



## The rising role of women in conservation

Empowering women in Zambia

## Rhinos: what we see in 2023

An update on populations and challenges

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2023



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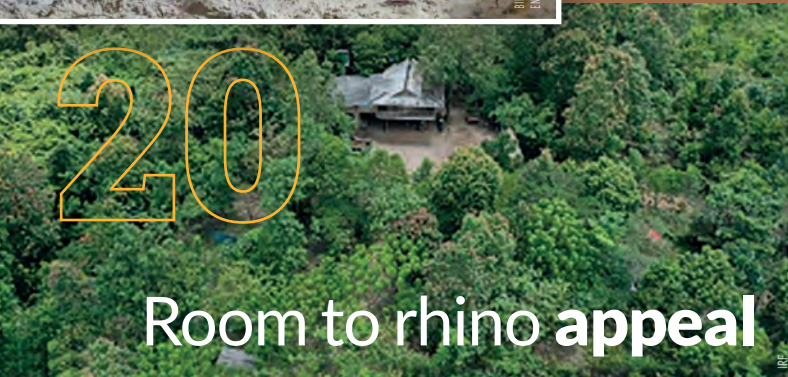


a new HOPE



RIHUMAS KUALA, INDONESIA MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT & FORESTRY

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# Coming full circle

Conservation isn't a challenge well-suited to people who like simple solutions. As one of the largest land mammals remaining on the planet, rhinos are dependent upon extensive areas connected to intricate webs of other species.

Additionally, rhinos are threatened by networks of organised criminals, spreading through shifting channels to different consumers. The five rhino species sit at the nexus of these two huge global threats to nature – illegal wildlife trade and loss of habitat, exacerbated by climate change – acting as important indicators for biodiversity. And the complexities of these threats mean that saving rhinos means saving other species, ecosystems and the people linked to them, too.

Ecosystems and crime networks both consist of a myriad of interconnections and cycles – like life. Sometimes we find ourselves taking one path and ending up somewhere completely unexpected, sometimes we take a path that loops full circle back to where we started. As some of you may know, I am currently on the second of those paths. After volunteering and then working for Save the Rhino in the late 1990s,

I moved to Africa to study black rhino ecology and help grow their numbers. Then, as the poaching threats to rhinos increased, I shifted to working for TRAFFIC and then WWF on illegal wildlife trade. It is a huge honour and great pleasure to now come full circle, back at the amazing organisation that is Save the Rhino.

Global rhino numbers are also changing, with different waves of poaching crises and other threats driving numbers down and successful conservation actions driving their recovery.

The latest information released by the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group shows that last year white rhino numbers increased for the first time in a decade, to more than 16,800 – a great achievement after 15 years of intense poaching losses.

At the other end of the scale, the very recent birth of a female Sumatran rhino calf at the Sanctuary in Way Kambas is also welcome news though serves as a critical reminder that there are fewer than 50 individuals of this entire species left.

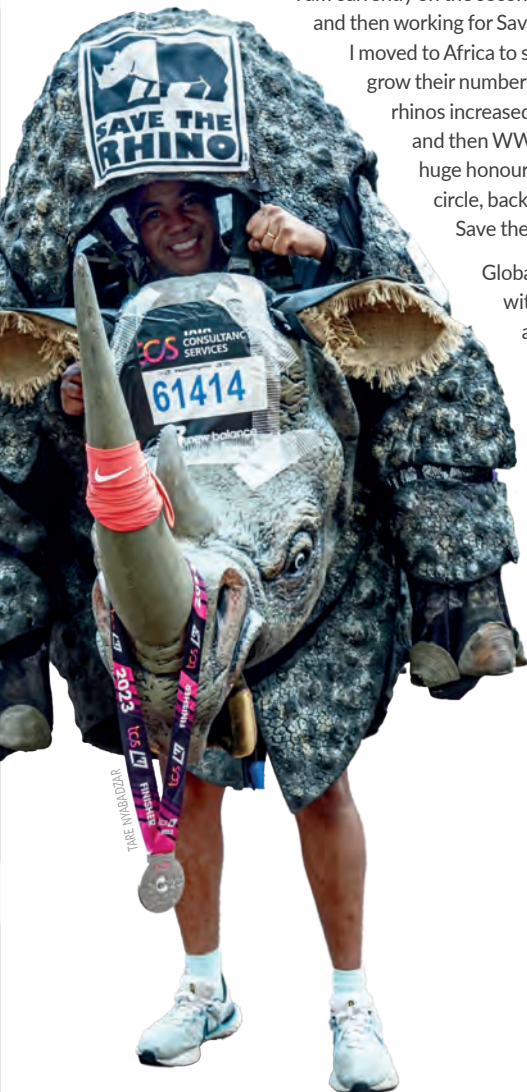
**In February 2024, it will be 30 years since David Stirling and Johnny Roberts created Save the Rhino**

Thankfully, Save the Rhino isn't a quick fix solution kind of organisation. We're adaptable, knowledgeable and determined. But most of all, we're in it for rhinos, wild places and the people around them, through every up and down, for the long haul. In February 2024, it will be 30 years since David Stirling and Johnny Roberts created Save the Rhino.

As we enter our third decade, we start a new phase with much to reflect and look back on – and much more to look forward to and do – we look forward to continuing to share our journey with you.



**Dr Jo Shaw**  
CEO, Save the Rhino International





# Your impact

Whilst rhinos remain under threat, we are making progress. Your passion and support helps us provide funding, resources and expertise to our partners around the world. Together, we are making a positive impact. Here are a few highlights from the past 12 months.



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## Africa-wide

### Providing insurance for rangers

It may not be glamorous or exciting, but we can all understand the value of insurance, especially when things go wrong. Yet, for the brave rangers that work in difficult and dangerous conditions every day, having access to health and life insurance isn't guaranteed.

Last year, thanks to many of you, ForRangers helped to provide more than 3,200 rangers across 62 protected areas with access to life and health insurance. The cover has ensured several rangers can receive the urgent and effective medical treatment they need, without having to worry about the costs.



**3,200**  
RANGERS

**62** PROTECTED  
areas







SORILIN ZAMAN



## India

### Expanding space for Greater one-horned rhinos

Thanks to consistent conservation activities, the Greater one-horned rhino population is heading towards recovery. With more than 4,000 individuals at the last official count, their growing number means they are reaching capacity in current locations.

In Manas National Park, India, your donations have supported efforts to restore key habitats by reducing the impact of invasive species and planting native grasses, in turn providing secure areas for these incredible rhinos to thrive.



BOO PANGSIAH, INDONESIA MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT & FORESTRY



## Indonesia

### A new Sumatran rhino!

The Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas National Park is now home to nine rhinos, after the birth of a new calf in September 2023. The rhinos are watched over day and night, protected by rangers and cared for by specialist onsite vets.

The new baby represents hope for a species that's in urgent trouble. We're doing everything we can to support and protect all Sumatran rhinos.

*Find out more on page 19.*

BRO HUMAS KLHK

## Newborn Sumatran rhino calf 30 September 2023



## Kenya

### A zero-poaching year in Kenya

Whilst poaching continues to be an intense threat in other countries, Kenya's rhinos remain well-protected. In 2022, the country achieved a great success: zero rhino poaching! It is the second time in three years this record has been achieved (2020 was also a zero-poaching year, the first time since 1999).

With almost 2,000 rhinos across the country, representing the world's third-largest rhino population, protecting them and helping them to grow in number is essential. Alongside our partners and thanks to your donations, we're supporting efforts to ensure they have enough safe, resilient and connected places to live.

BOGAN CONSERVANCY



# 2,000 RHINOS zero poaching 2020, 2022





Black rhino  
*Diceros bicornis*  
In-situ population<sup>1</sup> 6,487

<CR>

**IUCN RED LIST CLASSIFICATION**  
**Critically Endangered** Considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

White rhino  
*Ceratotherium simum*  
In-situ population<sup>1</sup> 16,803

<NT>

**IUCN RED LIST CLASSIFICATION**  
**Near Threatened** Is close to qualifying for or is likely to qualify for a threatened category in the near future.

The Northern white rhino subspecies is functionally extinct, with only two individuals (both female) left. The Southern white rhino accounts for all other white rhinos.

Javan rhino  
*Rhinoceros sondaicus*  
In-situ population<sup>1</sup> 76

<CR>

**IUCN RED LIST CLASSIFICATION**  
**Critically Endangered** Considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

Greater one-horned rhino  
*Rhinoceros unicornis*  
In-situ population<sup>1</sup> 4,018

<NT>

**IUCN RED LIST CLASSIFICATION**  
**Vulnerable** Considered to be facing a high risk of extinction in the wild.

Sumatran rhino  
*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*  
In-situ population<sup>1</sup> Estimated 34-47

<CR>

**IUCN RED LIST CLASSIFICATION**  
**Critically Endangered** Considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

## Rhinos: what we see in 2023

The latest updates on global rhino numbers give cause for both optimism and concern. The situation remains extremely tough, especially for the two species in Indonesia. Yet, there are positive trends – predominantly in Africa – and signs of hope for all five species.

### The ongoing impact of poaching

In 2022, there were 561 rhinos killed across Africa, a rise from 501 in 2021 and 503 in 2020. As in previous years, most of the rhinos poached on the continent were in South Africa. However, the areas facing the greatest pressure have shifted within the country. Fewer incidents were recorded year-on-year in Kruger National Park, which had previously been the poaching hotspot. Instead, in 2022 and so far in 2023, criminal syndicates have targeted reserves in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). Between January 2022 and July 2023, 387 rhinos were poached in the Province, compared to 126 between January 2020 and July 2021.

