

If rhino conservation has escalated into warfare, then welfare must be our primary objective



Sam Taylor | Chief Conservation Officer, Borana Conservancy

Our recent (and first!) poaching incident on Borana was performed with the collusion of two employees. Both were fencers on Borana, both well paid and looked after. It is nearly always the case that there is inside involvement. Wander around Borana after sunset, even with a bright full moon, and it is unlikely you will find a rhino without any prior knowledge of their whereabouts.

It has led me to think about what motivates a relatively well-paid employee of a conservancy to risk a long jail sentence for what amounts to a significant amount in the short-term, but not much when one balances it against a lifetime of employment, housing and social security. I think it is important for us to try and understand the mindset and profile of the individuals that risk so much to bite the hand that feeds them.

Obviously money is the primary motive. However, whilst they are offered comparatively large sums of money by poaching syndicates for their help, it cannot compare

to even a year's salary, let alone 25 to 30 years' service. Many of our rangers have only a minimal amount of conventional education, and so the concept of financial planning is perhaps not as

straightforward as it seems to us. With a growing economy in Kenya, the upwardly mobile population's first-world desire for material possessions combined with an aggressive marketing culture equates to many spending beyond their means. As a result, individuals get themselves into serious debt. Kenya has some fairly draconian banking laws, and while large un-backed loans are available, failure to meet the payments can end in bailiffs literally lifting the mattress from underneath you. The catastrophic impact this can have may drive someone to risk aiding a poacher for the sake of some financial relief.

If this is the case, then the financial departments at conservancies have a greater role to play than just balancing the books and running the payroll. An open-door policy, whereby employees are encouraged to come forward with financial difficulties and get advice about the best and sustainable way out of any financial trouble, is as significant to the protection of rhino as the habitat and wildlife protection itself.



Furthermore, the rangers' training must go beyond just learning to shoot and track. One of the most significant things our armed teams have

taken away from their ongoing training with 51Degrees is an education beyond the military tactics needed in anti-poaching. Long discussions about family planning, financial and life choices and health have placed the men in a better position, so as not to get themselves into a scenario whereby desperation forces them into the criminal underworld of commercial poaching.

But it's not all about finances and education. As I mentioned, these two fencers were well paid, with salaries far exceeding union demands. There are other factors. Allowing rangers to take ownership of their roles creates an enabling environment whereby the men feel a personal responsibility for the wildlife in their charge. Taking pride and enjoying in one's work means being allowed to have an opinion, and the ability to express your ideas. For this, face-time with senior management is essential and lessens the risk of an individual becoming disenchanted and working against us. Taking time to have informal discussions with the rangers in the field can go a long way to lifting their self-esteem.

“Allowing rangers to take ownership of their roles creates an enabling environment whereby the men feel a personal responsibility for the wildlife in their charge”

*Above: Rangers receive financial planning advice at Borana
Main: Equipment such as binoculars, boots and uniforms are essential for the rangers*



Of course there will probably always be bad apples amongst a team and there is no avoiding that. However with the majority engaged and motivated, it is hoped that these individuals will be unearthed soon enough.

