

# How a **rhino project** helps communities and protects ecosystems

**Richard Bonham**  
Chyulu Hills rhino project

"The game scouts have caught some poachers, Dad," my son Jack announced a few days ago.

"How do you know that? I haven't heard a report," I answered, somewhat surprised. "I know they have because I saw the game scout Landrover going past and it had two guys dressed in rags in the back."

I got on to the radio and was told, "Yes, we have just arrested two poachers who killed a giraffe in the rhino zone."

The above scenario is all-too familiar. The game scouts are making more and more arrests of poachers in and around our Intensive Protective Zone for the Chyulu black rhino. This tells us that the scouts are not only becoming more efficient, but more importantly there is a huge spin-off from the increased security that benefits other species and the habitat. Up until last year one could fly over the rhino zone and without fail see tell-tale wisps of smoke emerging from the forest canopy that would give away an illegal charcoal burning kiln. Today this sight is rare, which indicates that poachers can no longer move around with impunity and this

is a direct result of our efforts to protect the remnant Chyulu black rhino population.

My son's observation that you can tell a poacher as he is 'dressed in rags' is all too true. Without exception, the poachers we are catching - 52 this year alone - are all from very poor backgrounds and have very little choice of ways to earn a living. I believe that we cannot win this war through intensive security alone. We have to find ways to educate and create employment in order to bring the local communities on side.

This philosophy is not new in the Chyulus. We currently have 43 students on wildlife scholarships, have built schools employing qualified teachers to upgrade education standards, and we endeavour to find employment for ex-poachers - sometimes even as game scouts, working on the assumption that the best poachers make the best game keepers! We have a long way to go and need to do a lot more work on the Chyulu National Park boundary to gain the support of the Wakamba community, which is currently seeing very little benefits from wildlife.



RICHARD KECH

We have made some major breakthroughs this year. Finally the rhino are beginning to use (albeit with suspicion!) the artificial water points part-funded by Save the Rhino. The combination of this and Chester Zoo's making it possible for Richard Kech to be employed full time as an advisor to the rhino project, has enabled us to get our first three ID standard photographs of different rhino. Kech has brought with him a wealth of experience and is being kept very busy training our community scouts in the complexities of rhino monitoring and security.

We also have four new additions to our game scout team: two donkeys and two bloodhounds. The bloodhound tracker dogs (generously donated by OI Jogi Ltd) have, in their few months of active service, been responsible for the apprehension of two poachers and have tracked down thieves who stole solar panels from one of the local primary schools. The donkeys have been a great success too, enabling the mobile foot patrols to extend their areas of operation considerably by resupplying water to their camps.

As I write, morale has never been higher in our rhino unit, largely due to unwavering support of Save the Rhino, who always seem to pull something out of the hat when we send out wish lists - so a big thank you to all at Save the Rhino.



Above:  
Richard Kech in the bush

Left:  
A successful team of scouts  
with a weapons haul

CHYULU HILLS RHINO SCOUTS

## Grants

We have just sent over £6,469 from Chester Zoo, which will pay for scout salaries and incentives, for informer payments and prosecution costs, for the purchase of new radios, radio maintenance, a digital camera and solar power, as well as fuel costs for one of the patrol vehicles. Thanks so much for your continued support.

Thanks also to Kenneth Donaldson, for his donation of £5,850 towards Kech's salary and the purchase of two new 12-bore semi-automatic guns for the scouts.

# Txting 2 ctch poachrs

The rhino scouts in the Chyulus don't just use old-fashioned radios. They also use text messaging as an early warning system. These messages between Chyulu headquarters and the scouts show us how a major poaching sting in the Chyulus succeeded...