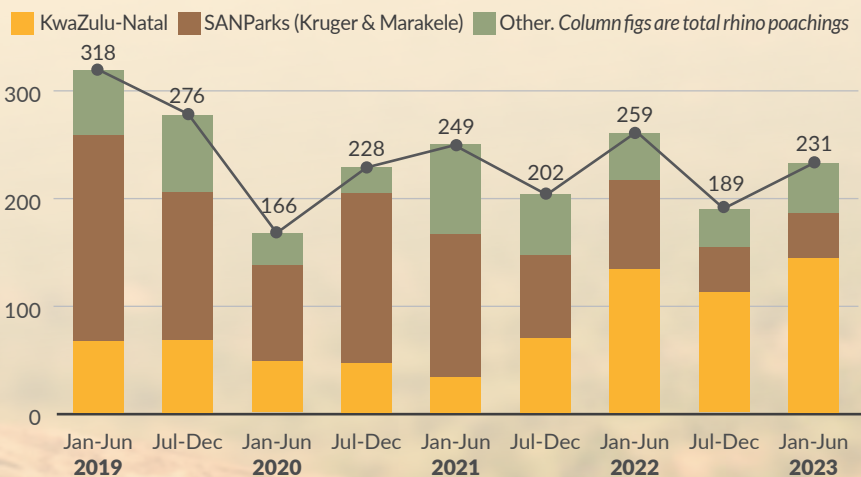
The threats from organised crime networks impact not only rhinos but also the people protecting them. Rangers in KZN continue to do everything they can to keep rhinos safe, but they are facing huge challenges and often under-resourced. Alongside our partners in KZN, we support ranger teams with vital equipment to help them every day. Many of you generously donated towards our Christmas appeal last year, helping to raise almost £50,000 in support of anti-poaching efforts in KZN. Your support went towards improving rangers' accommodation and equipment, renovating their on-duty houses

and upgrading technology, to enable dedicated teams at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and uMkhuze Game Reserve to work as safely and effectively as possible.

Whilst the number of rhinos poached remains a concern, there has been a marked decline from the peak of the crisis in 2015, when 1,349 rhinos were poached across Africa. And there are important milestones to be celebrated: Kenya recorded zero rhino poaching losses during 2022! Importantly, the continental poaching rate for Africa now sits below the rate of population growth, meaning that more rhinos are being born than being killed and numbers are on the up!

In Asia, poaching incidents are infrequent, but they do occur. Between January and September 2023, five Greater one-horned rhinos were poached in India and Nepal. Efforts to keep the species protected, boost investigation skills and increase the knowledge of people working in the judicial system are ongoing. The rise in illegal activities within Ujung Kulon National Park is a serious concern, particularly given reports of ongoing investigations by the Government of Indonesia into the recent unnatural death of a Javan rhino.

Total rhinos poached in South Africa 2019–June 2023 Six-month periods





## Current populations

On World Rhino Day this year, we shared the good news that three rhino species have increased in population size since 2021. What's more, these changes meant an increase in the overall number of rhinos in the world for the first time since 2015—reaching just beyond 27,000 at the end of 2022.

The increase in the global rhino population has been thanks to dedicated protection and strategic biological management interventions resulting in higher numbers of both African species (**black and white rhinos**). These interventions (including the expansion of rhino range due to establishment of new populations) have resulted in more rhinos being born and higher growth rates, despite simultaneous increases in poaching losses across the continent.

In India and Nepal, **Greater one-horned rhino** numbers have also increased slightly, meaning an ongoing positive trend for the species. As with black and white rhinos, Greater one-horned rhinos remain under threat from international trafficking networks and keeping every animal safe is crucial. In addition, they need additional secure and connected spaces for new populations to maintain their growth.

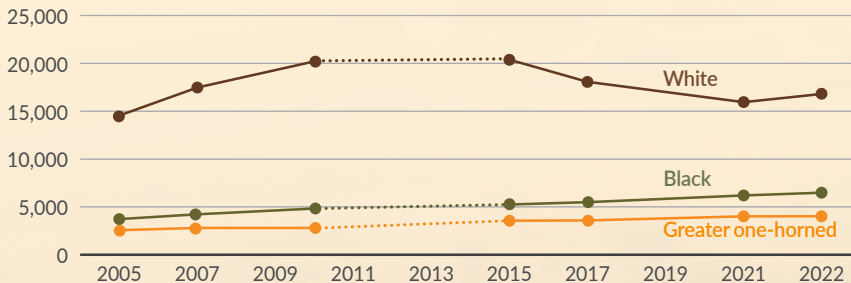


The two rhino species in Indonesia face a much more critical situation. Official government reports on **Sumatran rhinos** estimate that fewer than 80 individuals remain, though recent reports put this number at potentially just 34–47. With so few animals left in small and fragmented patches of dense forest, Sumatran rhinos seem to struggle to find each other and mate. Yet there is hope. The Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS) in Way Kambas National Park was created to provide rhinos with round-the-clock care to maximise

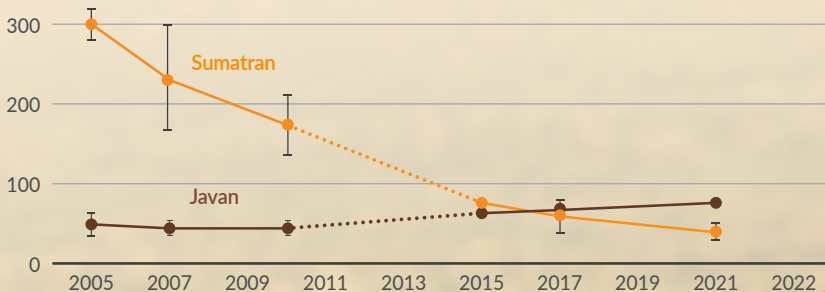
their breeding success. On 30 September 2023, there was exciting news demonstrating the value of this sanctuary, when a female rhino was born (find out more about her on page 19).

A new calf also recently joined the last remaining **Javan rhino** population: camera traps recorded the first sighting of an animal of approximately six months old between July and September 2023. However, with an estimated total population of just 76 individuals, all of which live in Ujung Kulon National Park, the species remains at considerable risk. Not only does this Park occur on the western tip of the island of Java close to an active volcano, there are also signs of a rise in illegal incursions and activities in the Park. It's also concerning that 12 rhinos in this population have not been recorded for at least three years.

### White, Black and Greater one-horned rhino population estimates 2005–22<sup>2</sup>



### Sumatran and Javan rhino population estimates 2005–21<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>In the rhino range states in which they naturally occur.

<sup>2</sup>Population numbers are as reported to CITES by the African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups



# Rhino running around the world

Working in African conservation for 32 years, with most of this time directly focusing on rhino breeding, reintroductions and anti-poaching, **Brad Schroder** is one of our most passionate and knowledgeable fundraisers. His journey started in London in 2014, and almost 10 years later, he's completed an incredible fundraising challenge.

This is Brad's story.

**Brad Schroder** | Fundraiser



London 2014, 2015



Great Wall Tianjin 2016



In 2014, Cathy Dean, Save the Rhino's then CEO, convinced me to run my first London Marathon in the "rhino". Whilst I, like many others that cross that tough marathon finish line, asked "Why did I sign up for this?" and initially stated, "Never again. Ever", inside, I knew I felt compelled to take it on again.

After a few beers, I created a group called the Running Rhinos, alongside my friend Greg Canning (above, left) and other participants from around the world. We had a big aim. To complete marathons, in rhino costumes, on all seven continents, raising funds and stimulating awareness of the plight of rhinos.

Sadly, Greg picked up a kidney disease, halting his rhino journey. But he supported me the entire way.



Antarctica 2023







## Sydney 2017



## Marakele, South Africa 2019



Over the next few years, I 'ticked off' marathons around the world. Initially, taking on London one more time in 2015, before completing the Great Wall Marathon in China, Sydney Marathon in Australia and Marakele Marathon in South Africa. Then Covid-19 got in the way.

By 2022, I had three continents to go. Thankfully, my knees hadn't quite given up on me. In 2022 I ran the Rio Marathon in Brazil and the Royal Victoria Marathon in Canada.

In March 2023, after much planning, delays, and packing, I arrived in Antarctica and took on the world's southernmost marathon. Finally, the original aim had been achieved.

The journey has been long and tough, but utterly amazing. One of the greatest rewards I received during this journey was the understanding of how little the world knows about the plight of rhinos or any threatened wildlife species. For me, having the opportunity to present and create awareness throughout the world has been a true privilege.

With my incredible, passionate and supportive friends, family, colleagues and other loved ones, we have raised more than £20,000. All funds raised throughout the marathons have been directly sent to Save the Rhino, so I can officially say that after almost a decade of running in the rhino, both my body and bank balance are broken! However, given the opportunity, I would do it again in a heartbeat for such an amazing cause.

I challenge each and every one of you reading this article to help Save the Rhino by running in a rhino, donating, raising awareness or doing anything you can. If we had a million people donate just £1, we would raise a £1,000,000 – small steps make huge progress – so we need your help!

I leave you with these amazing words for our five rhino species around the world:

*"There may be days when I can't help you, but the day will never come that I won't try."* – unknown



## Royal Victoria 2022



## Rio de Janeiro 2022



ALL IMAGES BRAD SCOOTER



# Laikipia Rhino-Range Expansion

As Kenya prepares to launch the Recovery and Action Plan for Black Rhinos in Kenya (2022 – 2026), 7<sup>th</sup> edition ('the strategy') we should take a moment to celebrate some successes in rhino conservation – for a change.

**Jamie Gaymer** | Chair, Association of Private and community Land Rhino Sanctuaries





**Operational conservancy areas of Laikipia, Kenya**

Rhino application pending

Current rhino range conservancy

9 km  
5 miles

Through the duration of our last 5-year strategy term, Kenya has managed to reduce rhino poaching to less than 1% of the national population, per year. Whilst we celebrate this achievement, it has left us in a somewhat unusual situation in that we have effectively run out of secure space to accommodate our fast-growing rhino populations.

