

Capacity building

An essential cornerstone for a new decade in rhino conservation

The ongoing safety of rhinoceros in Zimbabwe's Intensive Protection Zones (IPZ) is in the hands of Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management (PWMA) field personnel, who work with optimism and dedication despite testing conditions, limited material resources and little specialist rhino knowledge. Past activities inform future conservation efforts, through adapting strategies and consolidating successes.



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Since 2005, PWMA has recruited new field staff to augment its ability to manage Wildlife Estates. The recruits undergo short general training before being deployed to a National Park, where they must learn as much as they can on the job. Inevitably, in-service training opportunities vary among parks, and those associated with an IPZ that enjoys NGO support may stand a better chance of undergoing further development. Rhino monitoring in IPZs is a priority, which led to the employment (funded externally) and training of 36 rhino monitors over a three-year period, to augment PWMA capacity. Following training, these monitors were absorbed into the PWMA and deployed to suitable IPZs.

In order to develop the skills of rangers and ecologists, several innovative targeted programmes have been introduced by local NGOs over the past decade. These initiatives enable staff to protect not only rhinos, but all indigenous flora and fauna. For example, local (e.g. Marwell Zimbabwe Trust) NGOs, with international NGO support, employed external trainers to run short courses for PWMA rangers in basic rhino monitoring based on the African Rhino Specialist Group's (AfRSG) 'Sandwith Training Course for Field Rangers'. Further detailed training has been run by AfRSG

representatives, enabling senior IPZ staff to ensure that rhino monitoring and database maintenance attain international standards. Additional training in data collection and analysis, and field skills such as radio tracking has also been carried out. These programmes have led to enhanced reporting, analysis and knowledge of rhino populations in National Parks.

An example of the success of capacity strengthening was demonstrated in recent rhino management operations in Kyle and Chivero Recreational Parks. Prior to commencement of operations at Kyle, rangers trained by AfRSG in 2009 presented the veterinary team with a photographic dossier on the rhinos that were to be ear-notched and dehorned, which provided rapid access to vital statistics prior to individuals' immobilisations. At both Kyle and Chivero, rangers confidently located and identified target rhino and supported the veterinary team on the ground. All rhinos in both Parks were dehorned and ear-notched in under three days each and comfortably within the donors' budget. The upshot of such efficient operations is that a high proportion of rhinos are individually recognisable, leading to improved monitoring and confidence in population performance data.

Capacity building is minimally effective if it happens only once or involves few people, as staff transfers and turnover create

vacuums to be filled by new recruits. It is also ineffective if the recipient organisation cannot facilitate the use of staff knowledge and skills, manifesting poor outcomes and low morale. Local NGOs can assist by ensuring that regular standardised training occurs, which keeps staff focused and involved and enables new staff to be rapidly assimilated. This can be perpetuated either by developing trainers from within the organisation or by sending candidates to be trained by external professionals. Either way, it incurs a monetary cost that wildlife authorities in some developing countries cannot sustain: external support is vital.

The NGO challenge for the next decade is to build on outcome-based systems that are already in place, and to continue to support management operations, personnel development and population monitoring. In time, sound conservation practice, comprehensive wildlife law enforcement and robust research for population and habitat management will be entrenched in an organisation that is staffed by proud and professional warriors for wildlife.



Above: Matobo rhino monitors demonstrate the telemetry kit.

Below left: PWMA Kyle staff with a dehorned rhino. Rhinos are dehorned to reduce the threat from poaching.



Grants

In March 2010 we sent over \$41,445 from USFWS and a further \$5,000 from our own core funds, to pay for rhino management operations in six key rhino areas in five National Parks.