

Zambia:

Why do our local kids need to learn about rhinos?

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North Luangwa National Park is now the proud host of Zambia's only population of Critically Endangered black rhinos. A crash of 22 animals lives in a secure 200km² sanctuary within the National Park, following a huge translocation project that started in 2003. A team of dedicated rangers follows their every move to ensure the security of Zambia's new national treasures.

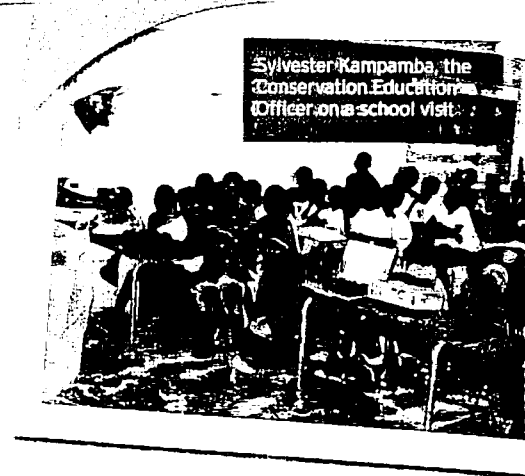
Rhinos were declared "nationally extinct" in Zambia in 1989 and their re-introduction is of great importance to the future of endangered species conservation in the country. As the population grows, the animals will be released to roam freely in North Luangwa National Park (NLNP), and ultimately in other National Parks across the country. This will enable other areas of Zambia to benefit from the economic profits of having rhinos, while increasing global numbers.

But the survival of the current and future rhino populations is dependent on the positive relationship between local people and conservation. Since rhinos became extinct in Zambia in the late 80s, this means that anyone aged under 20 has never seen one. This is why Save the Rhino's programme partner, the North Luangwa Conservation Project (NLCP), is running an innovative and strategic Conservation Education Programme (CEP) in schools surrounding the National Park. The project aims to establish a long-lasting link between local schoolchildren, the newly re-introduced rhinos and the environment as a whole.

Children under 15 make up about 50% of the growing human population around North Luangwa National Park. The Park lies in the Zambia's Northern Province (the fastest growing province in Zambia) with an annual population growth rate of 4.3%. Most of the people living here are peasant subsistence farmers using the traditional "cut and burn" shifting cultivation pattern; very few of them grow crops on a commercial basis. Children from these villages have hardly ever seen wildlife in its natural environment, despite the Zambian Government's hope to diversify the country's economic base (much of which is reliant on the copper industry) by actively promoting wildlife-based tourism. Tourism, together with natural resource-based projects, offers opportunities for local people to benefit from living with wildlife. Therefore it is vital that areas of high biodiversity, such as NLNP, are conserved and that, in turn, the environmental awareness of young people is increased.

The Conservation Education Programme run by NLCP is designed for Grade 5 pupils (10-14 years of age) from the 20 remote schools adjoining the National Park and surrounding Game Management Areas. Sylvester Kampamba, the Conservation Education Officer runs a mobile Conservation Education Unit: a Land Cruiser station wagon packed with a laptop, generator, projector and teaching aids that he uses for visiting schools. Prior to Sylvester's visit, teachers from the target schools are given a "Teacher's Guide" that supplements the learning aims of the National Curriculum. The guide covers 33 lessons in a variety of subjects based on conservation, covering issues such as animals (mammals, amphibians, reptiles and so on), plants and trees, deforestation, water, soil erosion, and overpopulation.

In support of this learning, and to spread the NLCP's conservation message to a wider audience, a "Conservation Education Celebration Day" is held every year in October in the community of Mukungule, just outside the Park. At this fun, all-day event participants of



the CEP come together to present poems, plays and songs and to compete in an afternoon of sports. Prizes are awarded for the best school plays, drawings and so on. There is also a colouring competition based on rhino colouring books, developed specially to coincide with the rhino re-introduction. To ensure that the event is attended by as many local people as possible, NLCP provides transport for children, teachers and parents.

By running the Conservation Education Programme, NLCP hopes to create a generation of responsible, committed Zambians who want to work for the sustained conservation of the greater North Luangwa ecosystem. By doing so, they will also ensure the future of the rhinos in this great wilderness area.

Grant

We are delighted to report that the final grant from the EAZA Rhino Campaign 2005-6 was given out in December 2008: £12,398 towards the Conservation Education Programme. This covers half of the amount required for 2009-10; if you'd like to help cover the gap, please get in touch with Save the Rhino.