We have approached, and in some circumstances exceeded, our ecological carrying capacity for rhinos in many reserves. This is having negative consequences in the breeding performance of some populations and exacerbating negative rhino social dynamics.

**Kenya's Long-term Vision<sup>1</sup> is to have a metapopulation in Kenya of at least 2,000 Eastern black rhinos in suitable habitats by 2037 and 1,450 rhinos by Kenya's Vision 2030, as a global heritage.**

Ever cognisant of the imminent poaching threat, our focus has turned to rhino-range expansion during the current strategy. We urgently need to secure more suitable habitat for rhinos so that we can encourage optimal breeding as we strive towards our strategic vision. The following extract is taken from the strategy:

*"There are significant opportunities for establishing new private and community sanctuaries in the Laikipia region, some of which are at the final stages of commissioning. The longer-term strategy of merging the private and community sanctuaries that are in close proximity to each other should also be initiated during this Plan period".*

The Association of Private and Community Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS) has developed a draft strategy for rhino-



range expansion in Laikipia that could see up to 680,000 acres secured for rhinos during the next 15 years. The concept includes government, private and community sanctuaries under a collaborative and coordinated approach to conservation in a contiguous landscape.

With the endorsement of the Kenyan Government through the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Wildlife Research and Training Institute, County Government and the Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Heritage, the APLRS will embark on the implementation of this ambitious plan together with partners and, importantly, being driven by the local stakeholders.

The APLRS also seeks to support other rhino-range expansion initiatives in the country. Kenya's partnership approach to rhino conservation is, perhaps, one of the reasons for our recent successes in achieving our national rhino strategic objectives.

**'Ecological carrying capacity' is the number of organisms that an ecosystem can sustainably support: in this case, the total population of rhinos that can live sustainably in a habitat.**

<sup>1</sup> Action Plan for Black Rhinos in Kenya (2022-2026), 7<sup>th</sup> edition

## The rhinos are back in town

In April 2023, after a few years of cancellations and postponements, the London Marathon returned to its traditional springtime routine for the first time since 2019. Of course, rhinos were spotted crashing through the world's largest fundraising event. And what an event it was!

Sam Lucock | Michael Hearn Intern 2022–23

On 23 April 2023, 67 incredible people – 12 of whom were wearing rhino costumes – took to the streets of London, taking in the infectious atmosphere and clocking up an amazing 1,755.4 miles between them (26.2 miles each) all in the name of rhino conservation.

Despite it being a very soggy (British) day, the weather did nothing to dampen spirits – and, truth be told, our bright sunset yellow shirts provided a jovial juxtaposition to the grey skies. At the time of writing, the team has raised an incredible £107,253! All those bucket collections, bake sales, golf days, murder mystery events, organised runs, and pub quizzes will go a long way in helping to protect rhinos.



**Charlott Laurie** (below, with Chris 'Rhino Boy' Green) applied for a place with us in London Marathon 2023 with a passion for conservation. "Save the Rhino has always been a charity that I have looked up to, so I felt incredibly proud being able to run for them. The team were amazing from start to finish. I loved being able to meet and run with some of the rangers who work incredibly hard. It was an awesome opportunity to hear first-hand about the work that they do to protect rhinos."



I loved being able to meet and run with some of the rangers who work incredibly hard.

Charlotte Laurie





Among the team was a group of rangers who work to protect black rhinos and other endangered species living in North Luangwa National Park, Zambia (*left*). **Lawrence Muyelesa** crossed the finishing line in an impressive 3:19:22, making him the fastest of the group. He was joined by his colleagues, **Luke Miller, Duncan Mumba, Norman Muchelenje, Duncan Mulenga** and **Royd Kasonde**, all finishing in under four hours!

Having the opportunity to run in a rhino costume was an incredible experience and a real pleasure.

Tom McQuade



**Tom McQuade**, (*left*) who has raised almost £3,000, charged through London as a rhino this year. "What an absolute privilege it was to run the London Marathon on behalf of Save the Rhino!"



**Kellie Clark** (*above*) had previously completed the London Marathon in other (homemade!) costumes. This year, she chose the rhino as her outfit of choice. "I'm going to be honest and say running in the costume was harder than I expected!"

"But the cheers and chanting from the crowd made me feel like a superhero! I've loved being part of the team, especially with the support and guidance from Sam, who helped so much with fundraising.

"Would I do it again? Absolutely."



"I've always admired Save the Rhino's work but to have the opportunity to run in a rhino costume was an incredible experience and a real pleasure. It was very hard at times, but I had encouragement from other rhino runners also navigating their way round. Their support and kind words supported my determination in getting to the finish line."

Running alongside his friend **Anthony Bonnett**, (*left*), we had a rhino in the ranks who answered to the name of "Chippy"! "Chippy" was operated by first-time marathon runner **Tare Nyabadza** (*far left*). "Running the London Marathon in costume was an unplanned but great decision, offering a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I couldn't resist. The cheers and shouts of 'Go Rhino' echoed from delighted spectators throughout the race, reminding me of the affection that people have for the costumes and the charity! As the race concluded, my connection with the charity only strengthened and I look forward to running again in the future, (maybe) with a costume!"



# Rainfall and resilient landscapes

Borana is currently going through a dry cycle and this will be our third consecutive year of below-average rainfall. This prolonged dry cycle is something that comes around every 14 to 16 years and has a significant impact on the ability for vegetation to grow and sustain itself, due to the increased pressure from browse species, like black rhinos. In turn, the animals have less food, negatively impacting their nutrition, breeding success, and overall population growth.

**Izzy Voorspuy** | Conservation and Sustainability Officer, Borana Conservancy

At our last annual aerial count, we saw a large reduction in the number of elephants on the Borana landscape, when compared to the last two years. This was as expected, as elephants can migrate into higher altitude areas, which have more rainfall and therefore better forage.

In comparison, given the importance of their security, rhinos cannot migrate into new

landscapes. In turn, we must pay close attention to every rhino during dry seasons, and our monitors have continued to conduct body-condition assessments every month to check the health of each animal. Fortunately, all have remained in good condition. However, in 2022, we decided to begin a supplementary feeding programme for large herbivores that were struggling, particularly white rhino and buffalo.

Two main feeding sites were established, and a mix of lucerne and Rhodes grass was provided regularly to support the nutrition of these populations. Of course, whilst this has been necessary, it is not ideal. Rather, we would like to focus attention on improving the quality of habitat and rangelands, using livestock as a management tool.







**Ecological Outcome Verification, or EOv, is a science-based method of ensuring healthier soil and in turn, more resilient habitats.**

Thankfully, the landscape has remained resilient throughout this prolonged dry spell. The black and white rhinos across Borana have continued to have stable body conditions, and we have not seen large numbers of other species, like buffalo, deteriorate. All this is because of continued rangeland management practice supported by Ecological Outcome Verification (EOV) monitoring.

In December 2022, we measured 35 EOv sites across the Conservancy, recording baselines from the data we received. Going forward, our monitoring will be conducted annually, each December, and will be used to monitor and inform management decisions and interventions. This information will help ensure that our planning is having the desired positive effect on the ecosystem and, therefore, the wildlife that it supports.

As our rangelands continue to improve, we have noticed an unintended consequence associated with this: our dams are not filling up as quickly as they used to. When it does rain or there is a storm, rainwater is now being well infiltrated into the soil. Through our partnership with Save the Rhino and its donors, we have been able to address this water-storage issue, improving water reticulation thanks to investment into new waterpoints.

Despite the low rainfall, 2022 was another great year for the rhino population on Borana Conservancy. For the eighth consecutive year, we celebrated zero poaching, and our rhino numbers continue to grow. Additionally, our aerial count shone the light on an animal closely related to rhinos – our Grévy's zebra population grew significantly. These successes highlight the importance of resilient, connected ecosystems that provide forage, shelter and safe spaces for species as they respond to changes in our climate.



ALL IMAGES BORANA CONSERVANCY



# Empowering people to engage in conservation

To build knowledge and positive attitudes about our shared ecosystem, one approach is to invest in community conservation outreach that links to specific conservation outcomes. This type of outreach plays a vital role in fostering environmental stewardship and sustainable practices at a grassroots level.

Stephen Gachagua | Conservation Education Officer, Mazingira Yetu, Borana Conservancy

It involves actively engaging with the people living in nearby communities, empowering individuals to become active participants in conservation efforts. In turn, community-outreach initiatives help to create a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the environment.

**By organising nature walks, local dialogues and education activities in schools, participants can develop a first-hand understanding of their local ecosystem's value and vulnerability.**

A key aspect of community conservation outreach is raising awareness about the importance of biodiversity, ecosystem services and the impacts of human activities on the environment. Through outreach educational programmes, workshops, and interactive events, community members gain knowledge about conservation principles and the need

STEPHEN GACHAGUA

for sustainable practices. This awareness helps individuals make informed decisions and adopt behaviours that minimise their ecological footprint.

Moreover, community outreach programmes foster a sense of connection and belonging to the environment. By organising nature walks, local dialogues and education activities in schools, participants can develop first-hand an understanding of their local ecosystem's value and vulnerability. Bringing these experiential learning opportunities into our strategy for the Mazingira Yetu Education Programme has, so far, helped us engage more deeply with learners, cultivating a strong appreciation for the environment and motivating individuals to protect it.

Engaging communities in conservation efforts also involves collaborative problem-solving and decision-making. By facilitating and encouraging community dialogues, participatory workshops, and partnerships with local organisations, we can empower individuals to contribute their knowledge, perspectives, and traditional wisdom towards conservation initiatives. This inclusive approach ensures that local communities are actively involved in shaping and implementing sustainable solutions that are culturally appropriate and effective.

