

A tale of five orphans

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As Zimbabwe's economy has collapsed, rhino poaching is flaring up and rhino population gains are being eroded. Because this menace is not being adequately dealt with through regular law enforcement, a real crisis now exists. Over 100 rhinos have been killed by poachers in the Lowveld since 2000 – 40 of these in 2008 alone. One of the unwelcome side-effects of the increase in poaching has been the rise in the number of orphaned, and sometimes injured, rhino calves that must be treated and rehabilitated.

Of Zimbabwe's current rhino population, the Lowveld conservancies in south-eastern Zimbabwe conserve 390 black rhinos (80% of the country's total) and 140 white rhinos (50% of Zimbabwe's total).

Black rhinos have been 'flagship species' for the formation of large conservancies in the Lowveld region of Zimbabwe, and for the conversion of these areas from cattle ranching into wildlife production. Rhino conservation efforts in the Lowveld, coordinated by the Lowveld Rhino Trust, link the Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (as the overall management authority for rhinos) with private sector wildlife operations and NGOs operating in the Lowveld. The active management includes drug-dartings (115 undertaken during 2008) for various security-related and management-related reasons such as translocations, removal of snares, de-hornings, and ear-notchings to facilitate monitoring; for instance,

Calves are particularly vulnerable to being caught in snares set for bushmeat, while their mothers are targeted for their horns. Ensuring the welfare of injured or orphaned calves is vital, as is their survival in terms of increased global rhino numbers. The rhino management operations by Lowveld Rhino Trust include the facilitation of drugs, vets, helicopters as well as food for the animals that need intensive care.

Calves that are still reliant on milk are bottle-fed skimmed milk with special supplements, a process that often takes long hours of patient training. Any injuries are treated. The calves are socialised with others, and are kept in secure bomas overnight and let out into fenced paddocks during the day. The intention is not to create a permanent sanctuary of captive rhinos; rather to rehabilitate and foster where necessary orphan rhino calves so that, once weaned and/or recovered from injuries, they can be released back into the wild populations.

There are currently five calves being raised under the Lowveld Rhino Trust

- Lisa-Marie born February 2007
- Carla born March 2007
- Blondie (male), born April 2008
- Millie born June 2008
- Sassy born August 2008



Above: On 1 November 2008, four-month-old Sassy was found beside her dead mother who had been shot by poachers. She was bottle-fed until she was able to eat from a bottle. Sassy, as her name suggests, was not taken by the idea and injured a good number of people before eventually realising that the milk bottle is a dead thing.



CRISIS ZIMBABWE

Poaching threatens Rhino's survival

Above: On 5 October 2008, four-month-old Millie was captured from beside the carcass of her dead mother, who was killed by cyanide when poachers poisoned a natural water hole.

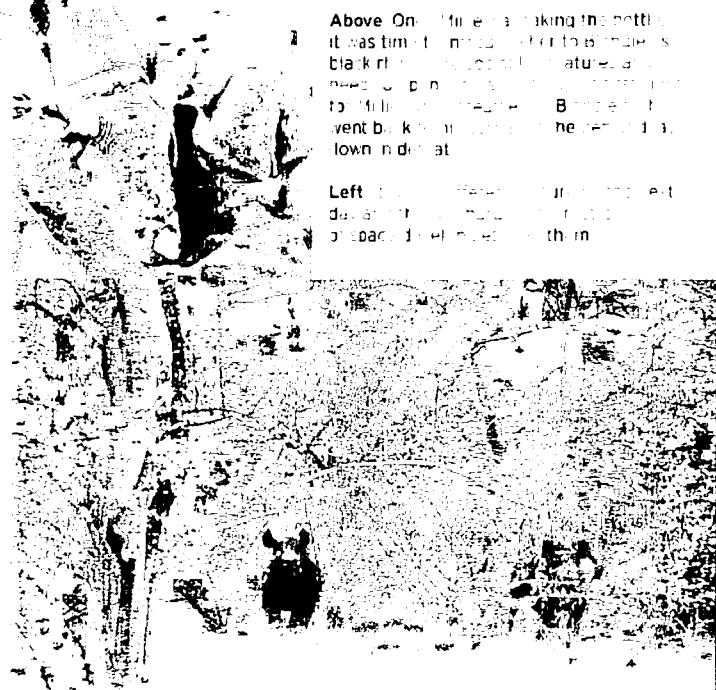
Millie possibly suffered slight poisoning and was very slow to take to the bottle. Fortunately she was a very gentle calf so it was possible to sit in the pen with her (sometimes for hours) trying to get her to drink. Eventually she began taking the bottle willingly.

Above: On 11th October, when taking the bottles it was time to introduce her to a male as black rhinos are social creatures and need to play with their own kind. It was time to Millie to meet her brother, Benjamin. It went back to the pen and she had a low incidence of aggression.

Left: The three rhinos are in the pen together and are getting used to each other. They are all protected by the fence and the staff.

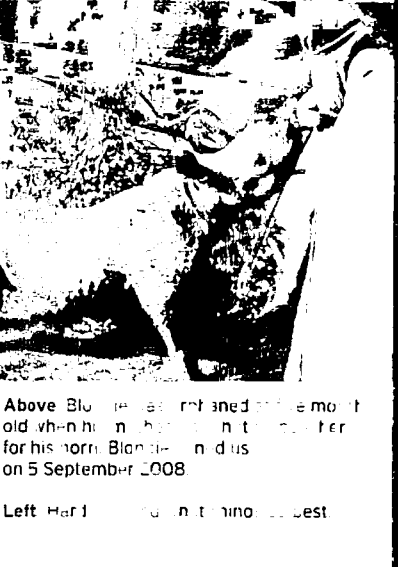
Right: Now that the three are settled in their routine of bottle feeding, they are allowed out into a well-fenced paddock to browse and exercise during the day. All three will need to be bottle fed for another year before they are weaned. They will be kept in the paddock for another year past weaning, until they are big enough to be released completely back into the wild where they will face lions and hyenas.

Below: All three young orphans now live together and will be raised and released as a group or 'trash' as a group of rhinos are known. Millie and Sassy have become very closely bonded, but Blondie is generally the leader, being the eldest and largest of the three.



Above: This is Millie today, - she really is the most affectionate little rhino you will ever meet

Right: This is Sassy, a perfect little beast but not to be trusted with an unguarded snin for a moment!



Above: Blondie has retained the most old when he was born in the winter for his horn. Blondie had us on 5 September 2008.

Left: Herd of rhinos in the forest.

For the latest updates on the rhino orphans and the work of the Lowveld Rhino Trust please visit

www.savetherhino.org

It costs around US \$1,000/£700 per month to look after an expected average of five orphans. A donation of £25 would look after all five's veterinary treatments, food and protection for one day.

If you would like to support the Lowveld Rhino Trust and the orphan rhinos, there are numerous ways to make a contribution:

Online
Visit our appeal page at www.justgiving.com/crisiszimbabwe to make a donation and don't forget to leave a message of support

Telephone 020 7357 7474
In normal office hours to make a donation via debit/credit card

Post a cheque
Made payable to 'Save the Rhino'. Please write 'Crisis Zimbabwe' on the back, and post to Save the Rhino, 16 Winchester Walk, London SE1 9AQ

