Mirror was the only newspaper in the world invited on the 12-hour translocation journey, in which young rhinos were being moved to East Tsavo National Park, where they have been decimated by horn poaching gangs.

We travelled 300 miles with the vehicles transporting Jack, a two-tonne male, aged six, and Mwanahamisi, a four-year-old female, from the capital Nairobi along a busy highway. They were at the vanguard of an extraordinary mission to create a new black rhino breeding population. The hope was these two young

rhinos, chosen because they came from healthy, productive lines, would produce their own children in the coming years.

But on Friday, the tragic news emerged that Jack and Mwanahamisi had died before being released back into the wild at a high-security sanctuary that has taken years to build.

So too have six other rhinos relocated from Nairobi to a temporary camp on the red-dust plains of Tsavo.

Six others brought to a separate enclosure near Nakuru, which is four hours north of Nairobi, have survived.

It is an unprecedented outcome that none of the experts could have foreseen after previous successes.

No one is sure why it has gone wrong this time.

Some suspect the rhinos died because their bodies could not adapt to the change from drinking fresh water to salt water. It is not thought those in charge of the move were aware of the salt concentration in the supply.

Others fear a virus might have spread among the animals. A specialist vet has been drafted in from South Africa to lead an investigation.

I spoke to World Wildlife Fund rhino

programme co-ordinator Martin Mulama, who has worked with the endangered species for 20 years.

"I am utterly devastated," said Martin, 53. "At a time when three rhinos are killed a day by poachers, the loss is particularly painful for those of us fighting to protect them."

He explained why conservationists were forced to adopt the high-risk relocation strategy. He told me there were more than 70,000 black rhinos in the wild in the 1960s, but just 2,410 by 1995 because of poaching.

On October 9, 1961, the Mirror featured a shocking photograph of rhino on the front page, headlined "Doomed". Our ground-breaking

seven-page expose followed the formation of the World Wildlife Fund a few weeks earlier, and brought vital attention to a little-known crisis.

"Doomed to disappear from the face of the earth due to Man's FOLLY, GREED, NEGLECT," the article continued. "Unless something is done swiftly, animals like this rhinoceros will soon be as dead as the dodo."

Money donated by readers helped the WWF to purchase land bordering Lake Nakuru, northern Kenya, to create a reserve in which rhinos later thrived. Yet the slaughter continued unabated elsewhere.

Between 1970 and 1992, around 96% of black rhinos were lost to gun-

toting poachers who fuelled the rhino horn trade.

Backed by cartels and terror groups, they cut off the rhinos' horns and left their carcasses to rot in the blistering sun.

The market is fed by the misguided belief in Vietnam and, increasingly, in China that rhino horn has medicinal properties.

In fact – as we saw when vets drilled a hole in Jack's horn to fit a microchip and tracker transmitter – rhino horn is made of keratin, just like human hair and finger nails. Following

earlier successful relocations across Africa, the black rhino population is above 5,000.

But with greedy poachers willing to take greater risks, despite tougher prison sentences, the battle is far from over in Kenya.

"This has taken a lot of planning because we want to be one step ahead," Martin told me in Tsavo, which is the size of Northern Ireland.

Nothing was taken for granted during the operation we witnessed. We were in the helicopter as the pilot hovered over Jack about 10 metres below and then a vet expertly fired the dart into his thick hide.

Within 10 minutes, Jack was on the ground and all-terrain vehicles arrived to prepare him for the journey ahead. While one vet doused its wounds in antiseptic, two others drilled a deep hole in its horn and inserted a microchip and a transmitter device.

The transmitter would have enabled the rangers at Tsavo to detect the rhino's movements and the chip

would have helped prosecute poachers caught with the horn.

The still slumbering rhino was then strapped up as a large crate was lowered just in front of its head.

Eleven strong men held it down just in case it kicked out. Then, with a low groaning noise, it surged forward into the crate in a sudden burst of energy.

Once the crate was firmly shut, a hydraulic arm lifted it on to a flat-bed truck and it was taken to Tsavo.

Translocations to the remote 10,000 hectare sanctuary, which is surrounded by an electric fence and has sensors to detect poachers, have been suspended after Friday's awful news. But Martin and his colleagues at WWF still aim to increase the numbers there to 100.

Once this has happened the fences can come down and the rhinos can roam the plains as they used to.

Because even through this operation went wrong, the blame does not lie with the conservationists.

The blood is on the hands of the poachers, the horn smugglers and the buyers in the Far East. Without them, there would have been no need to uproot poor Jack and Mwanahamisi.

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RISKY MOVE Jack didn't survive at sanctuary

Pictures: ROMAN GRIFFITHS