In conclusion, community conservation outreach is a powerful and necessary tool for engaging and empowering local communities in environmental stewardship. By raising awareness, fostering a sense of connection, facilitating collaboration and offering skills-development opportunities, programmes can create a foundation for sustainable practices and the protection of natural resources.

Ultimately, these initiatives help build resilient communities that value and actively contribute to the conservation of our shared environment. At Mazingira Yetu, this is what we aim to do.







## Establishing elephant exclusion zones for rhinos

Elephants are a keystone species, playing a crucial role in maintaining an ecosystem's health and functioning. Their presence contributes to seed dispersal, vegetation management, and overall biodiversity.

Dr Dominic Maringa | Head of Conservation and Wildlife  
Lewa Wildlife Conservancy

However, as Lewa's elephant population has increased (a result of increased insecurity in northern Kenya since the 1980s and land fragmentation in southern and eastern Kenya), they are rapidly changing Lewa Wildlife Conservancy's plant life. In turn, this is impacting the food available for species like black rhinos.

Since 1995, to reduce the impact of the increasing elephant pressure, Lewa has created 'exclusion zones'. The zones are relatively small areas that are separated from the wider landscape using electric fences. They prevent access to elephants (which can freely migrate to find forage elsewhere) and provide an environment where woody vegetation can grow and recover. Importantly, these zones have become areas of high productivity for black rhino food.

The black rhino is an iconic species for Lewa and their seasonal dietary responses are complex. They are mixed feeders throughout the year with no preference for acacia, especially during the wet season. Exclusion zones not only provide black rhinos with various types of woody vegetation, but harbour herbaceous layers, a vital black rhino dietary component.

To maximise wildlife dynamics and maintain ecological balance, it is important to ensure that the exclusion zones are interconnected in a fair distribution across the landscape. This helps facilitate the movement of animals around the Conservancy, preventing species from concentrating in specific areas, which could lead to intra-species fighting and ecosystem degradation. By avoiding wildlife hotspots, conservation efforts can be spread more evenly to support a healthy diversity of species across the landscape.



Beyond acting as a food source for black rhinos, exclusion zones bring other benefits. As a diverse, unique and protected area within a much larger landscape, the zones can act as carbon sinks, reduce habitat degradation and attract other endangered species, including leopards and lions.

Whilst the creation of zones is important, carefully managing them is also essential. Rotating exclusion zones can be a useful approach to dealing with elephant pressure, allowing new areas to recover and regrow, and supporting the needs of elephants too.

Of course, elephants are an iconic species and across the African continent, they remain endangered. Conserving their population remains important, and strategies like the creation of exclusion zones are vital to enable successful coexistence with elephants, while still achieving the desired vegetation and biodiversity across a landscape to sustain other species.

To date, Lewa has created 42 exclusion zones, covering 10,152 acres (approximately 11% of the Lewa-Borana Landscape).



# The Javan rhino

A century of teetering on the brink

“It seems that this unfortunate animal will not exist long except in the Peninsula of Ujung Kulon in West Java”.

This was the prediction of one Charles W. Loch before concluding his paper in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* in 1937, in which he provided accounts of hunting expeditions that took place in search of Javan rhinos for sport and museum collections.

Jimmy Rutherford | Programmes Officer,  
Save the Rhino International

Specifying the likely known remaining populations at the time, Loch gave his approximate estimates for each including “Probably Extinct” in Assam, “a few, 6 say” in Palembang, Sumatra, “8” in Siam (now Thailand), “4” in Burma (now Myanmar), “3 say” in South Laos, and “12” remaining on the Ujung Kulon Peninsula.

**Today, all our hopes do indeed rest on the single, remnant population in Ujung Kulon.**

Whilst these population estimates from the 1930s would, by today’s standards, be seen as unreliable, they do reveal an awareness of a species recognised almost a century ago to be teetering on the brink of extinction.

Go further back to the 18<sup>th</sup> Century however, and the story was quite different. Javan rhinoceroses were reported to be rather common, with their reputation as an agricultural pest even causing the then Indonesian Government to encourage their persecution. Since then, widespread destruction of their lowland forest habitats, combined with excessive sport hunting and hunting for Traditional Chinese Medicine followed.

By 2010, 73 years after Loch’s prediction and after the species had somehow survived the destruction of the Viet Nam War, Viet Nam’s last Javan rhino was poached.

© JIMMY RUTHERFORD



## A new hope for Sumatran rhinos!

In the dense forests of Sumatra, there's a glimmer of hope shining through the shadows. On 30 September, 2023, the Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry announced brilliant news – a new Sumatran rhino calf was born, joining the eight other rhinos living at the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary (SRS).

The female calf, who has not yet been named, is a symbol of hope for her species. She is only the fourth rhino to be born at the SRS in Way Kambas National Park and the third baby for her mum, Ratu.

Indonesia's Minister of Environment and Forestry, Siti Nurbaya, shared, "This news is certainly happy news, not only for the Indonesian people but also the world. I give my highest appreciation to the parties involved in the birth of this Sumatran rhino. Hopefully, we can continue to receive happy news from the births of Sumatran rhinos and other protected animals in the future."

Following 18 months on from the birth of Sedah Mirah, another female rhino who was born to first-time mum Rosa in March 2022, the new calf is settling into the early stages of her life at the SRS alongside mum, Ratu. At 23 years old, Ratu is an experienced parent, having nurtured her first calf, Andatu, in 2012, and then Delilah in 2016. Like the calves before her, this new arrival is a great cause for celebration, whilst also serving as a reminder of the alarming state of the Sumatran rhino population. With fewer than 80 left, and the IUCN's estimate of potentially just 34–47 individuals, Sumatran rhinos are in desperate need of help. Not only are their numbers frighteningly low, but the remaining rhinos live in small, isolated populations across fragmented habitats within Sumatra and Borneo.

Alongside our partners, we're working to protect the last remaining animals and encourage breeding to build their numbers back up. Since the early 2000s, in collaboration with the International Rhino Foundation (IRF), we have been helping to fund organisations and communities working around the clock to protect Sumatran rhinos, including Yayasan Badak Indonesia, Way Kambas National Park, the Indonesian Rhino Initiative and Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry.

Thanks to generous supporters, our grants have helped to support the Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary in Way Kambas, as well as funding the Rhino Protection Units working to find and protect individual rhinos in Indonesia. We have also contributed towards increasing the capacity of the Sanctuary, doubling the space available for current and future rhinos. The state-of-the-art breeding facility is a major achievement, and will be essential for this new calf and, we hope, more like her.



Today, all our hopes do indeed rest on the single, remnant population in Ujung Kulon. But the threats haven't disappeared. Invasive plants shadow their preferred food sources, whilst diseases, genetic defects, and potential poachers are a constant concern.

Ever present is the fear of the nearby volcano, Anak Krakatau. In December 2018, Anak Krakatau erupted (above), causing a devastating tsunami that killed hundreds of people and displaced tens of thousands more living on the coasts of Indonesia. The world's last Javan rhinos were just two kilometres away from the tsunami's landfall.

When it comes to Javan rhino conservation, we are on borrowed time. With much of Ujung Kulon National Park being low-lying forest, and many rhinos often frequenting areas close to the coast, it is – worryingly – only a matter of time before an eruption occurs again.

With so few Javan rhinos remaining, protecting every animal and improving their existing habitat is key for their conservation. So, too, is establishing an additional habitat within the species' former range.





# Room to rhino

## Help us restore Sumatra's rainforest



In modern times, few people have seen an elusive and rare Sumatran rhino in the wild. Yet these Critically Endangered rhinos aren't only far-removed from people, but also from each other.

It didn't used to be this way. These descendants of the prehistoric woolly rhinos once roamed across vast areas of Southeast Asia, possibly numbering more than 50,000. But after centuries of hunting, human encroachment and conflict, the few Sumatran rhinos that exist today cling on in fragments of primary forest across the islands of Borneo and Sumatra. Isolated from other members of their species, individual rhinos rarely meet, making breeding almost impossible.

Way Kambas National Park, in southern Sumatra, remains a refuge for Sumatran rhinos. Home to the vital Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary, and with a handful of wild rhinos thought to be still living in the Park, protection officers regularly patrol the 1,300 km<sup>2</sup> area. Yet, despite its importance for Sumatran rhinos, Way Kambas is the only protected area in Indonesia without a buffer zone.

Villages surround the National Park on all sides. And, while many local people are very proud of their wildlife, the efforts of so many people to maintain their livelihoods and raise their

families has inevitably led to encroachment inside the Park and the destruction of vital rhino habitat. Around one-third of the rhinos' rainforest home has already been lost.

Park authorities have worked closely with local communities to reduce encroachment, and today, as in Europe and many other parts of the world, local farmers are recognised and rewarded for their role as environmental stewards as well as food producers. This is an effective conservation strategy – because rainforest plant species grow so quickly, reforested areas can recover within just a few years, restoring vital habitat not only for rhinos, but also elephants, tigers, tapirs and the myriad other animals and plants that comprise this diverse and precious ecosystem.

Yet much land originally cleared for illegal farming remains degraded and resources for this essential conservation work are scarce. This year, a funding shortfall means that important habitat restoration may not be able to go ahead. And so our Christmas appeal, Room to rhino, aims to plug this funding gap, supporting local people to plant seedlings and bring this landscape back to life. As people in Europe and beyond set up their own trees over the Christmas period, we can help our partners in Way Kambas National Park to plant trees in a very different landscape, providing much-needed habitat and food for Sumatra's endangered wildlife.



