

# HELP A RANGER SAVE A RHINO



rucksacks  
sleeping bags

£45,000  
raised!



tents



first-aid kits  
& boots



torches &  
headlamps



thank you!



ALL IMAGES BY DIRK SWART UNLESS NOTED



Dirk Swart | Section Ranger, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

The need to maintain and upgrade equipment for field rangers on the front-line in the war against rhino poaching is ongoing. Last year Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HIP) received a boost in this effort with funds raised from Save the Rhino's Help a Ranger, Save a Rhino appeal.

In September 2014 I was invited to give a presentation in Budapest at the annual EAZA (European Association of Zoo and Aquaria) conference on the rhino poaching scourge in South Africa with particular emphasis on HIP. A number of these zoos still either have white rhino or the offspring of rhino from Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, translocated during Operation Rhino in 1960s and 70s during the time of the legendary conservationist the late Dr Ian Player.

Approximately £45,000 was raised from the appeal, which covered the procurement of many items. There are about 100 field rangers in HIP. Equipment received by field rangers included chest webbing, water bottles, first-aid kits, torches, pepper spray, headlamps, extra sets of canvas patrol boots, day packs, rain suits, bush jackets and individual cleaning kits for their firearms. Over 20 specialised bullet-proof vests were received, as well as camping equipment including many tents, sleeping bags and overnight packs for field rangers.

Funding further assisted with the upgrading of the two-way radio communication setup, an important security tool. Logistical items received included new tyres for law enforcement vehicles, the maintenance of motorbikes, a vehicle canopy for law enforcement purposes and water reticulation equipment. Funding continued to subsidise the horse establishment, namely with extra feed during the drought and some additional horse riding tack equipment.

Funding from United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) allowed the continued running of the Bat Hawk aircraft used to monitor the Park for law enforcement and biological functions. However, in March, and for the second time in two years, the engine failed in this aircraft, despite meticulous servicing, forcing me to crash-land once again.

Luckily this time I was more prepared and managed to walk away though the plane was extensively damaged. A new light-sport aircraft was requested and the Savannah SL SA was chosen as a replacement with a more reliable engine type. Thanks to the generous fundraising efforts from SRI and the combined insurance and internal



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funding contribution from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the process of obtaining this replacement aircraft is happening.

Further funds granted by SRI from the Anna Merz Trust are covering the training of Section Ranger Ian Pollard to obtain his Private Pilot Licence, so that he may too monitor the Reserve from the air. (Read more overleaf.) This funding will also cover the running costs of the new aircraft into the next financial year. Further USFWS funding for general maintenance has been received and is being actively utilised to make the living conditions of our field ranger staff better.

Rhino poaching is not in decline, however our ability to tackle the crisis is improving as well as our ability to adapt to the situation. A few years back, it was uncommon for field rangers to camp away from their picket camp, now camping is an accepted norm. And because rangers are better equipped, they are better prepared to face the situation. HIP has lost just over a dozen rhino to poaching so far during 2015, it is a continuous battle.

Liaison between the police services and the private sector has drastically improved. South Africa has acknowledged rhino poaching as a high priority crime and we need the continued actions of neighbouring countries to show they too take rhino poaching seriously.

## Grants

Since November 2014, Save the Rhino has sent a total of £97,523 to HIP including £2,507 from Knuthenberg Safari Park, \$35,480 from the Anna Merz Rhino Trust, £1,000 each from Holmes Wood Consultancy and Saffery Champness, £5,309 from Colchester Zoo and \$50,000 from USFWS.