

## Office space in **Namibia**

How do you communicate with your staff when they are spread over 25,000 km<sup>2</sup>, cellphone coverage is patchy at best, and you've only got email access in a couple of locations?

Rudi Loutit | CEO, Save the Rhino Trust

**H**ere at Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), we've got some peculiarly difficult logistics to battle with. The problem is space – too much of it. We are kilometres and kilometres apart from each other for most of the time, and meeting, planning, debriefing and so on all takes an immense amount of coordination and effort (not to mention vehicle costs).

Our office is based in Swakopmund, about 350 km away from Windhoek, where our partners, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (the government department responsible for wildlife), are based.

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The Swakopmund office is basic: four small rooms big enough for two or three people each, and a tiny kitchen. There is Wi-Fi access, and the rooms are light and breezy. True, you have to lock the grille even if you're just popping to the loo (shared with the staff from the Snake

Park next door). Sometimes the three-metre African Python from the Snake Park comes and hides under a desk to escape the continual school visits. Laptops are this season's hot property in Namibia, and it doesn't do to leave anything unattended. Cellphones move faster than hot cross buns.

The problems arise when we go into the field, which, after all, is where we're meant to be: monitoring the Kunene rhino population. Many of the trackers have never learned to read or write so we rely on the 'scribe' in each team to maintain manual records of sightings (in pre-printed rhino I.D. books), vehicle logs and incident records. These bits of paper need to be collected once a month and sent back for quality control. The bonus calculations for all sightings need to be checked and passed on to our accountant for payment. Some of this work happens at our main field base at Palmwag (445 km or 5.5 hours away to the north); the remainder is done in Swakopmund. Sightings records go off to MET in Windhoek, to be entered into the national rhino database; incident records go to Namibian Police or to the Protective Resource Unit for anything involving CITES-

### Grants

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listed animals; while the vehicle logs go to SRT's admin team to maintain the fleet records and costs.

Staff meetings are another matter. Our trackers are divided into four teams: the Northern camel team, the mobile team, the Desert Rhino Camp team and the Southern Ugab team. Even the nearest team at Ugab is about 2.5 hours drive north of Swakopmund.

Geographically, the centre of the rhino range is somewhere near to Palmwag: that's a full day's drive away from Swakopmund. There is a basic office and accommodation at Palmwag, which we use for meetings. Power at Palmwag is supplied courtesy of solar panels provided a couple of years ago by The Ashden Trust and water comes from a borehole: those bits work well, it's just the communications that's a problem: there's no email access. Sometimes this is a blessing, but if you're missing a bit of vital information, you have to wait until you're back in Swakopmund or in Khorixas (assuming it hasn't rained as this stops the satellite working).

As anyone knows, it doesn't matter what business you're in: in the end, it all comes down to efficient and effective teamwork, coordination and communication. The immense distances we have to cover in Namibia don't help – though all that space and rugged terrain in the desert is wonderful.

Top: SRT's office has two front doors: on the left, the closed door leads to the three offices and a tiny kitchen. Each door is alarmed and has a metal grille for security

Above: Rudi's preferred mode of transport from home to the office – his trusty bicycle



ALL IMAGES SAVE THE RHINO