With your help and alongside our organisational and community partners in the Park, **we can restore much of this land to provide much-needed habitat** for Sumatra's endangered wildlife

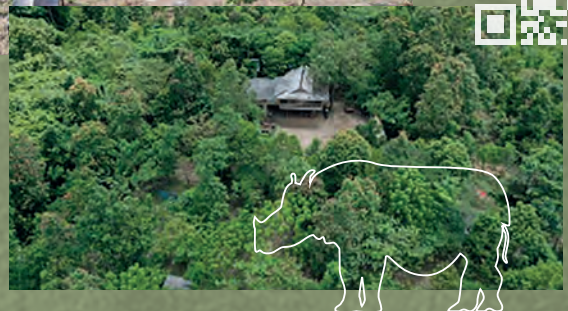


Our goal is ambitious but achievable: **to raise £20,000 to support the transformation of three sites in Way Kambas.**

Your contribution will help fund the growth of native tree species, with local experts and community members driving the restoration project forwards.

To donate towards Room to rhino, simply scan the QR code opposite or visit

[www.savetherhino.org.uk/roomtorhino](http://www.savetherhino.org.uk/roomtorhino)



There are fewer than **80 Sumatran rhinos** with IUCN estimating just **34 to 47**

**What will the appeal help to fund?**

- Land preparation, making and installing stakes, providing seeds, digging planting holes, and planting
- Guarding the reforested areas against wild fires and creating fire breaks
- Producing seedlings to plant
- Organic fertilisation and maintenance of planted areas





# Just for interest (rates)...

There are some paradoxes in rhino demography. On the one hand, we need to “think big” by concentrating our efforts and resources on populations that are large enough to develop long-term genetic and demographic viability. On the other hand, we need to make an effort for every individual rhino because small numbers add up, in due course, to bigger numbers.

Raoul du Toit | Director, Lowveld Rhino Trust Senior Advisor, International Rhino Foundation

Natasha Anderson | Zimbabwe Rhino Manager and Rhino Monitor Lowveld Rhino Trust

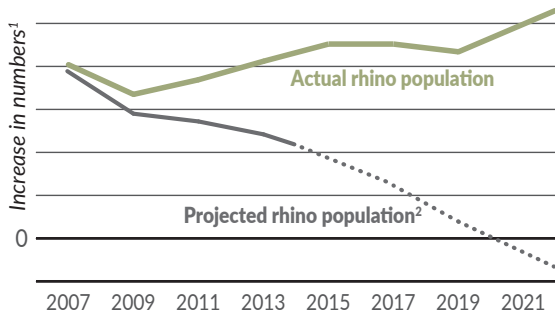
Rhinos are relatively slow-breeding animals and sometimes develop skewed sex ratios that compromise their reproductive rate. Yet, even slight gains in growth percentages, above an average level, have a compounding effect that can be surprisingly effective in enabling a rhino population to out-breed poaching attrition.

The bottom line is that, just like financial investing, the key to building numbers is to regard every percentage point of population growth as critical, to build a cushion of rhino biological capital to survive recessions and to continually work on the enabling conditions for rhinos to breed themselves out of decline, even if we can't completely prevent poaching.

From the early 1990s, the rhino populations in Zimbabwe's Lowveld region were concentrated in large enough areas of good habitat to allow significant growth. From small numbers, three of these populations have expanded significantly, despite major poaching knocks. By giving these rhinos plenty of space and mating opportunities, they have maintained biological growth rates that enable them to save themselves from long-term poaching declines.

The chart below shows, with real data<sup>1</sup>, the population status that was achieved (**Actual rhino population**) during a period when the annual biological growth rate of the black rhinos was around 10% per year. This compares with what would have happened (**Projected rhino population**) if the population had instead achieved an inherent growth rate of 7% while suffering the annual poaching losses that occurred.

Status of Lowveld rhino population 2007–21



The Lowveld Rhino Trust's star example of a single rhino who required huge effort to save, but has since repaid that effort with interest is Siabuwa. Siabuwa was rescued from the heavily poached Zambezi Valley just over 30 years ago.

She was translocated to join 36 other introduced individuals, similarly rescued in their ones, twos and fours, to form a founder population in Bubiana Conservancy in Zimbabwe's southern Lowveld. Once settled, Siabuwa's population averaged a 13% annual growth rate and has been able to maintain a significant population, despite experiencing staggering poaching losses.

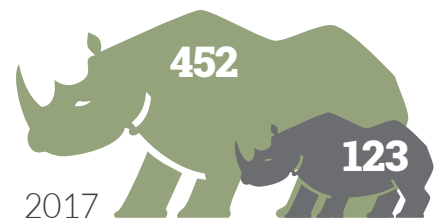
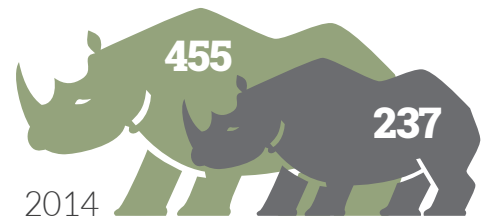
Black rhinos are socially complex animals and maintaining stable social networks is critical for their breeding performance. In these settled Lowveld populations, it is not uncommon for females to produce their first calf at five years old, as opposed to the seven-year average for the species, and to have an interval of less than 24 months, compared 30 months for most black rhinos.

Combine this with effort made to save every individual you possibly can by treating wounded animals, rescuing orphans (to put back into large, wild populations) and recovering even single stray rhinos like Siabuwa, the value of these individuals adds up.

Siabuwa, who sadly past away in August 2023 from old age, had ten calves, who have gone on to produce 28 calves of their own thus far, with a further 11 “great-grand-calves” already born and one great-grand-grand calf. A total of 50 black rhinos, with space for more.


<sup>1</sup> Actual figures redacted for security reasons.

<sup>2</sup> Because of the high poaching off-takes post-2014, the 5% calving rate simulation becomes impossible: there are simply not enough rhinos left alive.



Actual v projected rhino population By year





In her lifetime, Siabuwa had 10 calves, who in turn, have (so far) produced 28 calves of their own, with a further 11 'great-grand-calves' already born.



# The rising role of women in conservation

In the realm of conservation, female empowerment projects have emerged as a powerful force, reshaping the outlook of wildlife protection. One remarkable aspect of this movement is the growing number of female rangers.

Cesca Cooke | Grants Team Contractor, North Luangwa Conservation Programme

Penelope Konkola | Gender Diversity and Inclusion Officer

As women increasingly take up roles in a traditionally male-dominated field, they bring unique perspectives, resilience, and compassion to safeguarding our planet's precious biodiversity. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the path to becoming a female ranger is not without challenges.

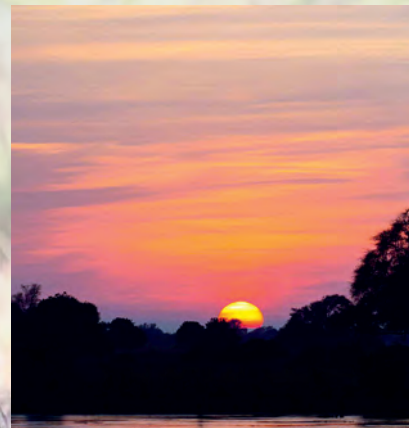
At the North Luangwa Conservation Programme, we have been supporting the inclusion of women for many years, witnessing a welcome rise in females joining the law-enforcement sector. Yet, it has never been enough to simply look at the numbers and hope for change. We must continually look at the working environment and speak to women across the conservation landscape, understanding their challenges, and implementing new approaches that boost diversity.

Two of our female rangers, Chakanga Mbulo (Canine Master Handler) and Joan Kasabula (Intern tracker in the Rhino Monitoring Unit) both have key responsibilities in the law-enforcement department and are also new mothers. They each have a unique perspective, navigating this part of their lives whilst juggling



important responsibilities and aiming to be role models in their communities.

When Chakanga was asked how she motivates other women in her community, she said, "I am treated with respect by both men and women. I am viewed as a woman who has influence and is an example for mothers with teenage daughters".

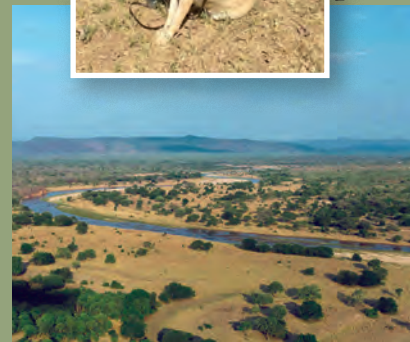






Joan spoke of how North Luangwa supports women in their law-enforcement teams, "The deliberate effort that is shown has really helped me grow personally. I am empowered every time there is an opportunity to improve my skills. The project is also flexible with what assignments are given to new and breastfeeding mothers, and this has enabled many of us mothers to continue providing for our families whilst still executing our duties."

These women are rewriting the narrative of wildlife protection in their communities. Their presence and dedication challenges gender norms and inspires young girls to envision a future beyond societal expectations, showing them that conservation knows no gender boundaries. As they uplift the next generation, the future of conservation looks brighter than ever before – a future built on inclusivity, collaboration, and the unyielding determination to protect Zambia's invaluable natural heritage.



**I am treated with respect by both men and women. I am viewed as a woman who has influence and is an example for mothers with teenage daughters.**



ALL IMAGES WANA MEADOWS UNLESS NOTED



# Preparing for rhino relocations **by supporting local communities**

Rhino translocations may seem easy, having been done successfully many times with standard protocols in place and increasingly safer drugs used for tranquilizing rhinos. But there is one component in particular that is essential for successful translocations: support from the people who will be living locally to the rhino recipient sites.

