

# INNOVATIVE THOUGHT TO PROTECT RHINOS

Over the past few years, the rapid inflation in the price of rhino horn has exerted significant poaching pressure on global rhino populations. At Ol Jogi, in common with many others, we have been forced to analyse, evaluate and evolve our security infrastructure to mitigate the ever-increasing threat.

**Jamie Gaymer** | Warden, Ol Jogi Conservancy

often refer to our 'toolbox' of security techniques with which we combat the threat. Each 'tool' serves a purpose and plays an individual part in offering a level of protection for rhinos; however each tool may become obsolete and relatively ineffectual as the threat evolves. It is paramount to consistently scrutinise our toolbox to ensure that we host an efficient model.

Our efficiency might be measured in terms of rhinos lost to poaching as a percentage of our total population; the impact of poaching on our net population growth; and/or our relative success measured against local, national and international trends. It is clear that the strength of individual tools is vastly increased when used in conjunction with other tools.

Cooperative and mutual intelligence-gathering between the private sector and the Kenyan government has led us to understand that 'most' rhino poaching sadly has some form of 'inside' involvement. Rhino poaching cartels now have the financial motivation and backing to economically incentivise sanctuary employees. In doing so, the poachers gain valuable information on our circumstances and rhino security is compromised.

According to our information, poaching syndicates actively seek sanctuary employees with the view to financially corrupt them. We believe individuals are being offered large sums of money to sell sensitive information to the poachers, meaning poachers are able to evade all other security tools and ultimately poach our rhinos. In recognition of this theory, we added another implement to our toolbox in 2013. We initiated a 'zero rhino-poaching-bonus incentive'. Ol Jogi realised it would be very difficult and financially unviable for the poachers to corrupt 'all' of our security employees. In light of this, we took a percentage of our security budget to one side. A bonus is payable at stipulated intervals to 'all' security employees in equal measure, as long as we do not lose a rhino to poaching during that interval. Those who stand to gain are all people who hold the information that could potentially compromise our security.

The concept is simple and aims to create a self-policing mechanism amongst our security employees. We felt that if we added another financial incentive to improve motivation, the Ol Jogi security personnel would actively seek individuals who might selfishly deprive them of their bonus. The fact remains that one or two individuals might gain more by selling information to poachers but, by doing so, they deprive the rest of their financial reward.

It soon becomes clear when an individual suddenly 'comes into money' and typically starts to buy material items far beyond their economic means. In such cases, the perpetrator not only lends him/herself to further investigation but also alienates his/her colleagues.

Only time will tell whether this concept will work. It is still new and leads to a series of unanswered questions: How much of our security budget can we afford to put into this scheme or withdraw from other aspects of our security tool-box? What is the right balance, considering the level of our current security infrastructure?

In conclusion, Ol Jogi aims to test this concept and adjust the balance if necessary. Ultimately, we hope to find a more cost-effective rhino conservation model and if successful, perhaps others can replicate this idea, fine tune it to suit their individual circumstances and hopefully achieve better efficiency by tackling the problem from a different angle.

## Grants

Ol Jogi is a member of the Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS) in Kenya. Save the Rhino has supported a number of APLRS initiatives, most recently the black rhino Emergency Fund, thanks to grants of £5,000 from Chester Zoo, £2,500 from the Swire Charitable Trust and £200 from Matt Todd.



ALL IMAGES: JAMIE GAYMER

Rangers work hard to protect Ol Jogi's rhinos including Mweiga and her calf (top) and Mbenda (left) from poachers

