

You have a friend request - Save the Rhino International

When the likes of Facebook, bebo and Myspace first entered our lives, who would have thought they would lead to such a revolution in communication and social media; helping to launch unknown bands and singers, playing a vital part in lobbying and campaigning and even in helping charities raise much-needed funds? A savvy fundraising charity in the 21st century should not be without these tools.

Lucy Boddam-Whetham
Fundraising Manager

With the power of the internet increasingly being used as a cost-effective fundraising and awareness-increasing tool, it was time for Save the Rhino to test its digital skills. In spring 2009, the rhino poaching crisis in Zimbabwe presented the urgent need for an appeal. So, in partnership with the International Rhino Foundation in the US, we launched an online, paper-free effort to raise emergency funds and to increase awareness of the work of the Lowveld Rhino Trust. This was a first for Save the Rhino, and we were keen to explore the possibilities and avoid the costs normally associated with a postal campaign.

We really did learn as we went along. We thought it important to set up an appeal-specific Justgiving page so that everyone was able to see the fundraising target and progress. By allowing donors to post their comments, the use of Justgiving allowed us to create more of a dialogue with our supporters. This was also true of

the specific cause we set up on Facebook, which helped us to reach a wider audience and to receive additional donations. Across the world, an average of 5,000,000,000 minutes is spent on Facebook each day. This is surely set to increase as people become more and more active in communicating to the world what they care about, so the potential of the site is enormous. As a small charity with limited resources, using such tools is a cost-free way of communicating with our existing supporters and also reaching a wider audience. Save the Rhino could / would never launch a costly marketing campaign, so the use of social media is a cost-effective alternative that ticks all our boxes.

We sent three appeal update emails to our RhiNEWS subscribers over a six-week period and posted regular updates on our own website. These updates allowed us to communicate quickly and efficiently the problems of the crisis but also enabled us to deliver news from the field as and when it happened, as well as updating supporters on the progress of the appeal.

Another first for us was an online webinar (or online press conference). Organised by the International Rhino Foundation, the webinar meant that journalists from around the world could talk live to Raoul du Toit of the Lowveld Rhino Trust, Susie Ellis of the IRF, Michelle Gadd from USFWS, and Cathy Dean, our Director. Statistics, maps and images were available to all attendees as they talked.

The online appeal was certainly a learning experience for us. Following its success, we have started using twitter and who knows, next year we might even attempt an online, interactive Rhino Mayday. Watch this space...



CRISIS ZIMBABWE Update

The appeal raised more than US \$120,000, of which Save the Rhino raised \$31,000, and resulted in more than 50 articles in major media outlets and hundreds more smaller pieces.



Thank you to everyone who supported our appeal, in particular: Friends Foundation of Safaripark Beekse Bergen and Dierenrijk, Dublin Zoo and Stuttgart Zoo. Special thanks also to Susie, Maggie, Kelly and April at the International Rhino Foundation for all of their help and to Alex Rhind for helping with the design of our email and web updates. The Lowveld Rhino Trust has now successfully moved 46 critically endangered black rhinos out of areas where they were particularly vulnerable to poachers. Since May, eight poachers have been killed in the Lowveld during armed confrontations with the police. There have been seven known rhino poaching losses. To learn more about the appeal please visit: www.savetherhino.org

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), to which Zimbabwe is a signatory, is likely to discuss censuring Zimbabwe at its 2010 Conference of the Parties, because of the country's inadequate actions to halt poaching.

 **Twitter**
Start following Save the Rhino on Twitter by going to www.twitter.com/savetherhino



The workhorse of the skies

While various fancy gadgets make our jobs easier, we rely primarily upon some indispensable workhorses to get the job done.

Raoul has worked tirelessly in conservation in Zimbabwe since 1986

Raoul du Toit
Director
Lowveld Rhino Trust

What first comes to mind when I think along these lines is the plane that I fly on rhino ops. It is a two-seater Aviat Husky that was donated by the Beit Trust twenty years ago. It is mainly fabric-covered, therefore very light, but has a powerful 180-horsepower engine and a propeller with an adjustable pitch, giving a high power-to-weight ratio. The plane flies itself - or perhaps it is just that, after over 3,000 hours, I've become so used to flying it, I don't think about the controls most of the time. It gracefully allows me to do tight orbits over a rhino at relatively slow speed, nose pitched up to the limits of the pitch control, without having to take my eyes away from the operation below me to anxiously monitor instruments that I'd certainly want keep checking if I was flying most other aircraft so close to the speed at which I could stall or spin.

I have done that kind of ops flying even in horrible places like the Chipinge mountains, where a standing wave of wind comes over the mountains, pushing the plane down into the deep valleys. You have to orbit within the valleys with wing flaps down to enhance lift, and a lot of power, adjusting for the variable wind direction in different parts of the orbit,

while the plane is tossed around in the turbulent air. Its tolerance of extreme flying conditions makes the Husky an aircraft that passengers with queasy stomachs should definitely not get into. When radio-tracking, it is easy for the pilot to roll a wing up without deviating from course. This allows the strut-mounted antenna to scan from the area below the plane to the horizon, but being what is technically described as an unbalanced turn, it inevitably unbalances the stomach of a passenger.

Some say that the Husky is just an imitation of the famous Piper Supercub, which looks very similar. Not true. The Husky flies just as slowly as the Supercub but also much faster and, most importantly, has twice the fuel endurance that is a major factor in our rhino work.

A great safety feature of the Husky compared to other small aircraft is its structural strength. I have collided with big birds like eagles and vultures, which are always a risk when flying low above areas where there are a lot of animal carcasses, such as during the devastating poaching that accompanied land invasions in Zimbabwean conservancies in 2001-4. A bird strike creates a mighty bang and an equally mighty fright, particularly when

the extent of the damage is unclear. The Husky's tail strut once cut a tawny eagle almost in half. While I was trying to work out what had happened to my violently pitched aircraft, the vet who had darted a rhino was shouting over the radio to be given directions to the collapsed animal. If he had looked up he would have seen the eagle fall down to make a direct hit on the rhino. The Husky's robust landing gear also enables me to land on a wide variety of surfaces; rough patches of open ground, overgrown airfields, roads. The only landing problem I've incurred was when the tail wheel snapped off as it caught in a small termite hole. The tail wheel spring had finally fatigued after thousands of landings. Not to be beaten, we patched up the bent and torn rudder and made a new temporary spring to complete the op by cutting a car's leaf spring in half.

This reminds me, a Land Cruiser is another form of reliable kit. The first temporary spring we made for the Husky was from a Land Rover spring but it was too soft - a Land Cruiser spring did the job. Having opened up the Husky versus Supercub debate, I'll leave the Land Cruiser versus Land Rover issue to another discussion about favourite kit for rhino work in Africa...



Carla the rhino liked to lead William whenever he went out to cut browse for her