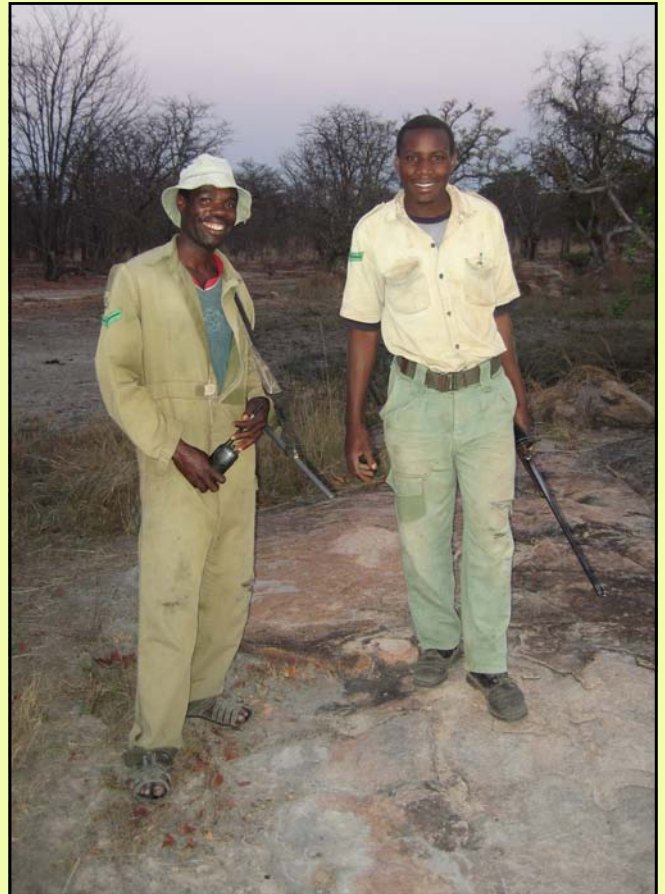


Protecting the Rhino

by Paul Holmes

Twenty four hour surveillance of the remaining rhinos is vital for their continuing survival in the Midlands. The Rhino monitors, who are funded by the Trust, carry out this task with enthusiasm. Each time we have visited the conservancy we have been lucky enough to have had the opportunity to see rhino in the bush and are always impressed with the monitors' skill and morale.

The monitors are armed and have radio communication with Dave Strydom, the conservator, and many of the landowners. This enables rapid communication of information about any suspicious people seen in the conservancy. When we were there the radios were buzzing with a sighting of unidentified people wandering about. Sometimes these people can have a legitimate reason, e.g. legally prospecting with official permission, or they can be illegally poaching wildlife with dogs, setting wire snares or even going after the rhino. All sightings are followed up and this has resulted in a staggering number of arrests and convictions for poaching, 68 in the first 8 months of 2009. Also 1048 poacher's wire snares have been removed in the same period!



Warning Sign

Boots or 'Tyre' Sandals - Which would you prefer when walking through the bush ?

The monitors are incredibly skilled at tracking the rhino all day without disturbing them, but in order to do this they need sturdy uniform. They have recently received new boots from a South African donor but still more are needed as well as new uniform, trousers, shirts and overalls. The wear and tear on clothing in the bush is severe. The photograph below illustrates 'traditional' sandals made from car tyres used by one of the guards whilst out walking in the bush all day. One of the downsides of having inadequate uniform is the possibility that the guards themselves can become mistaken for trespassers. This results in time being wasted following up reports of suspicious men wandering in the bush.



With the onset of the rainy season there is also a dire need for lightweight two man tents for use on night patrols.