**Dr Bibhab Talukdar** | Senior Advisor, Asian Rhinos,  
International Rhino Foundation







ALL IMAGES INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION



In 2008, as part of the Indian Rhino Vision (IRV) programme (which began in 2005), it was decided that rhinos would be translocated into Manas National Park from Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary and Kaziranga National Park in Assam. To support these efforts, awareness campaigns were launched in the fringe villages of Manas National Park, providing information about the translocation project for the people living in the local communities. These campaigns proved successful. For one rhino in particular, the impact was obvious.

**After being relocated into Manas National Park, one rhino strayed out almost 50 to 60 km east, leaving the sanctuary of the Park for more than two weeks.**

After being relocated into Manas National Park, the rhino had strayed out almost 50 to 60 km east, leaving the sanctuary of the Park for more than two weeks. Recapture was difficult, taking several weeks to organise logistics and security. However, many local people around supported the capture team with food, water, and reports on which direction the rhino was moving. Local villagers also offered temporary shelter to the team, which ultimately enabled them to rescue the rhino and return him to the National Park. Without the assistance and collaboration of people living around Manas, it would have been much harder to bring this rhino home.



In our new phase of the IRV programme (which kicked off in 2022), we aim to translocate at least 30-40 rhinos to the vast, connected habitats of the Laokhowa and Burachapori Wildlife Sanctuaries. Our team, in partnership with Aaranyak, an Assam-based NGO, has initiated community outreach and support activities, to help communicate the project to people surrounding the sanctuaries. The projects aim to ensure local people benefit from rhino conservation, and empower them to be a vital line of defence in safeguarding the released rhinos from poaching.

So far, following consultation with local people and forest and police officials, we have provided communities with solar street lights along the boundary of the Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary. This not only provides additional light for people's everyday lives, but also helps them to more easily see any wild animals (including rhinos) that might stray into the village. To further garner community support, we have been working with young people living in the communities, offering training on organic compost-making and lemon cultivation. Interestingly, the planting of lemon trees provides an additional benefit, in that they reduce human-wildlife conflict by deterring animals such as elephants from entering villages.

These programmes take time, funding and knowledge to achieve success. But the results are well worth it: communities with different livelihood options, engaged in local wildlife conservation projects, and able to live alongside healthy, thriving rhino populations.







# Project **Blood Orange**

In my 22 years at Save the Rhino, one of the things I have been most excited about, because of the potential to achieve a major strike against rhino poaching, is Project Blood Orange. This is a follow-the-money investigation into a rhino poaching and trafficking syndicate operating primarily in South Africa.

Cathy Dean | Grants Manager, Save the Rhino International

On 17 March 2020, Lt-Col Leroy Bruwer was assassinated as he drove to work in Mpumalanga, South Africa. Colonel Bruwer was a senior, highly experienced officer in the South African Police Service's Directorate of Priority Crime Investigations (SAPS DPCI), who had gained valuable insights into the major rhino poaching syndicate that was the focus of this Project, codenamed Project Blood Orange.

Although there were suspicions about who was involved, tangible evidence was needed. Understanding the connections between people and organisations, by following

their financial footprints, became a necessity. KPMG's technical expertise was therefore requested by the SAPS DPCI, with the approval of the South African Government's Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

As a commercial entity and according to its own governance rules, KPMG could not apply for or receive grants, it can only invoice for work done. It was therefore looking for an NGO partner that could provide funds and/or fundraise for the project. Save the Rhino agreed to give two grants – of £20,000 and US \$60,000 – and to work on a proposal

to the UK Government's Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund.

At the time of writing, we are only able to share information about the syndicate that is already in the public domain; the court cases of the accused are not due until early 2024. However, to date, 17 suspects have been arrested and charged with money laundering, corruption and conspiracy. Two of them were rangers working for SANParks in Kruger National Park; they have since been dismissed from their posts.



As Kruger's Head Ranger, Cathy Dreyer reports:

*"In 2022, Kruger National Park saw a 46% decline in rhino poaching incidents, with the specific Section in which the arrests took place experiencing almost no losses since the arrests in April 2022. Since the investigations, it appears that for the first time those involved in rhino poaching and facilitating rhino poaching in the Park fear the consequences of their involvement and their possible arrests. The fact that many family members were also arrested sent out an even stronger message and was a strong deterrent."*

By investigating the financial flows associated with individuals within this syndicate, identifying people and entities involved in these transactions, providing evidence of illicit activity to prosecutors, the intention was that Project Blood Orange would contribute to the dismantling of the syndicate and disable the links between poaching rhinos and exporting of their horns.

Thus, this would impact the fight against rhino poaching and add to efforts that aim to address this pressing threat on white and black rhino populations. We have every hope that the court cases in early 2024 will demonstrate the success of Project Blood Orange.

WANA MEDDINGS



“A follow-the-money investigation is like a jigsaw puzzle, except that it is much harder. You don't start with all the pieces. There's no box with a picture of the finished puzzle on the lid. There are no hard edges or corner pieces, so you can't start at the outside and work into the middle. And there are many extra pieces that may not ever fit into the puzzle.”

Senior Manager, Forensic, KPMG Services (Pty) Ltd





# Sensing success

Tracking, as we know it, is an ancient art that was developed and used by hunter-gatherers. It kept our ancestors alive. It was a skill passed down from generation to generation, and was based on observing signs left by animals, as well as anticipation based on experience. This art evolved over millennia and became a tactical feature in many conflicts throughout human history.

**Dennis Kelly** | Section Ranger – Makhamisa, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

In Africa, where wildlife conservation efforts have been persistently challenged by poaching, anti-poaching ranger teams have honed these skills to track suspected poaching gang members who trespass into protected areas. This dangerous 'game' changes daily, according to the experience and learned behaviour of both the suspect and the law-enforcement staff.

Whilst the human skill of tracking is based on sight and cognitive anticipation, a dog, with a sense of smell up to 100,000 times stronger than our own, uses its nose. Using dogs to track humans has been a game changer in law-enforcement. Dogs' noses can track a human in situations where humans can see no sign. The very finest human trackers can track with very few visual cues; however, the process is painstakingly slow. Trained working dogs have no need for any visual cues – their only requirement is scent, dropped by a human while walking through the environment.

The Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park K9 Unit has been through changes over the last few years, but is now beginning to settle in as an effective team and a key part of our anti-poaching strategy. Having said that, we still have a long way to go to reach the levels to which we aspire.

When I was asked to take over the running of the K9 Unit, I had very little knowledge about working dogs, particularly in the law-enforcement context. However, as we have seen throughout this horrific rhino-poaching saga, there was and still is an incredible stream of people that want to help.



Without this help, we could never have achieved the successes we have made to date, in this ongoing battle. Thank you to everyone that has supported our work.

Our canine response unit in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi is a young team of dogs, with the most experienced member being Ghost, our cold-scent Doberman X Bloodhound. She is the rock upon which the unit is built. Our two young Dutch Shepherds, Captain and Chief, are slowly growing in skill and experience and will be a daunting prospect to any suspect who finds them on their trail.

Thanks to these dogs and the growing team built around them, we are boosting our anti-poaching efforts and are committed in our aim to protect more rhinos.



DENNIS KELLY (HP)



## Wildlife internet trade in Viet Nam

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on businesses that engaged in the sale and advertising of wildlife, including restaurants, traditional medicine shops, pet shops, and markets. Many of these enterprises were forced to close due to restrictions on people’s movements. However, the online market is a different story.

Dung Nguyen | Vice-Director, Education for Nature-Vietnam ENV



As our Director of Policy, Bui Thi Ha, explains, “The Covid-19 pandemic may have resulted in the closing of a large number of wildlife-related businesses such as wildlife farms, souvenir shops, and restaurants, but social media provided a new alternative retail market for wildlife.” In fact, during the Covid-19 pandemic, we observed a disturbing trend for online markets. During 2021, at the height of Covid-19 restrictions in Viet Nam, we recorded a 41.3% increase in online wildlife crimes compared to 2020.

**Online markets have thrived since they offer a much lower risk of being caught, while simultaneously reaching a significant number of customers.**

These online markets have thrived as they offer a much lower risk of being caught, while simultaneously reaching a significant number of customers. Traders were able to break the law and make a living during the pandemic, all while hiding behind a screen. In this “anonymous” market, hundreds of opportunistic, amateur, and professional traders seized their opportunity to adapt to the new way of living, and this trend has continued.



Today, products derived from rhinos, bears, elephant ivory, tigers and pangolins are crowding online retail groups.

At ENV, we have been handling hundreds of new online cases every month, with 54.4% of all recorded cases in the first two quarters of 2023 alone being online. Our Cyber Crime team investigates violations and prioritises cases to be handed over to law-enforcement agencies, while lower priority cases are dealt with using a tailored response.

If subjects do not comply with warnings, our social-media partners support our work through account deactivation or link removal. In recent years, we have witnessed the excellent efforts of our partners at TikTok, Zalo, Google, and Facebook in responding to wildlife violations in Viet Nam. In fact, thanks to their collaboration, thousands of social media accounts advertising endangered wildlife have been deactivated, and owners sent warnings.

On the law-enforcement front, authorities face numerous challenges in dealing with internet wildlife crime, mostly due to the level of complexity involved in these cases and their inability to identify physical crimes and subjects. Many law-enforcement agencies have also historically been reluctant to consider virtual violations as serious enough to warrant concerted efforts or strict punishment.

However, since 2022, we have witnessed a great improvement across agencies in their efforts to deal with internet crime. In many cases, prompt detection combined with appropriately strict punishments for illegal online wildlife traders have been adopted. In one case, a report to our Wildlife Crime Hotline about an online trader led to the seizure of 164 g of black rhino horn and an arrest. The individual was sentenced to 12 months in prison by Yen Thanh District Court in November 2022.

