

Namibia:

Community game guard training

Save the Rhino Trust in Namibia (SRT), has supported capacity building related to the conservation of Black Rhino for many years, not only through the training of our own trackers (many of whom have subsequently taken on responsibilities as guides with commercial tourism operators or as community game guards with conservancies) but also through periodic workshops and other extension activities in communities across the Kunene Region. We have long considered the engagement of local communities in conservation as being a prerequisite for the long term sustainability of the rhino of the Kunene Region.

Simson Uri-Khob

Director of Community Outreach, Training and Research
Save the Rhino Trust

The growth in SRT's community support has been mirrored elsewhere in Namibia, most notably in the support shown by Namibia's Government to the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CNBRM) movement. Since 1994, the government has gazetted 50 new communal conservancies, entrusting almost 15% of Namibia's land area to indigenous communities. Between 2006 and 2007, this initiative helped bring in almost three million pounds in revenue, and lifted 15 conservancies out of being donor-aid dependent.

It is therefore a vindication of SRT's training structure and core philosophy that our training programme has continued to go from strength to strength. Highlighting how far the Trust has come since the formative years of the Community Game Guards scheme, 2008 saw the completion of the guards' training at the Terra Conservancy, along with that of Wilderness Safaris. It also saw the phase one training of guards in five new conservancies, bringing twenty-six new game guards into

the regional efforts to expand the black rhino range.

Significantly, one of the new conservancies that SRT has been mandated to train is in an entirely new area of Namibia. This is the first time SRT has been invited to train a conservancy in the north-east of Namibia, representing a marked expansion of our programme from its roots in the arid north-west. This also means that our staff will be traveling further to undertake training than ever before, testament to the Trust's growing national importance.

It is hoped that, should funding be secured, all five conservancies will have completed their second and final stage of training by November of this year. Once completed, this will bring the total additional land area protected by SRT-trained guards to 23,000km². This is almost the same size as the Kunene ecosystem that SRT originally sought to protect almost thirty years ago, highlighting just how much progress has now been made since that time.

Such is the demand for our game guard training skills, that we have been exploring the possibility of a 'trainer-trainer' model. It is hoped that, in creating an enabling network of game guard trainers, we will be able to turn our focus towards enhancing the skills of our own

staff in the Kunene. The ultimate objective of freeing up SRT staff is to allow for the creation of a framework that allows for continent-wide idea exchanges. As part of the Trust's 2008-2012 vision, staff will have the opportunity to train alongside our counterparts in Kenya, to enable skills transfer and ultimately to boost the effectiveness of rhino conservation across the continent.

If future hopes are realised, the prospects for the long-term survival of Namibia's black rhino are very positive indeed. Most exciting is that conservancies that haven't seen black rhino for a generation or more are now relishing the prospect of having these magnificent animals back on their communal lands again. Perhaps most important of all is that in a global environment that continues to threaten the very existence of mega-fauna such as rhino, Namibia's community-based resource management programme shows that these animals can not only survive, but prosper, whilst also helping empower the human populations they live alongside.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JIMMY HARRIS



Thanks!

To the RSCPA for awarding £2,581 for new camel enclosures. We'll report on this in the next issue.