

Training on the frontline



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Since 2010, the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism has been proactive in its endeavours to combat the onslaught of poaching. A number of security workshops and scene-of-the-crime courses have been held, new technology tested and even drones deployed.

Piet Beytell | Principal Conservation Scientist: Wildlife Research, Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism

In a sense, Namibia has been lucky that the majority of rhino poaching has taken place in Zimbabwe and South Africa. However this has changed, with Namibia now experiencing a sharp spike in rhino poaching. The recent upsurge in poaching of rhino and elephant in the north-east of Namibia has emphasised the need for specially trained Wildlife Protection Unit members. Poachers are mostly heavily armed and trained criminals; thus the need has arrived to train Wildlife Protection Services (WPS) members in the Ministry to counter these illegal activities.

Therefore, MET has approved a Wildlife Protection Unit training school of excellence on an MET rare species breeding farm adjacent to Waterberg Plateau Park. During the first year, the aim of the school will be to train 200 WPS staff members in various anti-poaching methods. This training is very important to ensure all staff members are fully able to combat poaching in Namibia's protected areas.

Also during the first year, twelve WPS staff members will be identified to be trained as instructors in the second year, to ensure the future sustainability of the school; retraining of the first year's staff members will also be done. At the end of year two, a programme will be developed to ensure that all staff are retrained annually to ensure good standards are maintained. The training will be done by experienced instructors with experience in tactics, bush-craft and weapons handling. The company identified to provide the training currently holds the contract to train the Special Forces of the Namibian Defence Force.

All training modules will be evaluated and adjustments made to ensure the highest standard of training is provided. The facility will also be used to conduct other courses such as the annual law enforcement training, scene-of-the-crime, DNA collection and rhino monitoring. The facility will also be used to train members of the Protected Resource Unit of the Namibian Police and could in future be used to train anti-poaching units of rhino custodians.

Grants

Our thanks to USFWS, which has provided a grant of \$89,112 for additional security measures for Waterberg Plateau Park; Save the Rhino is contributing another £3,200 from our own core funds.

Standing as a united front to save Namibia's rhinos

After successfully suppressing an upsurge in rhino poaching in Namibia in the late 1980s, the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism recognised the need for and importance of improving national coordination and maximizing the impact of conservation programmes in the country.

Birgit Kötting | Rhino Custodian Manager, Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism

Consequently, the Black Rhino Custodianship Programme began in 1993, enabling private land owners and communal conservancies to enter into an agreement with the Namibian government in order to have the desert-adapted black rhinoceros reintroduced in their area and thereby diversify tourism-related benefits from wildlife.

Since its launch in 1993, the Custodianship Programme has blossomed into an incredible conservation success story, with 26 freehold and 11 communal custodians currently taking part. Despite the disturbing upsurge in rhino poaching in southern Africa, the Programme continues to receive a lot of interest from individuals dedicated to rhino conservation, and during early 2014 another seven freehold properties were assessed for their suitability for black rhino. In 2012, the Programme was decentralised to regional offices in order to distribute the responsibility of the Programme more effectively within the Ministry and maintain the achievements the Programme has produced thus far.

Also during early 2014, white rhino owners in Namibia took the long-overdue initiative to form an association that pulls together all private rhino owners in an effort to assist the Namibian government in the fight against rhino crimes. People have come to realise that in order to curb the current rhino poaching onslaught in rhino range states, we have to stand as a united front against poaching syndicates.