

Zimbabwe:

An escaping rhino and a new Field Coordinator in Matusadona

This is a short report (November 2005) on the rhino-monitoring programme in Matusadona National Park, Zimbabwe.

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A meeting took place in Tashinga on 20 September with Eleckson Ndlovu (Senior Warden, Matusadona), Dick Pitman (Director, Zambezi Society), Adrian Wilson (Director, Zambezi Society UK) and myself, when we discussed immediate needs, a problem animal, and the need for effective onsite ground coordination.

Requirements put forward by the Senior Warden included: monthly fuel supplies of both petrol and diesel; road maintenance for a particular access road into the mountains; new batteries for the Motorola radios; batteries for the GPSs; and, due to a recent staff increase, field equipment for Rangers. There are also various vehicle repairs that were needed, but the scope is not yet known. Out of three boat engines, two are in need of repair.

One of the rhinos that had been through the Intensive Hand Rearing Programme, had walked out of the Park and was wandering into very dangerous territory. The rhino (Shungu), was going up to people and sleeping close to villages, obviously posing a great threat to his life should he have encountered unscrupulous people. The National Parks' capture unit managed to immobilise the rhino and transport him back to Tashinga where he is currently in

a boma, so as to prevent him from walking straight out of the Park again. He is being provided with about twelve bundles of browse twice a day and always has water available. A thatched roof has been constructed in one corner so as to provide shade during the immense heat of the day. Even with all these provisions, his condition is likely to go down, and so I took 100kg of horse cubes with me to help supplement his food. I also suggested that they try and "walk" him to the Makadzapela boma where the browse is of a better quality and there will be fewer interactions with people. As soon as Dr Chris Foggin has finished his current operation, there is a plan to put a horn implant in so that Shungu can be monitored if he were to try and walk out again.

In October in Chinoyi, I updated the Senior Warden on the help that the Zambezi Society could offer. He was obviously very delighted and would start to action some of the field-based and maintenance activities. We also discussed the issue of "walking" the rhino to the Makadzapela boma.

Over the next six months, leading up to the next Matusadona ear-notching / horn-implant operation, the Trackers along with Parks' research staff will carry out an intensive rhino monitoring

programme. We have collected sufficient spatial rhino data to have a clear idea of where sub populations of rhino exist on the valley floor. Over the next six months, these areas of known rhino ranges will be visited to ensure that each rhino in the area is sighted visually and the ear-notch patterns recorded. The monitoring up to this point has been done using indirect signs. Although this has been a useful management tool, we need to have a clearer idea of each individual rhino.

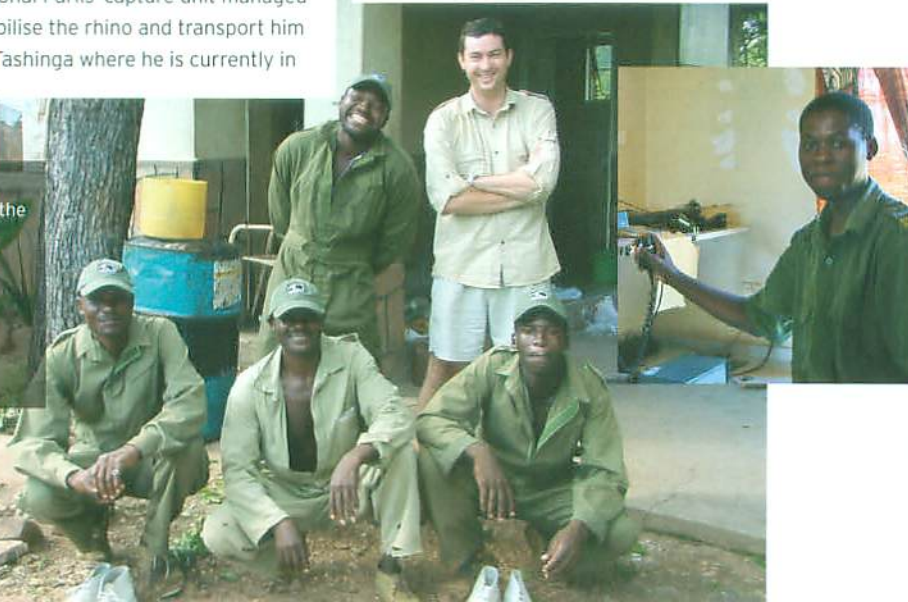
In order to get a more detailed picture of the rhino population, and to provide more effective ground coordination, we have contracted Godwin Vhurumuku to be our Field Coordinator (Rhino). Godwin has an Undergraduate Degree from a local university and has worked extensively and very effectively during the field research of a recently completed carnivore project in Matusadona and surrounding communal area. He was periodically stationed at Tashinga and so is known and accepted by all members of staff. Apart from coordinating the intensive monitoring programme, he will also capture and analyse previous debriefing data (including rhino sighting and distribution), extending back to 1995. Godwin will spend most of his time based at Tashinga where he will have access to a Zambezi Society vehicle.

ALL IMAGES: CATHY DEAN



Right:
Duncan Purchase, with the
rhino monitors

Far right:
The radio room at
Tashinga HQ



£5,000

Save the Rhino

International was able to give Zambezi Society a grant of £5,000 in 2005, thanks to the generosity of Ecco Unlimited. The Zambezi Society is now fundraising for a major census, ear-notching and horn-implant operation, due to take place in July / August 2006 in Matusadona National Park. We have awarded £10,000 to assist them in this.