

# What, actually, is a conservationist?

Typical, normal, standard, usual... words often used when a request comes through for 'a day in the life' article. But living far from anywhere, surrounded by wild animals and stark beauty, crunching away at numbers one minute, elbow-deep in a Toyota Land Cruiser engine the next, is not always what people think conservation is all about. Nevertheless here's my stab at it.

**Ed Sayer** | Project leader, North Luangwa Conservation Programme

**F**lying in the cool of the early morning, before it gets too hot and tight turns become affected by the thermals and wind, can be a great start to the day. Taking off around 5 am, these flights are either for law enforcement support and

construction projects or roadworks. I also try to regularly see each rhino, especially those that we may be monitoring more closely. This could be an older animal, a cow that has recently calved or an animal whose condition is cause for concern. During these sightings I don't get too caught up with getting a perfect photograph, but rather try to spend time watching the animal for as long as possible without it being disturbed to observe its behaviour, feeding, interaction with its surroundings and general demeanour.

The afternoons can often be more of the same but are invariably more sedentary with office work being a necessary evil! By the end of the day it is back to rhinos for a full debrief with the Head of Rhino Monitoring to discuss rhino sightings of the day. We try to see every animal twice per month so there are normally sightings to discuss and photos to go through. There are a few animals that receive 'in-field' supplementary feeding and we discuss how much they have eaten, what they left and what amount we need to keep

feeding them. Depending upon the stage of the deployment (the rhino-monitoring officers do 10-day shifts at a time) they may switch tactics to carry out dedicated law enforcement patrols over a specific area. We try to mix things up and not get into a fixed routine, which poachers might take advantage of, so there are many aspects to discuss.

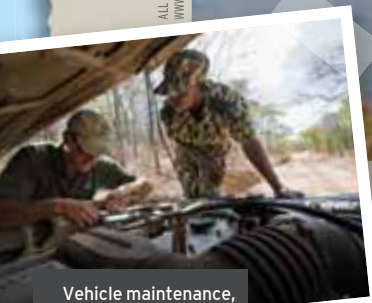
What else? Well, negotiator, accountant, strategist, facilitator, human resource manager, procurement officer, mechanic, civil engineer, fund raiser, construction supervisor, pilot, nurse to sick employees, scarecrow to marauding elephants breaking into the kitchen, dispatcher of child-killer snakes, botanist (collecting plant specimens to look up 'in my spare time'), loving husband, caring father... oh and occasionally time to 'be' a conservationist, whatever that is!

## Grants

We'd like to thank Peter Lawrence very much for his donation of £1,000, which paid for 5 digital cameras, cases and memory chips, as well as contributing to picket maintenance. We also sent £1,864 from grants from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund to pay for teacher-training workshops for the completely revised Lolesha Luangwa; the Conservation Education Programme.



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Vehicle maintenance, aerial surveillance and rhino discussions are all in a day's work

surveillance in sensitive areas, checking or re-supplying



patrols or to specifically locate and check on rhinos using VHF transmitters. The plane is fitted with tracking antennas on each wing enabling me to locate an animal in a matter of minutes, to help the rhino-monitoring unit reduce tracking time. With an evermore dispersing population, individuals can move considerable distances overnight and we need to know their positions to help coordinate the security around the Intensive Protection Zone.

I normally fly for an hour every other day, then once on the ground I visit the radio control room at the airstrip. This is the nerve centre of the law enforcement effort across the area (over 1,600 km<sup>2</sup>) and utilises officers from 24 Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) bases who conduct more than 60 patrols a month. The radio control officers, as well as scanning radio traffic over 25 channels, crucially monitor and coordinate patrol movements across the North Luangwa ecosystem, and log and record poaching incidents and illegal activity.

The rest of the morning can be filled with any number of things from meetings, answering emails, writing reports, visiting the workshop or checking progress on

