From Rescued Orphan to Wild Rhino – a Rhino Timeline
The Journey Home

As you have learnt from the Mpilo and Makhosi factsheet and Storm factsheet the aim of the Zululand Rhino Orphanage is to return rhino orphans back to the wild.

This is not a quick process and takes a considerable amount of time and a lot of care of the rhinos to ensure that they are ready to return to the wild.

We have put together a timeline of their journey home to show you how long the process takes.

This is one reason why the rhino orphans need our support.

You can support their care and their journey back into the wild by adopting one of the orphans, fundraising for the orphans or raising awareness about their situation.

Every rhino counts in the fight to save them and as you will see from the timeline they need all the support we can give them. Thank you for wishing to support their journey.
Rhino Rescue – the baby rhino is found and rescued. This is a critical time, they need to be found as soon as possible to give them best chance of survival. Emergency medical care will be given to the rhino at the scene if necessary.

Rhino Senses – due to the traumatic experience of being orphaned the baby rhino is likely to be very distressed. In order to help calm them they are blindfolded and have ear plugs placed in their ears, this is to help reduce the sensory overload they may be experiencing and help them be calm.

Transport – once they have received any medical treatment, they will be transported to the Zululand Orphanage. Whilst being transported they are monitored constantly to ensure they are safe and to help keep them calm. They will have blankets on them to keep them warm and comforted.
#BeMoreRhino

A Rhino Timeline

Arrival – once they arrive at the orphanage they will be moved to the intensive care area. They will be given further medical treatment if necessary. The main aim at this stage is to keep them calm, warm, comforted and to provide them with fluids as they will likely be dehydrated having been unable to feed from their mother.

24 hour care – whilst in the intensive care area the rhino will often have a UV lamp on them plus blankets to keep them warm. They will be monitored 24 hours a day and often a carer will sleep with them, this will comfort them as they will be desperately missing their mother.

Ongoing care – once the rhino begins to be calmer and their health is more stable the blindfold and ear plugs will be removed. They will be offered milk from large bottles with a teat on it so it is like drinking from their mother. It will take a number of days and possibly weeks for the rhino to start trusting the carers enough and drinking sufficient quantities of milk.
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Growing Stronger – the rhino will continue to be hand fed milk from a bottle to ensure that they gain weight and strength. The rhino will continue to build trust and a bond with their carers, gradually starting to feel safe. The rhino will have an area outside that he or she can explore, although this will be a slow process as there will be lots of new smells and noises especially of other rhinos for the baby to get used to.

Making friends – once the rhino is stronger and is eating regularly and gaining weight the carers will identify some of the other rhinos that could become friends with the new orphan. They are likely to be orphans who are still young but who are settled in the orphanage. It is hoped they will form a crash, this is what a group of rhinos is called.

First steps – once the orphan friends have been identified the new rhino will have the opportunity of meeting his or her new friends. This is a nerve racking time for the carers and especially for the new rhino, it is important that this is all done slowly and carefully.
A crash – once the rhino has ventured into his new outdoor area he can meet his new friends. Often this will be just one or two other rhinos. It is hoped that they will look after the new rhino, play together and comfort each other. Rhinos are very sensitive animals and will look after the new members of the crash.

Growing up – once the rhinos form a crash they will spend all their time together. Playing together, having their milk together, sleeping together and wallowing in the mud together. They will form close bonds. They will continue to be cared for closely by the carers at the Orphanage and will be weighed weekly to ensure they are growing and developing.

Weaning – as they grow older just like human babies they will start to be given less milk to drink and will start to eat to more like a fully grown rhino. Including eating the vegetation, the lucerne (hay) and rhino pellets for treats. Eventually they will not have any milk anymore but drink water and eat food just like human babies.
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Elephant

All grown up – when the rhino reaches around three years old the cares will have to consider whether the rhino is ready for the next step in their journey, returning to the wild. This will depend on many factors, are they old enough, are they self sufficient, i.e. not relying on their carers anymore for food and comfort, are they in a crash that could be released together and are they fit and healthy.

A secret location – once the rhino is ready to return to the wild a suitable release site will be identified. This area will need to be an area where poaching is low, an area where the rhinos can be monitored 24 hours a day and will need to be a secret location.

Final preparations – before the rhino is released he or she will be fitted with a radio collar so that their location can be tracked. The rhino will also be dehorned to make them less attractive to poachers. They will first be released into a smaller wild area so that the carers can ensure they are doing well on their own in the wild.
Return to the wild - After a few weeks if the rhino is settling well in their new habitat then they will be released into the larger area, into the wild. This is a momentous day for all involved to return the rhino to where he or she belongs, the wild. However it is also sad for the carers as they will miss the rhinos.