

# Making rhino conservation make sense

As reported in the last issue of *The Horn*, the Midlands Conservancy in Zimbabwe has had a difficult time, losing 27 black rhino in the period August 2004 to June 2006 to poachers using AK47s.

## John Gripper Sebakwe Black Rhino Trust

The Sebakwe Black Rhino Trust has been the main supporter of the Midlands' rhino conservation and education work since 1989, and we were delighted to get a grant of £20,675 from the EAZA Rhino Campaign in 2007, to pay for the purchase of a new radio repeater to improve the radio system, purchase of a new Toyota 4WD vehicle for the conservator, the renovation of a house for conservator and extra bonus and salary for the two conservators.

We are therefore very pleased to report that during the whole of 2007, no rhinos were shot by poachers. However, we are experiencing increased poaching of wildlife through the indiscriminate use of wire snares and unfortunately this year we found one young rhino dead with a cable wire around his left hind foot. During the month of November 2007 alone, 295 wire snares were recovered in the Conservancy and 21 carcasses of zebra, eland, impala and kudu were found in snares.

We can tackle this by increasing anti-poaching and monitoring patrols, and we are recruiting additional staff for 2008. However, we also need to address the needs of the local population, and we do so through the Sebakwe Conservation and Education Centre. I'd like to tell you a bit about the work done by the Centre and its Director, Clayton Zazu.

We funded Clayton's enrolment in a 3-year advanced Environmental Education distance-learning course at Rhodes University in South Africa, and he has just graduated with a MEd with distinction.

There are three strands to the Centre's work:

- Providing diverse and unique environmental education learning experiences and opportunities to schools, colleges and universities in Zimbabwe through the Sebakwe Environmental Education Programme.
- Promoting environmental conservation and wildlife research through partnerships with local and international colleges and universities.
- Promoting the involvement and accountability of local communities in wildlife and environment management matters, through the "Making rhino conservation make sense" programme.

This third strand is aimed at helping local communities to actively participate in the conservation of natural resources within their areas, and at the same time be able to draw benefits from their conservation efforts. The programme is also heavily biased towards making local communities appreciate the need to help protect the endangered rhino population within the Midlands Black Rhino Conservancy. Here are some of the achievements in 2007:

- Planned and conducted six community outreach and awareness activities. A local drama group was engaged to present two emotionally moving and educative plays aimed at raising awareness and encouraging the local people to actively support environmental conservation within their areas.



MIDLANDS RHINO CONSERVANCIES

- Conducted four community sensitisation workshops targeting the local leaderships.
- Established six village conservation committees (VCC) in the villages forming the southern boundary of the Conservancy.
- Helped establish and train village-based anti-poaching scouts (VBAS) in communities around the Conservancy.
- These local youths act as village environmental watchdogs and informers: we're pleased to announce that these scouts have managed to reduce cases of poaching, bush fires and other unsustainable practices within their villages, and so far have collected thousands of snares, thus saving wildlife and even their own livestock.
- Provided supplementary food for children at ten local primary schools through the Centre. This is a way of making rhino conservation make sense to local communities.
- Launched a Rhino Scholarship project to benefit academically gifted but socio-economically disadvantaged children from local communities to go to high school.

**Above:** Clayton Zazu is a popular figure in the local community.

**Background:** Rhinos seek shade in the heat of the day.

