

What good are rhinos to Zimbabwe's Lowveld communities?

The answer: Lowveld Rhino Trust's incentive scheme. Local communities play a powerful role in the survival of the rhinoceros, but their understanding of some of the key issues has been limited due to a lack of relevant information and training, along with incentives.

Simbarashe Chiseva | Community Liaison Officer, Lowveld Rhino Trust



As an attempt to resolve this, the Lowveld Rhino Trust (LRT) is establishing a rhino conservation incentive scheme to raise awareness of rhino conservation amongst communities in and around the South East Lowveld conservancies. The scheme aims to make rhinos more relevant to communities living alongside them, with annual tangible benefits delivered.

The entry points of the scheme are primary schools within a 10km zone of the boundaries of Save and Bulyepi Valley Conservancies. Supplementary conservation education materials known as 'Rhino Cards' were supplied to the upper grades of 84 primary schools in and adjacent to Save Valley Conservancy. These colourful, durable cards contain information about rhino conservation and are consistent with the environmental studies syllabus, so teachers can readily incorporate the material into their lessons.

Teacher-training sessions on rhino conservation were held at each participating school to enhance the teacher's ability to deliver rhino education and awareness. LRT then supported an inaugural Rhino Quiz competition during 2012 in these schools, which are grouped into 18 clusters.

I had a particularly memorable day at Chatama cluster composed of three schools

namely Chamburukira, Tapudzai and Manyiri on 25 October. I had spent seven months on preparatory activities, including drafting quiz documents, distributing Rhino Cards, teacher training and numerous visits to district education officials. Now, after three restless days of distributing quiz materials to cluster centres, the day I had worked and waited for with anxiety and curiosity had arrived. I got up early in the morning and prayed to God for the day to be a success. My mind was swinging between expectation and apprehension; I was not sure what to expect. I arrived at Tapudzai primary school and could not believe what I saw. For a moment I thought another function was happening, but after the school headmaster (Mr Dzoro) welcomed me, I learnt that the amazing stage was set for the Rhino Quiz events.

Over 200 parents and thrice as many students had gathered at the school to proudly watch various rhino education performances and the quiz competition. The children had been training for the Rhino Quiz and their chosen events for months. The prime stage seats were held by the local headmen and district education officials. After the opening, the children nervously took their positions to start the day's performances. The rhino conservation message was displayed through gymnastics, poetry, art and drama. The crowds were thrilled and were left calling for more.

Afterwards, the main headline event, 'The Rhino Quiz' began. Three teams lined

up to compete. The quiz began positively as all the schools answered their first questions correctly. By round four, Tapudzai team had taken a convincing lead by answering all their questions correctly and also finessed three additional questions incorrectly answered by the other two teams. After the ninth and final round, the hosting Tapudzai school team was way ahead. In addition to certificates, the winner and runners-up received rhino prizes of school exercise books. Students that excelled also won personal stationery.

The Rhino Quiz prize offered to winning schools will increase in proportion to the growth in the neighbouring rhino population each year – linking community benefits to successful rhino conservation. In 2013 the programme is being expanded to all primary schools in neighbouring Bulyepi Valley Conservancy as well.

Grants

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We've sent just over £32,000 to the LRT this financial year, including €5,000 from Dublin Zoo (an annual donation), £17,709 from Knowsley Safari Park, £1,966 from Shannah Adams and other misc. donors; £2,362 from USFWS, and £5,955 from our core funds. These grants paid for ongoing rhino monitoring, for the community incentives scheme and for exchange visits for the LRT's rhino monitors. Big thanks to all our donors!



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