



Top three pictures: Rangers undergo law enforcement training, including learning medical and rifle skills. Below: BGP also held a dog handlers course for three new handlers



Swaziland's Big Game Parks

Swaziland's rhino story continues to be a positive one, although we have inevitably faced a number of challenges. Poaching continues to be an underlying threat to any rhino, and Swaziland's rhinos are no exception.

Mick Reilly | Head of Conservation and Security, Big Game Parks (BGP)

Swaziland's close proximity to Mozambique's capital; Maputo (the most active centre of criminal syndicates smuggling rhino horns), is a constant reminder that poaching could escalate at any moment. Two of South Africa's hottest poaching areas (Kruger National Park and Zululand) both lie further from Maputo than Swaziland does.

In spite of this, we have only had three rhinos poached in the past 22 years. Apart from a good dose of luck, we feel that the zero-tolerance approach that Swaziland practises through her laws and enforcement agencies has helped to suppress the poaching. The two rhino poaching cases at Hlane Royal National Park in 2011 were both conclusively solved within a matter of days, while the case at Mkhaya Game Reserve in 2014 took nine months to solve, when the poaching group attempted another poaching trip directly out of Mozambique that ended in disaster for them! The level of support the Parks receive from the police, the Prosecution Department, and not least, from the Head of State himself, shows massive political will. This results in no effort being spared when a poaching threat has been identified and the resources deployed are truly impressive. With poaching rising all around Swaziland, Big Game Parks (BGP) has embarked on a training programme for its rangers as well as the associated law enforcement support structures.

Earlier this year, BGP put 51 rangers and 10 police officers from the Operational Support Services Unit through firearms handling and basic ranger-training courses. This training was provided by the British-based Endangered Species Protection Agency (ESPA), and was well received by the Swazi Police and rangers.

The course was partly funded by *Sporting Rifle* through Save the Rhino. This training has given the participants the confidence and operational competency they need to confront armed poaching gangs successfully.

We are currently busy with the second phase of the ESPA training, which will bring advanced prosecution skills for wildlife cases to a group of eight prosecutors from the Directorate of Public Prosecutions. Commensurate with this, extra training is being done with the rangers to capacitate some of them as instructors.

BGP also recently held a dog handlers course (top right) where three new handlers were trained and two new track



and apprehension dogs introduced to the rhino security force, generously sponsored by www.stophinopoaching.com

The most important part of law enforcement lies in good intelligence. BGP actively seeks information from the public through an advertised reward offer for information that leads to arrests and successful prosecution – especially information which prevents poaching.

BGP has partnered with the International Rhino Foundation on this project. With a highly motivated and committed team of rangers, BGP remains committed to ensure that Swaziland's rhinos are given the best chance of survival.

BGP is highly appreciative of all the individuals and organisations that continue to support our conservation work and special thanks is due to the readers and publishers of *Sporting Rifle* magazine for their support in upgrading ranger facilities and sponsoring ranger training.

Grants

SPORTING RIFLE

Since October 2014, Save the Rhino has sent Big Game Parks a total of £15,681. With thanks to *Sporting Rifle* Magazine and its readers who raised a fantastic £13,171 through their magazine auction to buy vital equipment for rangers in Hlane Royal National Park and Mkhaya Game Reserve of Big Game Parks, Swaziland. www.sporting-rifle.com

Rhino Conservation Awards 2015

A highlight of this year was when the Ingwenyama of Swaziland, His Majesty King Mswati III (left), deservedly received the 'Best Political and Judicial Support' award at the Game Rangers Association of Africa's Rhino Conservation Awards, held in Johannesburg in July 2015.

This award has helped to bring further focus to the rhino poaching problem we face in Swaziland, and having been awarded to the Head of State, has automatically brought a lot of support for rhino conservation.