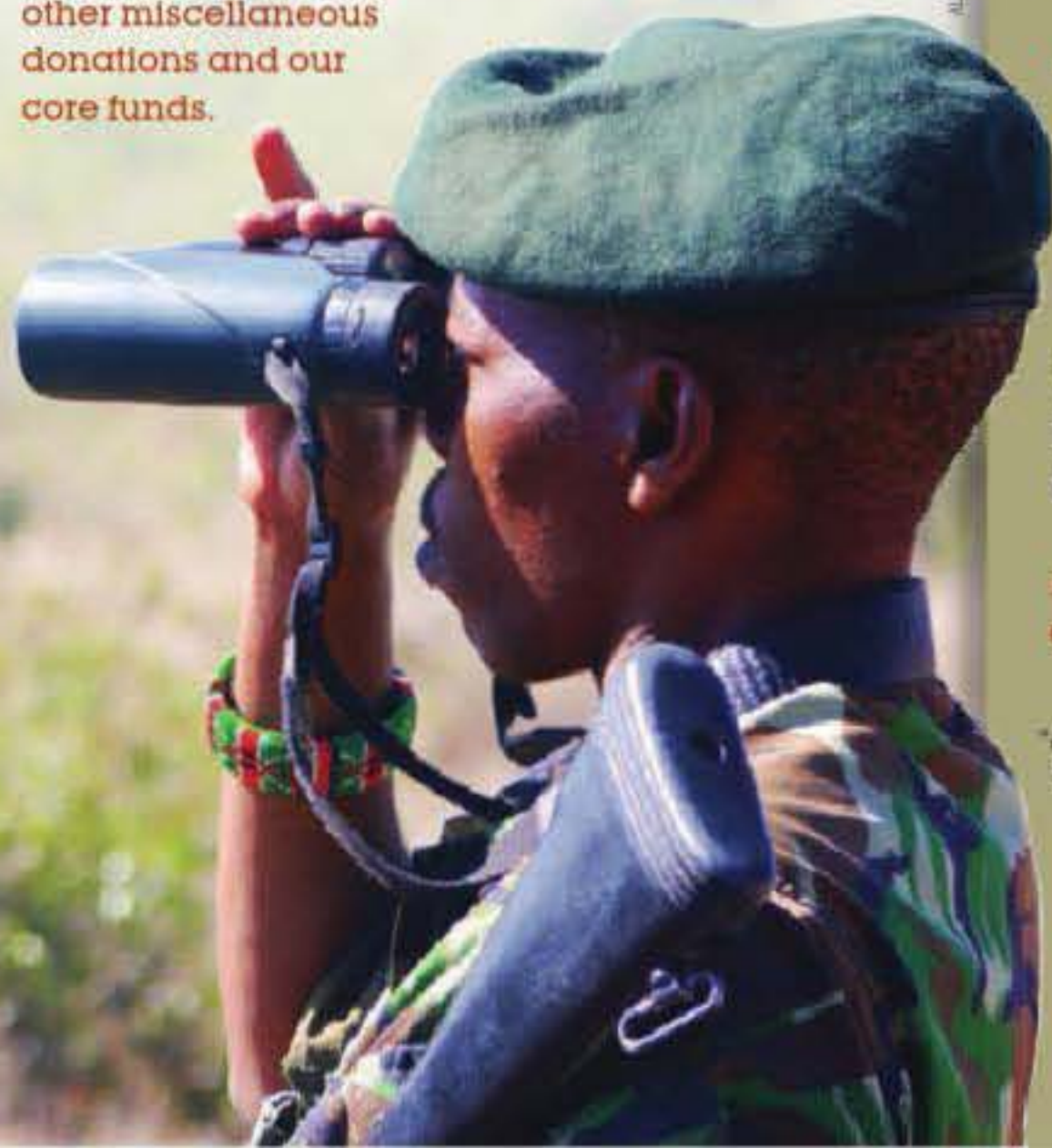
Ultimately, however, we need to provide the means and positive environment for the rangers to protect the rhino. This all comes down to welfare. Over the years Borana has been aided by Save the Rhino to develop the welfare of its rangers. Providing the best kit and equipment means they can perform their arduous job of tracking, monitoring and protecting rhino in comfort and safety. Ranger training has been integral to the development of skillsets that help improve lives both at work and at home, and instill a sense of pride in their position.

Recently, Save the Rhino has facilitated grants to upgrade housing and accommodation, so that the rangers can get much needed respite from the rigors of the bush in their down time. Borana has provided all its employees with flying doctors cover, and taken a lead role in the creation of the 'Running for Rangers' initiative, which, with support of SRI aims to raise money for rangers' welfare in terms of kit, equipment and insurance cover.

Our rangers are our greatest asset, but also a means for poachers to infiltrate. We must understand and address their needs, and in doing so, not only will we have a more motivated and effective anti-poaching unit, but the chances of being betrayed to a poaching gang is lessened. This will save lives. Both the rhinos' and – ultimately – the rangers'.

Grants

Since November 2014, we have sent Borana grants totalling £108,804, including \$38,168 from the Anna Merz Rhino Trust, \$58,708 from USFWS, and many other miscellaneous donations and our core funds.



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Membership of Save the Rhino is the perfect way to support rhino conservation. Join as a member yourself or purchase gift memberships for the rhino fans in your life. Funds raised through memberships are hugely important to Save the Rhino, and we are very grateful to all our members.

We have three membership schemes:

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As a **Protect** member, you will receive

- A Save the Rhino T-shirt (colours vary)
- A rhino pin-badge and car sticker
- Monthly e-zines full of rhino news and info on how you can get involved
- Subscription to *The Horn*, our magazine

Evolve £10 per month

Includes all the benefits of **Protect** membership PLUS free entry to one Save the Rhino event per year

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£2 per month, for ages 3 to 16

As a **RhinoSaver**, you will receive

- Personalised RhinoSaver certificate
- Silver rhino pin-badge
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- Membership pack full of fun rhino facts and pictures
- Cuddly rhino toy

Overseas members very welcome!

Our members come from all over the world. You can now pay in GBP, Euros or US dollars on our website, by card or PayPal.

For membership queries contact Grace, email grace@savetherhino.org or call +44 (0)20 7357 7474

*All gifts included in the welcome packs are subject to availability. Save the Rhino reserves the right to substitute alternative gifts of an equivalent nature and value and/or refuse entry to events. See our website for more details.



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