



Skilled rhino trackers maintain a constant presence in the field to deter poachers.

IMAGES: STEVEN AND ANN TOON

# Ensuring the security of the Kunene Region's black rhino population

Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) has for the past 27 years provided consistent patrolling of the black rhino range in Kunene Region, Namibia. Simultaneously, the Trust has constantly monitored the rhino population by means of individual recognition of each rhino.

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Rhino data is recorded on identification forms and includes GPS coordinates for rhino sighting localities and clear photographs of each animal. Home ranges are also evaluated, as are sex ratios, age classes and female inter-calving periods. These activities and resulting data are provided by teams of trackers operating from different bases, in vehicles, on camels, on foot and supported by aerial surveillance and rhino-tracking flights, with air to ground communication. Ground-based tracker teams have vehicle and handheld radios for effective communications.

The present rhino range covers an area of 2,700 km<sup>2</sup>, currently subdivided into twelve eco-zones for field patrol, rhino monitoring effort and aerial surveillance. To cover this rhino range with available resources, the Trust established an Adaptive Monitoring Strategy that integrates expert knowledge of rhinos with long-term rhino data. The goal of the Strategy ensures that the use of resources for patrolling and monitoring is highly effective, efficient and repeatable.

## Objectives of the Adaptive Monitoring Strategy are:

- > to incorporate both expert knowledge and hard data (rhino database) to prioritise plans
- > integrate priorities for implementation into practical work plans
- > compare the conceptual model with practical monitoring effort to identify shortfalls and changing circumstances. Adjust accordingly

## Key variables that influence where SRT chooses to place its monitoring effort are:

- > security threats and their changing circumstances
- > rhino population performance related specifically to mortalities, inter-calf periods (birth rates), dispersal and additional factors relating to population status and distribution
- > the monitoring capabilities of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism / Conservancy staff deployed on the periphery of the range

A relative importance value is assigned to each of the above variables and to each monitoring method: eco-zone census / audit; ground patrol; field-training patrol; aerial surveillance / tracking flight; full moon ground patrol; tourists' viewing patrol; and remote camera placement and monitoring

Periodically, the Strategy is evaluated to refine key variables and their relative importance ranking, and to produce revised work plans. Recording and analysing field patrol and rhino monitoring effort and the outcomes from this effort are essential to the Trust, which then acts as a deterrent to would-be poachers.

Resulting from the above is a comprehensive black rhino database that has been in operation for over 20 years. In addition, the Trust is able to assure donors of the wise use of funds and efficient application of resources. The fundamental aim of this strategy is to monitor the rhino population continually and as effectively as possible, while reducing the motivation for poachers to enter the rhino range in the first place.

Trackers are rewarded with an incentive in the form of a rhino sighting and recording bonus based on the identification of each individual rhino. An added incentive for trackers is the annual field day bonus based on the actual annual field days worked. Both these bonus incentives are carefully administered.

The application of the Adaptive Monitoring Strategy is proving effective for the protection of black rhino resident in the Kunene Region of Namibia: long may that be the case.



## Camels on the job

Our grateful thanks to US Fish and Wildlife Service for its grant of \$39,435 to help support the costs of the camel-based rhino monitoring team, which patrols particularly challenging terrain in the Kunene. Save the Rhino contributed \$9,169 from our own core funds.