The illegal wildlife trade will undoubtedly continue to evolve as traders find new ways to operate in the face of mounting obstacles. It’s therefore critical that law-enforcement authorities can rapidly learn and understand wildlife traffickers’ new tactics, so that they can promptly and continuously develop effective measures to fight wildlife crime.



# The life of a rhino monitor

Being a rhino monitor is an incredible job. It's one that many of us would love; searching for rhinos every day, tracking their behaviour and supporting actions to boost their conservation. To find out more about the role, we asked Joshua Rogers, Rhino Monitor at uMkhuze Game Reserve, to share his insights with us.

**Joshua Rogers | Rhino Monitor, uMkhuze Game Reserve**

## Tell us about uMkhuze and your role

uMkhuze Game Reserve is home to both species of rhino found within southern Africa, the black rhino and the white rhino. The ever-increasing threat to these species has created an environment that is dangerous and unpredictable, requiring a team that is motivated and dedicated to the protection of such an endangered species, a team I am proud to be a part of. I am currently employed as a Rhino Monitor, a position that carries great privilege and responsibility.



## How did you get into rhino conservation?

Having grown up on a game reserve just outside Kruger National Park, with a father who is a wildlife veterinarian, much of my childhood was filled with the capture and treatment of some of Africa's most iconic species. This instilled a deep passion for conservation within me. Having then seen first-hand the plight of South Africa's rhino, I knew I wanted to play my part in their protection.

## What is a typical day like for you?

As part of the uMkhuze team, I have come to learn a diverse set of skills that are needed to work within wildlife conservation, and particularly, to focus on rhinos. On a typical day, we walk patrols of 10 to 15 km, searching for rhinos in tough environmental conditions. Creeping carefully up to rhinos that might be only a few metres away, you've got to keep calm and remember that at any moment a small change in wind direction could cause a change in behaviour.



When I'm not tracking on foot with the team, I'm up in the air flying the Reserve's light aircraft, searching from above for all the rhinos we can find, photograph and identify.

## What is the biggest challenge in your day-to-day?

The most difficult part of my job is trying to find specific rhinos. Finding any black rhino in the Reserve is hard, but specific animals can feel almost impossible to find at times. This is because they often opt for thick areas of bush as opposed to their white rhino cousins, which prefer more open areas. This can create dangerous situations, especially on foot. It's a species I could best describe as being highly inquisitive with an unpredictable temperament. Black rhinos are never shy about keeping you on your toes!

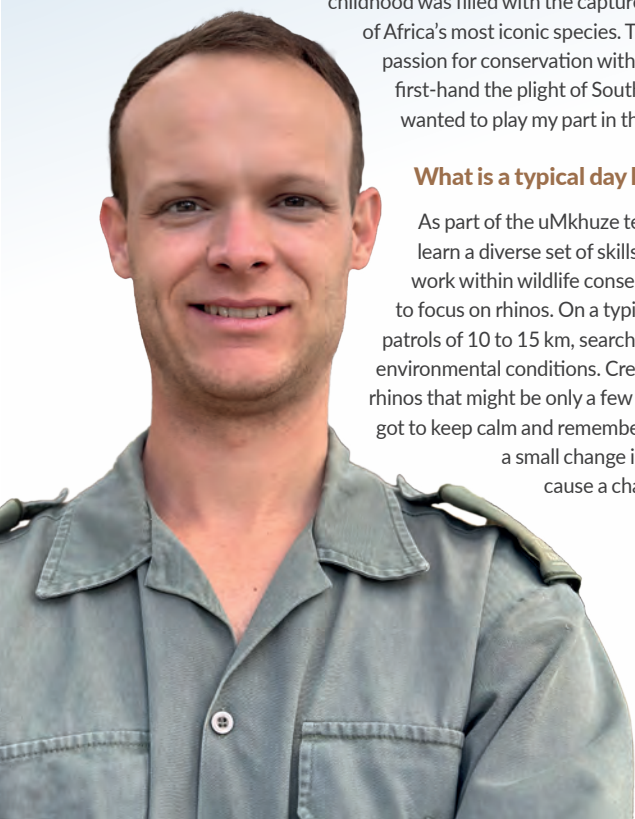
## What's the best part of your job and your favourite memory?

The best part of my job is being able to patrol on foot and fly a plane over a Big 5 Game Reserve: a camera could never do justice to the sights and sounds. I have been very fortunate to see some incredible sightings ranging from rhinos with newborn babies to lions on kills.

It is impossible for me to highlight one particular moment as my favourite, but if I ever had to choose just one experience, it would be sitting at a waterhole at night, during a full moon, watching black rhinos come to drink right in front of me. You'd be surprised how well you can see at night on a full moon once your eyes adjust. Simply being there, watching the animals interact with one another, is a wonderful and humbling experience.

## What do you hope to achieve for the future?

My hope is that we are able end the rhino-poaching scourge that has been plaguing us for so long. If we fail to achieve this task, we would have not only lost the iconic rhino from our planet, but it does not bode well for the future of other endangered species. This is why it is important that we all play our part in raising awareness in protecting our natural environment for generations to come.





# Going wild for rhinos

Going wild or 'rewilding' is a recent focus for many species, including African rhinos. Black rhinos in late 2021 numbered 6,195, of which 164 were in semi-wild areas with only few in intensive conditions (mostly in South Africa) and 218 were in *ex-situ* collections (zoos and sanctuaries outside of rhinos' natural habitat).

**Sam Ferreira** | Scientific Officer, African Rhino Specialist Group

Of the Eastern black rhino subspecies, 10% are in zoos, and these animals could help improve wild populations if they can adapt when returned to nature. It is different for Southern white rhinos. By 2021, 37% of the 15,942 Southern white rhinos lived in semi-wild and intensive areas (4,883), or *ex-situ* collections (1,077).

The biggest semi-wild Southern white rhino population is in South Africa. A private owner, John Hume, acquired 957 rhinos from 98 different sites in South Africa from 2008 to 2016, when poaching was a huge threat. His rhinos increased at 9% per year at the beginning and, more recently, at 7.5% per year. By 2023, there were about 2,000 rhinos in total. Good management practices have maintained genetic diversity.

The initiative, called Platinum Rhino, has expensive security costs, which its owner can no longer afford. Platinum Rhino was put up for sale earlier this year. At the time of writing, negotiations are underway for its purchase and for the potential rewilding of many of the rhinos.

Platinum Rhino has showed how well intensive breeding can perform for Southern white rhinos, while raising awareness. Although this subspecies does well in captivity or semi-wild conditions, it also has the lowest risk of disappearing of all five extant rhino species. Most precarious are the Sumatran and Javan rhinos: with total populations of fewer than 80; both species are at the brink of extinction because of poaching and habitat loss.

ALL IMAGES STEVE AND ANNY TOON



The trade-offs around intensive and *ex-situ* rhino populations rely on analyses of conservation needs of all species. In Africa, the role of rhinos in the wild is key for species diversity and recovery in large ecosystems. There are always lessons to learn. Policies that incentivise rhino conservation can have unintended consequences. Governments should support initiatives but, as in South Africa, cannot be responsible for non-sustainable private models.

Currently, there are more Southern white rhinos than any other rhino subspecies (or species), but there are not enough safe places in the wild for them. This means, at a place like Platinum Rhino, breeding needs to be slowed down to allow time to find or create safe places, and rewild all the rhinos over a 10 to 15 year period. Finding safe places for rhinos in Africa, with increasing pressures on land, has become critical.

*Thanks to Lucy Vigne, Susie Ellis and Mike Knight for their contributions to this article.*





## A beacon of hope for black rhinos in Kunene

Namibia is one of the driest countries on earth. Rain here is hugely variable, with an average of 650 mm per year in the north-east to as little as 150 mm per year in the north west. Since 2012 the entire north west of Namibia has been experiencing a longer dry period than usual.

Lorna Dax | Programmes and Partnership Development, Save the Rhino Trust Namibia

With El Niño set to come into play during our upcoming summer months here in the southern hemisphere, we are preparing for the worst. Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) has been active in the arid north-west for more than 40 years. During this time, staff members of the Trust – some of whom are still part of the team today – have lived through several boom-and-bust cycles, typical of the desert environment. These cycles are characterised by a succession of wetter-than-average years followed by drier-than-average years, and are linked to global weather trends.

Several dozen natural springs dot the 25,000 km<sup>2</sup> landscape where we operate. These springs represent lifelines for the desert-adapted fauna of the region, like the Southwestern black rhino. Less rain during the past decade means that many of these springs – fed by underground aquifers – have dried up completely.

One area, named the 'Top Barab' patrol zone, has been significantly impacted by the dry weather. Previously, it has been a core rhino-breeding location, thanks to the water provided by springs. In the early 2000s, more than a dozen rhinos moved freely in this area. However, the combination of an upsurge in poaching and the more recent absence of naturally occurring water has meant that rhinos have largely left this zone.

One of our general principles at SRT is to allow natural events to take their course, and this is particularly true with the complex underground water table in the region. We have been mindful of not upsetting the natural water cycle, which has evolved and characterises the area. Therefore, we have set out to restore the spring at Top Barab through traditional pit excavation techniques, as opposed to invasive borehole drilling. Our team has successfully dug out the well (*top right*), giving hope for the black rhino population and diverse wildlife that roam the region.



Although we are hopeful for the spring to provide adequate water for the rhinos and patrol teams, more needs to be done. There is

a need to conduct proper testing and analysis of underground water levels, and to open or uncover more natural springs and ensure they are sustainable long-term.

The story serves as an inspiring narrative of teamwork, innovation and adaptive management as the patrol team put "all hands on deck" to restore water supply in the area.

### El Niño is part of the natural climate phenomenon called the El Niño Southern Oscillation.

The name 'El Niño' is widely used to describe the warming of sea surface temperature that occurs every few years. An El Niño is declared when sea temperatures in the tropical eastern Pacific rise 0.5°C above the long-term average.

