

Endangered rhinos ready to be sent from Europe to Rwanda

June 20 2019, by Karel Janicek



In this undated photo provided by Safari Park Dvur Kralove, Black Rhino Manny is photographed at Safari Park Dvur Kralov, in Dvur Kralove nad Labem, Czech Republic. Officials say five critically endangered eastern black rhinos from wildlife parks in three European countries are ready for a transport back to their natural habitat in Rwanda, where the entire rhino population was wiped out during the genocide in the 1990s. (Oliver Le Que/Safari Park Dvur Kralove via AP)

Five critically endangered eastern black rhinos from wildlife parks in three European countries are ready to be transported back to their natural habitat in Rwanda, where the entire rhino population was wiped out during the genocide in the 1990s.

Officials from the Czech Republic's Dvur Kralove zoo said Thursday that the three female and two male rhinos have been slowly trained to get used to custom-made transport boxes to take them Sunday to Akagera National Park in eastern Rwanda, which is now considered safe for rhinos.

Their journey will mark the biggest single transport of rhinos from Europe to Africa. Transporting them won't be easy and the animals will have to be tranquilized several times during the trip. The rhinos weigh between 850 and 1,150 kilograms (1,874 and 2,535 pounds)

The rhinos first met in November when the three already at the Dvur Kralove zoo were joined by one from Flamingo Land in Britain and one from Ree Park Safari in Denmark.

"Even though they have been well prepared, you know it is still a long trip, it is stressful, it is stressful for me, it is probably stressful for them," said Pete Morkel, an internationally recognized veterinarian from Zimbabwe and expert on rhino relocations.

"It is not easy moving black rhino, they are explosive animals, they can get unhappy very quickly. So you have to keep your finger on the pulse and see what happens and respond accordingly," Morkel said.



In this undated photo provided by Safari Park Dvur Kralove, Black Rhinos Mandela and Jasiri are photographed at Safari Park Dvur Kralov, in Dvur Kralove nad Labem, Czech Republic. Officials say five critically endangered eastern black rhinos from wildlife parks in three European countries are ready for a transport back to their natural habitat in Rwanda, where the entire rhino population was wiped out during the genocide in the 1990s. (Dominika Stempa/ Safari Park Dvur Kralove via AP)

When they get to Rwanda, the rhinos will undergo a lengthy process of adaption before they will be allowed to roam freely and join 18 eastern black rhinos that were transported to the park from South Africa in 2017.

More than 500,000 people were killed in the genocide in Rwanda in

1994. The conflict also devastated the entire population of lions there.

Rwanda's ambassador to Berlin, Igor Cesar, described the transport as "historic" and recognition for his country's efforts to restore its wildlife diversity.

African rhinos remain under intense pressure from poachers who kill them to meet demand for their horns in illegal markets, primarily in Vietnam and China. There are only a few hundred of the eastern black subspecies remaining in the world.



In this undated photo provided by Safari Park Dvur Kralove, Black Rhino Jasmina is photographed at Safari Park Dvur Kralov, in Dvur Kralove nad Labem, Czech Republic. Officials say five critically endangered eastern black

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Citation: Endangered rhinos ready to be sent from Europe to Rwanda (2019, June 20) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-06-endangered-rhinos-ready-europe-rwanda.html>

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