



Radio days

Last year, the Swire Charitable Trust gave a donation of £1,500 for the Selous Rhino Trust via Save the Rhino.

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Selous Rhino Trust

rangers holding tracings of rhino prints—all categorised & identified



IMAGES: LOUISA MUIR

diagonally cut bits of branches that had been munched by rhinos

We have used the donation to buy new VHF hand-held radio equipment to supplement and strengthen the four radios that the Trust previously had at its disposal, which were inadequate for the project's use and with more than five years' use, were coming to the end of their lives.

The majority of the work of the Selous Rhino Trust is focused around anti-poaching and rhino monitoring activities.

Rhino monitoring is usually foot-based with two groups of 4-6 rangers undertaking two patrols each month to very remote pre-planned areas, where they scour the environment and document signs of rhino activity (physical sighting, foot prints, dung and evidence of browsing). The patrols tend to travel by vehicle and foot to the heart of the area, set up a base camp, and then go out on foot on a daily basis to different parts of the area, returning to base camp each evening, and moving camp once the survey has been completed. Each patrol team consists of up of 3-4 rangers and a one-man support team, whose job it is to look after base camp and provide meals to the rangers, in order that the rangers can focus on the important work at hand.

Anti-poaching ground patrols tend to work in a similar way (and of course in any case whenever rangers are on monitoring activities they are by default providing important anti-poaching presence and law enforcement). However, for anti-poaching

activities to be efficient and effective, there must be a concerted effort that usually includes a combination of aerial, vehicular and foot support.

For the system to work effectively, the entire anti-poaching team must work together in a specific area. Firstly the plane goes up to cover the broad area quickly and pinpoint any poaching activity. If signs are found, a GPS reading is taken and the message is immediately relayed to the vehicular team below which quickly makes its way to the nearest road access to the poaching. From there, a foot patrol leaves the vehicle and heads straight for the trouble. This is a fast and effective approach to getting to the root of the poaching problem.

What both the anti-poaching and monitoring activities rely on most is communications. Last year, Save the Rhino made a major contribution to the building of a new repeater station on a range of hills that cuts the north of the Selous from the river to the northern boundary of the Reserve. This repeater has transformed communications because it now allows us to talk to rangers across the range of hills, where before there was effectively a brick wall. What we then needed was more radio support in order that different patrols could keep in touch with each other in the event that they needed to call on each other for assistance, and in order that planes, vehicles and the ground team could have stronger communications

during concerted anti-poaching raids.

Finally, the support member left in camp during monitoring patrols had no form of communication, which is something that we wanted to change.

Thus (back to the beginning at last!) we used the Swire Charitable Trust's money to buy new VHF radios including 12-volt chargers and cigarette lighter chargers for the vehicle recharging. The £1,500 paid for five radios which have been allocated as follows:

- one dedicated to the aircraft
- two dedicated to vehicles
- two dedicated to strengthen patrol communication (used for patrol teams so that the teams of six can be split down further into smaller groups of three rangers). Some of the older equipment will be used for support communication back up

Thank you

The Selous Rhino Trust would like to take this opportunity to thank Swire Charitable Trust very much for this donation which is providing a very tangible enhancement to our work and to the environment in which our rangers work. Thank you!