ALL IMAGES © SRT NAMIBIA



# Rhino trek Namibia

In March 2023, a group of 16 people set out to walk 130 km from Save the Rhino Trust's (SRT) headquarters in Palmwag, Damaraland, across the arid desert to the Skeleton Coast. Led by Tim Holmes, they fundraised for rangers at SRT.

Tim Holmes | Patron and former Trustee

Following a visit to SRT's HQ in November 2019, I was keen to organise a group trek to raise funds that could help build a new block for SRT's brilliant rhino rangers. Black rhino can be seen all the way from Palmwag up to the Skeleton Coast, but no one had walked the desolate route for at least 10 years, as there is very little water, temperatures are higher than 35°C, and there are plenty of dangerous animals along the way.

Our idea was parked throughout the Covid-19 pandemic but, in 2022, following a visit from SRT's CEO, Simson Uri-Khob, a group of 15 of us from Cambridge, UK, were galvanised.

Here are a few photos to share from our journey.



Our 15-strong team set off from the UK on 19 March 2023, enjoying one last night of luxury at the Palmwag Lodge before embarking on our trek.

Along the route, we were escorted by an armed police officer and four rhino scouts as we walked into the Uniab Valley. Each day, we would aim to go at least 20 km.

By lunchtime, the heat would climb to a scorching 38°C.



ALL IMAGES TIM HOLMES







We approached the coast on day four, not long after a lioness was seen walking directly towards our camp! The rangers expected she had recently been at the coast preying on seals and was now on her way back to the desert.



On day two, temperatures crept to over 40°C, but we were rewarded with the fantastic sight of a mother rhino (cow) and calf. The baby was touchingly named Tish after one of the team, as a thank you for our fundraising efforts.



The last day was the most gruelling of all, walking in deep sand over the dunes. The main road marking the last kilometre was a much-welcomed sight by all of us! In total, we walked 125 km in six days, raising more than £12,500.

A huge thanks to the entire team and everyone that's supported this challenge.

**Inspired by Tim's story?  
Want to do a trek or challenge?**

Get in touch with us:  
[fundraising@savetherhino.org](mailto:fundraising@savetherhino.org)





# Partnering for Pachyderms

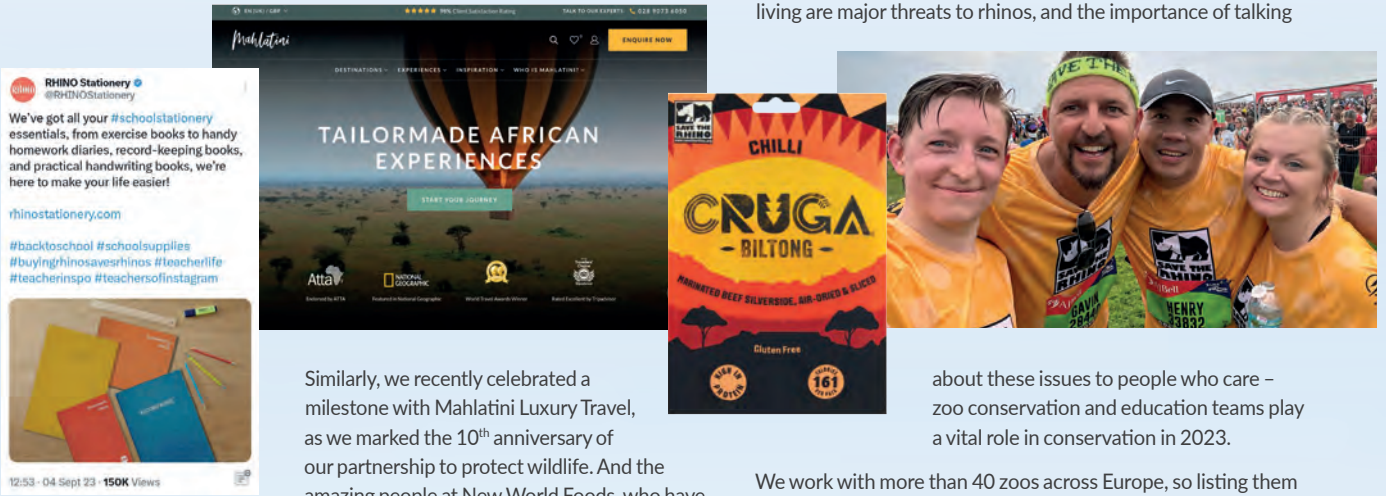
We often talk about the myriad amazing things that people do to raise awareness and funds in support of rhino conservation. And we spend much time writing funding proposals and project reports for the governments, trusts and foundations that also generously fund our conservation work.

Jon Taylor | Managing Director Darion Moore | Partnerships Manager (both of Save the Rhino International)

But there is another group of wonderful supporters who work with us, as teams and organisations, to provide vital protection for wild rhinos and their habitats – our corporate and zoo partners. These days, there is a welcome move for private companies to prioritise good corporate citizenship, and to align their environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) objectives to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. But some of our partners in the private sector have been ahead of the curve for many years. Our good friends at Rhino Stationery have been working with us since 2006 – not only promoting the cause of rhino conservation on exercise books in UK schools (many people tell us they first heard of Save the Rhino through their schoolbooks), but also donating more than £118,000 for rhino conservation!

'entertainment attractions' to become vital conservation organisations. Zoos accredited to the British and Irish and/or European zoo associations operate to the highest standards of animal welfare and conservation practice, and we have been privileged to partner with some of them for many years.

Modern zoos contribute to conservation by running their own carefully managed breeding programmes, maintaining healthy captive populations that can be called upon to restock rhino habitats that have been historically poached. And they also raise funds for field conservation projects by holding special events, or by asking visitors for a voluntary 'Conservation Euro' to support wild populations. But, perhaps even more importantly, a big zoo might see more than a million visitors in one summer season; in a world where the climate crisis and unsustainable living are major threats to rhinos, and the importance of talking



Similarly, we recently celebrated a milestone with Mahlatini Luxury Travel, as we marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our partnership to protect wildlife. And the amazing people at New World Foods, who have worked with us for nearly five years, have just celebrated raising £100,000 for rhinos through the sale of Cruga biltong (look for the Save the Rhino logo on packets in your local UK supermarket!)

about these issues to people who care – zoo conservation and education teams play a vital role in conservation in 2023.

The danger of an article like this is that we cannot mention everyone – there are so many brilliant organisations that care about more than profit. They include watchmakers, animal food manufacturers, and even underwear creators. Our friends at Rhino Precast have just completed the Great North run for rhinos this year! These organisations are amazing, and they demonstrate that good business is about much more than the bottom line.

We work with more than 40 zoos across Europe, so listing them all isn't possible in this short article, but special mention must go to our friends at Wilhelma Zoo in Stuttgart, Germany, to Dublin Zoo in Ireland, and to Safaripark Beekse Bergen in the Netherlands. And, here in the UK, to the teams at Colchester Zoo and West Midland Safari Park, among many others.

But it is not only private-sector teams that have transformed over recent decades. Most zoos have shifted away from being

It seems that wherever we look, there are people who care about rhinos, wildlife and wild places. It is sometimes said that there is a tension between economics and environmental issues but, in our view, the only tension is between short-term and long-term thinking. It is a privilege to work with these organisations to ensure that our precious wildlife and natural resources are protected for the future.





# Conservation careers

**John Gitonga** began as the Administrator for the Association of Private and community Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS) in Kenya's Laikipia region four years ago. Today, he not only supports APLRS members, but also gathers black rhino data from national parks as well as private and community conservancies across the country to inform conservation plans. We asked John about his career so far.

**John Gitonga** | Administrator, Association of Private and community Land Rhino Sanctuaries



## What activities do you do each day?

One of my core duties is to act as secretariat for quarterly APLRS meetings. But my role is much more than administration tasks from a desk. Under the guidance of Kenya's Rhino Programme Coordinator, I actively engage in field visits, interacting with the people collecting rhino data each day.

In addition, I conduct capacity-building workshops on database management (*below*), data analysis and report

generation, and I am a member of the our national Rhino Steering Committee. As a trained rhino instructor, I also work alongside the KWS and Wildlife Research and Training Institute to provide comprehensive training on

various patrol-monitoring techniques, rhino tracking, identification and rhino biology to equip rhino monitors with essential skills for effective monitoring.

Participating in ear-notching activities is another fascinating aspect of my work (*top left*). By putting permanent V-shaped marks on a rhino's ears we identify each animal, which makes monitoring much easier and more accurate.

## What sparked your passion for data?

I developed a passion for programming, particularly for data analysis and visualization, in 2019, when I cleaned the national black rhino database. I find joy in executing lines of code that run successfully, and I am excited about the prospect of creating data models that can contribute to rhino conservation in Kenya. I want to make a positive impact and am excited about the potential of data-driven approaches to enhance rhino conservation efforts in the country.

## How did you begin your career?

In 2017, I graduated from the University of Nairobi with a Bachelor of Science in Range Management. Soon after this, I started as an Intern for the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, before moving to Ol Pejeta Conservancy (OPC), where I worked as a coordinator between the communities and the Conservancy.

At OPC, I concentrated on raising awareness of the importance of using sustainable natural resources. In 2019, I began as the APLRS Administrator and alongside this, I am currently completing a Masters in data science and analytics from Strathmore University.

## What are your top priorities as the APLRS Administrator?

Since starting in May 2019, my role has undergone significant growth and transformation. Initially, my focus was coordinating rhino activities between members and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) through the National Rhino Office.

Now, my responsibilities have evolved into much more data management and analysis. I play a vital role in tracking the implementation of Kenya's Black Rhino Action Plans, overseeing and managing the rhino database at both APLRS and National levels.





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