

THE DILEMMA OF THE HORNED

In the Junes of 2003, 2006, 2008 and 2010, events took place in North Luangwa National Park that will forever be imprinted on the minds of those involved. Although years separated these June dates, what happened was the culmination of decades of dedication and lifetimes of lost sleep.

Claire Lewis | Project Ecologist Jake da Motta | North Luangwa Conservation Programme

I'm clinging precariously onto a sledge, not a snowy Christmas toboggan type – but a flatbed pallet with metal runners big enough to carry a ton of rhino as it lurches down the grassy airstrip. I'm trying to answer my six-year-old daughter's questions, when tears prick my eyes as it dawns on me that her ambition of becoming a wildlife vet might be just a pipe dream, and she'd be better off with her other ambition of flying like Tinkerbell the fairy.

The deep exhalations of moist, warm horse-like air on my hand as I count immobilised breaths of this rhino, Kango, his hairy ears and prehensile lip, smooth toenails and precious horns are stark reminders that everything we do is because of this animal, and those that arrived back in North Luangwa in all those Junes.

Kango has so far behaved impeccably, being darted in a nice open area where he chose to lie down heavily sedated in order for us to give him the short bumpy ride to rhino Hilton.

It has been my great privilege to be part of this positive blip on the ECG trace of rhino survival – a trace that is in constant danger of flat-lining. There is rarely any good news about rhinos. Habitat loss and poaching are taking an ever greater toll on all five species worldwide, and as their dwindling populations become increasingly fragmented, so the gene pool of each species shrinks to a puddle from which evaporation into extinction through disease, climate change or local politics is only a dry season away. Reduced to critical status by the activities of man, the existence of the rhinoceros now depends entirely on the benevolence of its nemesis.

Back on the sledge, I am awed by the quiet professionalism of the rhino immobilisation team. Every year we gather together the biggest and best in rhino conservation in North Luangwa. With logistics dovetailing across the continent it is a marathon feat to have, for one week only, a helicopter, a fixed-wing Husky aircraft, two vets,

a monitoring coordinator and my husband, Ed (who has learnt to do drilling and radio transmitters implants) to immobilise the North Luangwa rhinos to refit them with micro-chips, transmitters and ear notches for identification. I'm usually back at base organising food and laundry, but today I get to be involved, as we are moving Kango to a boma to give him some respite from a dominant adversary and a few weeks of protein-rich feeding to get his condition up. Kango has so far behaved impeccably, being darted in a nice open area where he chose to lie down heavily sedated in order for us to give him the short bumpy ride to rhino Hilton. He is too precious to allow natural selection and fate to have their way.

Over the course of the last few days, each rhino has had a radio transmitter implanted in one of its horns; a female was found with a new week-old calf and several others confirmed to be pregnant; carrying inside them priceless, microscopic cargos of DNA to bolster the genetic survival of the species.

It is not inconceivable that we can reverse the damage man has done and haul rhinos from the brink of extinction. Keeping rhinos alive depends on the continued efforts made through dozens of projects worldwide like the NLCP, staffed by near-fanatical conservationists, funded by deep-pocketed donors and backed up by tenacious law-enforcers. Oh... and by the simple expedient of persuading the certain peoples of South-east Asia to rather 'take a couple of aspirins and call us back in a hundred years or so.' But in the meantime I can hope that my six-year-old will become a wildlife vet and there will still be rhinos for her to immobilise 20 years from now when she graduates.

Not inconceivable, the odds are long, but let's hope not.

Grants

Since October 2014, Save the Rhino has sent £2,000 (plus the grants for Lolesha Luangwa) to the North Luangwa Conservation Programme for the purchase of VHF transmitters, thanks to the generous support of Peter Lawrence.



Moving Kango

Top two images: Rhinos are immobilised to be ear-notched and re-fitted with micro-chips and transmitters

Right and below: The process of moving black rhino Kango from a pallet into a boma



Where the money went: 2014-15

Each year, we keep detailed records of all the grants we make: where the money came from and how it was allocated. Then we analyse the grants to get totals by country, by rhino species, by field programme, by strategy and by activity.

