

Zambia:

North Luangwa National Park and surrounding Game Management Area scout forces undergo a variety of training to enhance anti-poaching efforts.



Excellence is an art won by training

The primary asset to any anti-poaching force is its manpower. Adequate numbers, motivation, strong leadership and discipline are all important elements of the same. In North Luangwa National Park, we have worked hard to ensure the law enforcement standards are high but, with illegal trophy hunting for ivory and rhino horn on the increase, there is no room for complacency.

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The North Luangwa National Park (NLNP) black rhino population is yet to receive any direct threat from the region-wide upsurge in rhino poaching – but the statement rightly contains the word ‘yet’, we remain ever vigilant.

Even where rhino populations are struggling, reintroductions cannot take place in insecure areas. Indeed, security is one of the main criteria an area must fulfil in order to gain approval for such a programme to take place. Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) began its involvement in North Luangwa, through the North Luangwa Conservation Programme (NLCP), back in 1986. The park was originally declared a “Wilderness Area” and had too few scouts with too few resources to patrol it effectively. In 1998, (the year black rhino were declared nationally extinct in Zambia) FZS / NLCP

formed a 10-year partnership with the Zambia Wildlife Authority to support law enforcement and protection of NLNP. Substantial increases in manpower, support to recruit and in-service training in 2001-3 culminated in positive trends in wildlife census numbers and a formal assessment by the South African Development Community Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation of a proposal to reintroduce a founder black rhino population to NLNP. In 2002-3, African Rhino Specialist Group experts visited North Luangwa to give their opinions on all aspects of a reintroduction programme: security, browse and habitat quality, sanctuary structure, etc. The first black rhinos arrived in May 2003 with an additional ten animals arriving in 2006 and five in 2008. The final five founder animals will be delivered to NLNP in May 2010.

Paramount to the success of the programme is the ongoing security of the rhinos, the surrounding Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ) and the entire Park. The poaching threat is constantly changing and it is important to stay on top of intelligence and patrol analysis to create an environment for strategic patrol planning. No amount of planning works, however, if the scout force in the field is ill-equipped, de-motivated, underperforming and lacking discipline and confidence. In-service training can address these problems and prevent them from manifesting themselves within the force and becoming real issues. In 2009, with the financial support of FZS, Save the Rhino International, United States Fish & Wildlife Service, Paul Tudor Jones Family Foundation and Save the Rhino Trust Zambia, a programme of courses was carried out to re-train the NLNP and surrounding Game Management Area scout force.

The training involved a variety of different modules but with an emphasis on practical exercises, particularly in firearms use and handling and tactical patrol work. At the end of each course the scouts were issued with full new uniforms and patrol equipment to reinforce the motivational message and pride within the scouts, encouraging them with greater confidence and better discipline to patrol more effectively.

Throughout the training the scouts were being assessed on discipline, motivation, attitude to training and leadership potential. The Chief Training Instructor said: “The Wildlife Police Officer’s [scouts] left each course with highly elevated competency and vastly improved confidence levels. This augurs well for the future and there is no doubt that the continued protection of the growing population of rhinos, the National Park and surrounding areas will be achieved as a result.”

So far, there have been some very encouraging patrol results with two large ivory cases being cracked in the last three months. Let’s hope the news of these and other anti-poaching successes reach the ears of would-be poachers and keep the North Luangwa black rhinos off the target list.

