

In the field in Zimbabwe

Here two men making a great contribution to conservation in Matusadona National Park (MNP), Zimbabwe, explain what they do. Zambezi Society Zimbabwe's rhino anti-poaching and monitoring work is funded by Save the Rhino.

Challenges and partnerships
Elson Gwanyanya
Senior Warden
Parks and Wildlife
Management Authority

Challenges and partnerships The Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (PWMA) rangers are involved in the protection of the rhinos, patrolling the 1,400sq km of MNP. Furthermore to check on the whereabouts of the rhino population, monitoring has been put in place. At times in the past, resources were not adequate resulting in some activities not being done or only partially done (for example monitoring).

Though government efforts to conserve and protect the threatened rhinos were being done, it is now also complemented by the help of Non Government Organisations in areas where resources were lacking. The Zambezi Society is an NGO that has been assisting the PWMA with the monitoring of black rhino in MNP. Most of the monitoring efforts are being concentrated on the valley floor section of the Park, which covers about 400sq km. The assistance is not only on the monitoring; they also assist with fuel and recently donated raincoats, mosquito nets and chest webbing. The donation of this field equipment boosts morale among the rangers, thereby increasing the protection and monitoring efforts.

As of now, the population is said to be stable. Last year the monitoring team recorded the birth of two rhino and they are monitoring a third female as we expect another birth very soon. As the area manager of the Intensive Protection Zone, I am convinced that the population is safe.

Our next project with Zambezi Society is to develop a management tool and morale booster (using incentives) by accurately measuring patrol coverage in the field.

A day in the life of a rhino monitor
Godwin Vhurumuku
Field Coordinator
Zambezi Society Zimbabwe

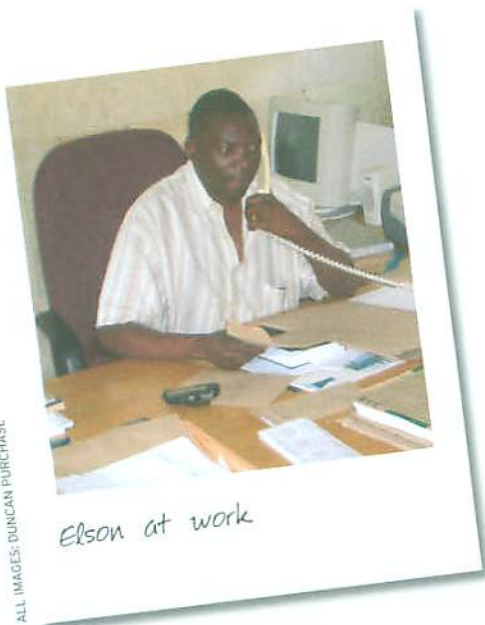
The day usually starts off with Sadza (a thick porridge made from maize meal). I then equip myself with a GPS, notebook and pen, while the rangers ensure that their gun straps and guns are in place. The trackers equip themselves with small axes in case we find a dead elephant and need to remove the ivory. However, our most important equipment is our eyes and ears.

Before leaving base, I carry out a briefing on the purpose of the patrol. We discuss the signs to use in case talking compromises our situation. A leader is chosen and the pace and direction is determined, making sure we pass water points on the way.

Once we find spoor (prints) and determine their age, the team leader changes to a tracker and we walk in a single file following the spoor, making sure we do not step in it. The tracker uses his eyes to follow the spoor and his hands to indicate his progress. While on spoor we increase speed to a run. While the tracker is on spoor, the rangers look out for elephants and the rhino itself, while the other trackers and myself listen for sounds. This technique works very well to protect us.

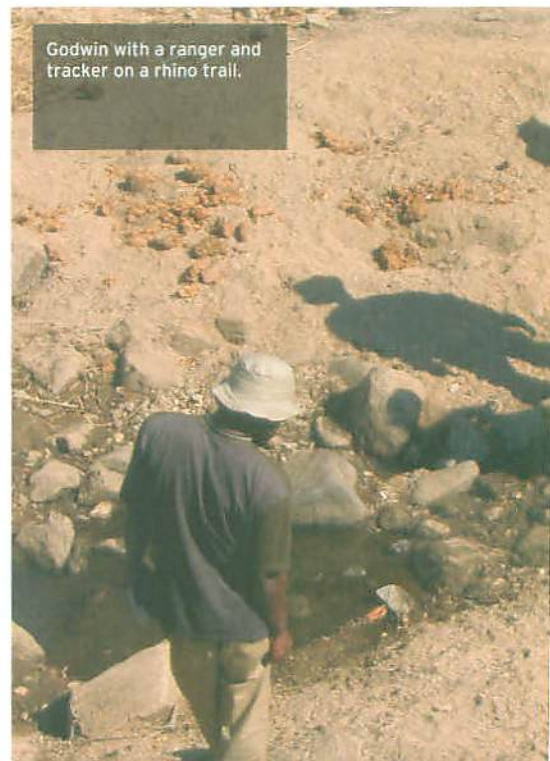
Once we get close to the rhino, the rangers drop back to reduce the chance of disturbing it. When feeding sounds are heard the wind direction is determined for best observation. We give each other a chance to observe the rhino making sure it is not disturbed. Most often the rhino does not realise that it has been observed.

I record the GPS position, and use binoculars to 'read' the ear notch pattern, which serves to identify the individual rhino. These are recorded in my notebook and we then return to our base camp after another successful day in the field, monitoring rhino.



Elson at work

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Godwin with a ranger and tracker on a rhino trail.