Cathy Dean | SRI Director

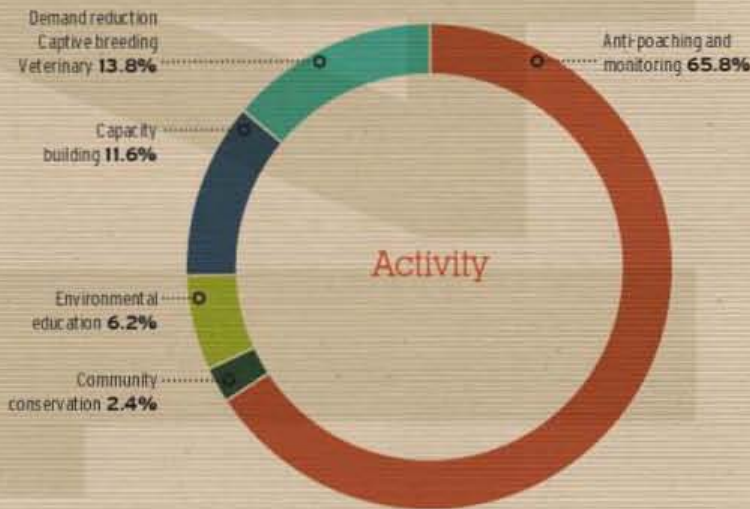
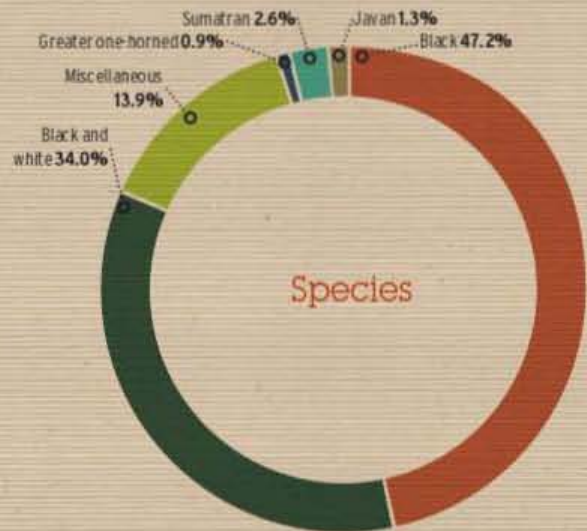
In total, we gave out **£846,707** to rhino programmes, as well as **£2,147** to the **Environmental Investigation Agency**, from the joint Douglas Adams Memorial Lecture. The following analysis relates only to rhino-related work

Species support

81% went specifically to African rhino programmes - black and white

5% went to Asian rhino programmes - Greater one-horned, Sumatran and Javan. Our partner the International Rhino Foundation (IRF) leads on programme management and fundraising for Asian rhinos, and we do what we can to help fundraise for them without targeting the same donors

The remaining 14% went towards work in Vietnam to reduce demand for rhino horn



Activity support

The majority of our grants went on **rhino protection and monitoring (66%)**. It is vital to protect the big rhino populations while longer-term behaviour change campaigns, international cooperation, intelligence gathering operations etc. take effect

14% went on demand reduction efforts in Vietnam

12% went on capacity building: sharing experience and skills between field programmes, such as scene-of-the-crime training

6% went on environmental education programmes using black rhinos as the focal species. We support Rafiki wa Faru in Tanzania's Mkomazi National Park and Lolesha Luangwa in North Luangwa National Park in Zambia

2% went on community conservation programmes (though many of our grants involve local communities in terms of employment, education, training and capacity building) and captive breeding efforts for Sumatran rhinos

Country support

68% of our grants went to the 'Big 4' African rhino range states: Kenya, Zimbabwe, Namibia and S Africa which have the biggest populations of black and white rhinos. Zimbabwe's rhinos receive substantial support from the IRF and its donors, while South African rhinos have many donors supporting them, e.g. Peace Parks Foundation, Howard G. Buffett, WWF-South Africa etc

We gave substantial grants to field programmes in Tanzania and Zambia (5% each). Although these programmes have smaller rhino populations, they have the ecological carrying capacity to hold much more

14% of our funding went to Vietnam for behaviour change campaign work with TRAFFIC-Vietnam and Education for Nature Vietnam