EDWARD  
Hi Sir, I am at Isinet for much poaching taking place in various places. We saw spot lights last night and chased but could not catch them. Will ambush tonight  
13:55 09-June-2007

SAM  
I went to patrol and found track of vehicle in the bush and eventually came across one giraffe that has been killed last night and I recovered 1 pang (hunting knife). Free put your phone where there is reception coz an getting problem in reaching u. Be alert even tonight. If possible send a credit  
19:17 10-June-2007

SAM  
The op is-tive coz the boys [poachers] have not shown up. When will you be back?  
11:11 11-June-2007

EDWARD  
7 poachers seen yesterday at Rsebei area, this is beyond Centre, fixed snares which already caught one cow and 2 other managed to get out, 5 snares removed by herdsmen  
16:35 11-June-2007

EDWARD  
We found poachers hide out in bush with tracker dogs. Chased and fired 5 shots over their heads but they not stop, but got away, recovered bow and 7 poison arrows  
14:37 12-June-2007

WILSON  
Hallo Fred, ops going well here. Went 2 O1 Donyo Sanbu and found everything smooth  
15:40 13-June-2007

WILLIAM  
Hi, I came to realize that most of the informers don't have radio, so they flash me for reports and I have to call them, if possible you send me credit  
23:36 17-June-2007

EDWARD  
We just started op next to Ruino's home area. I met all teams as we planned, also met Samuel to assist us, will try to cover various points Zmoro. I will keep updating you  
21:06 19-June-2007

WILSON  
Mayday mayday. We are following tracks of 3 people who are following a Rhino at Riatua, send mobile one to help. Alert and open radio links  
09:44 24-June-2007

WILSON  
Cancel call out of tracker dogs...Have caught one poacher. We have evidence of snares and bushbuck meat. Send car to base to collect poacher  
11:54 24-June-2007

FRED  
Morning Richard. Informer says the poachers who s bow and poisoned arrows recovered by scouts want them returned, or they will burn informers house and your house too... pls call  
13:27 01-July-2007



## New technology in conservation

**Petra Fleischer**  
Fundraising Manager

We all know technology everywhere is changing rapidly - and conservation-linked applications are no exception. To keep us all informed, I did some research into what's hot in the world of conservation technology. Luckily our newly appointed Patron, **Chloe Chick** from the GSM Technology Fund, and **Scott Wilson** from Chester Zoo helped me write this article.

### Mobile phones and SMS

Last year, we ran an appeal for second-hand mobile phones, and had a great response. With help from Vienna Zoo we received a donation of 12 new phones from Samsung for the Indian rhino project run by Aaranyak, and our lovely loyal supporters send in their second-hand phones for the Chyulu project in Kenya. In five years the number of mobiles in Kenya has grown from one million to 6.5 million - with about 80% of Kenyans covered by mobile networks. As a result we now receive great emails from Fred in the Chyulus demonstrating how SMS is helping their anti-poaching activities:

### GIS

Geographic Information Systems or GIS is yet another technological application that is being increasingly used in the field, and could be utilised even more in rhino conservation.

GIS is useful as a database for storing large amounts of information; but when this information also has a geographic location component, the GIS has very powerful data analysis tools. Its strength lies in being able to display and more importantly interpret, analyses and relationships between lots of layers of different data (e.g. a rhino occurrence locations layer plus a habitat type layer plus a water source layer plus a roads and human influence layer...etc.).

In rhino conservation it can be used in home-range analysis, population density calculations, habitat analysis (for example for translocation sites or larger habitat management strategies), as well as mapping exercises for results of remote tracking e.g. horn transmitters, for poaching activities and effective planning of patrols or for analysis of high-risk poaching areas in relation to human population, roads and water sources. GIS also has the capacity to produce great visual displays of maps, graphs etc relating to all of this information.

### CyberTracker

This is an icon-based easy-to-learn system immediately computerised and associated with a GPS location. CyberTracker's software can be used on smart phones and handheld computers to record rhino and other wildlife observations of any level of complexity. What's good about it is that users can customise a series of screen interfaces and choose to display icons (like an image of a rhino sleeping), text or both, which makes data collection faster. It also allows field data collection by non-literate users and schoolchildren.

One of the projects supported by the EAZA / SRI Save the Rhinos campaign, the SOS Rhino at Tabin Wildlife Reserve in Sabah uses, and trains field staff in the use of, CyberTracker. Rhino Protection Units there collect all data relevant to indications of rhino presence and changes in the region. Record of days of outstation patrolling and specific findings are recorded in CyberTracker software.