

From *Ballet* to Rhino conservation - Erica Caren Brell

Bernd Brell describes the unusual career path of unsung hero Erica, who works as Save the Rhino Trust's accountant and Head of Administration.

Bernd Brell
Director of Field Operations
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Erica was born on 11 December 1964 in Somerset West in South Africa. After attending school in SA she studied ballet at the University of Cape Town where she received her Diploma as a qualified ballet teacher. The seed of her enjoyment of the outdoors was sown while spending time on her uncle's farm in Vredendaal.



Erica and Bernd have now moved to Walvis Bay so that daughter Inka can attend school.

BERND BRELL

Before moving to Walvis Bay in 1989 (Walvis Bay was still part of South Africa at that stage), she taught in Tulbagh and Uppington. In Walvis Bay she taught ballet at the Black and Colored schools, which was part of the curriculum of the Cape Administration until Walvis Bay became part of Namibia. After Walvis Bay became

part of Namibia, the subject was dropped and she started her own ballet school, *The Erica Caren Ballet School*. She also joined the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) as a volunteer and became the Vice Chairman, helping to care for homeless and sick animals as well as raising wild animals (e.g. barn owls) that had been confiscated and given to the SPCA to look after.

Her keen interest in the outdoor life took her to Hobatere Lodge (a concession area on the western boundary of the Etosha National Park) during school holidays. The lodge and concession is run by her niece Louise Braine and Louise's husband Steve. While assisting her niece (cooking, general running of the lodge) she also had close encounters with a variety of game: elephants, lions, warthogs, snakes and many more.

It was here that she met her future husband Bernd, working as Lodge Manager, Field Guide and Game Ranger. After getting married in 1997, they spent seven months in Walvis Bay together, before moving to a farm south of the Etosha National Park, where they spent two years living in a 5x5m tent. The couple ran their own safari business from here, Erica doing the books for the safari operation and also being the hostess and caterer on these mobile and walking safaris.

After helping out at Huab Lodge (her daughter Inka was born in August 2000), they approached Blythe Loutit about a job vacancy at the Save the Rhino Trust (SRT)'s Ugab Base Camp, situated on the banks of the Ugab River approximately 60kms east of the Atlantic Ocean.

Again she was tasked to do the book keeping but she also took control of the female staff at the Base Camp as Project Manager. Most of her efforts were put into assisting and helping the ladies at Ugab to

improve their standard of living by looking at health issues, teaching them in making crafts (batik and material painting), basic administration needed to run a campsite and how to keep a campsite clean and intact. She also was SRT's Public Relations Officer at Ugab Base Camp, talking to and advising local and foreign visitors about the do's and don'ts while travelling through the southern parts of the Kunene Rhino Range and the Ugab River.

Between all the above activities she also acted as the pre-school teacher to her daughter and some of the SRT staff's children, using their natural surroundings as their classroom. The evenings were spent either watching elephants moving through camp during the dry season, or tending to a vegetable garden kept behind the "Robinson Crusoe gone wrong" cabin.

After Lorna Davis resigned as Accountant from SRT, Erica became the new accountant and head of administration for the Trust, attending courses in bookkeeping as well as being trained in the bookkeeping system "Quick Books". She has been instrumental in streamlining and bringing SRT's bookkeeping systems up-to-date and communicating with overseas donors on a regular basis.



A wild Namibian black rhino

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