

Akagera National Park in Eastern Rwanda received 70 southern white rhinos from South Africa, according to Rwanda Development Board (RDB).

The move is said to be one of the largest cross-continental wildlife translocations ever undertaken. The historic operation is part of African Parks' Rhino Rewild Initiative which aims to bolster the rhino population in Akagera National Park, further positioning Rwanda as a key player in global conservation efforts.

According to the RDB, the translocation was completed in two phases of 35 rhinos each, spaced three days apart. The initiative, supported by The Howard G. Buffett Foundation, is designed to establish viable rhino populations across Africa and ensure the long-term survival of the species.

"This historic translocation reflects Rwanda's growing contribution to global conservation efforts," said Jean-Guy Afrika, CEO of RDB. "Our commitment to protecting endangered species is closely tied to our vision for sustainable tourism, where thriving wildlife and well-managed protected areas like Akagera National Park create long-term value for both visitors and communities."

The Rhino Rewild Initiative aims to relocate more than 2,000 southern white rhinos to secure, well-managed habitats across the continent. The 70 rhinos introduced into Akagera will build on a successful 2021 introduction, when 30 white rhinos were moved from and Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve in South Africa. That population has since grown to 41.

To improve their adaptability, the newly relocated rhinos were first moved within South Africa to the Munywana Conservancy, a collaboration of private and community landowners. This transition helped them acclimatize to disease exposure and climate conditions similar to those in Akagera.



The rhinos were then transported in individual steel crates over a 3,400-kilometre journey, which included road transport to Durban's King Shaka International Airport, an international flight to Kigali aboard a Boeing 747, and a final overland trip to Akagera National Park. Each group's journey took about two days, with veterinary teams monitoring the animals' health throughout.

"This translocation is just the beginning of a long-term conservation intervention," said Peter Fearnhead, CEO of African Parks. "There are still numerous risks ahead,

but with the safe arrival of all 70 animals and a dedicated team at Akagera, they have a real opportunity to thrive.”

Dale Wepener, Warden and Conservation Manager of the Munywana Conservancy, echoed the importance of collaboration: “Projects like this directly embody the ethos of our conservancy — expanding green frontiers and creating new strongholds for species of conservation significance.”

Now safely in Rwanda, the rhinos will be closely monitored by a dedicated veterinary team to ensure they adapt well to their new environment. The move was facilitated by a strategic partnership between RDB, African Parks, the Munywana Conservancy, and global conservation donors including the Rob Walton Foundation and the Pershing Square Foundation.