

ON EXTENDED CAMPING PATROL IN HLUHLUWE

Field Rangers Sihle and Bhekisisa wake up at the crack of dawn. They have all their kit packed to last for another four days out in the Park overnight, patrolling an area they know is very vulnerable to rhino poaching incursions.

Dirk Swart | Section Ranger, Manzibomvu, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

By now, they are accustomed to extended camping trips, often journeying out into the wilderness with little notice, but they know that the only chance we have of catching poachers – and preventing rhino deaths – is for us to go where they operate.

Five years ago, the only teams camping in tents in the Park were the specialised anti-poaching units, who would, from time to time, visit these danger spots. Now, the poaching crisis has put pressure on everyone to have a 24/7 presence in danger zones or accept the possibility of finding butchered rhinos the next day. The escalation of rhino poaching has forced a change in tactics and our patrol methods.

At the early stages of the crisis, in the mid-2000s, field rangers would often come across a rhino carcass a week or even longer after it had been killed. The teams almost never investigated the crime scene in the immediate aftermath. How things have changed. Field rangers in some sections are camped for up to 12 days per month in areas known to be targeted by poachers, especially around the full moon (also called a "poacher's moon") when criminals are perceived to be more active. Rangers working deep within the Park, for days at a time, are in a much stronger position to identify suspect activity, hear gunshots, or pick up on any other signs of illegal incursions into the Park. Now, if a rhino is poached, its carcass is usually uncovered within a day, or at least less than a week, due to a combination of highly-focused field ranger patrols and the hawk-eye view brought to us by aerial surveillance.

Working with a fresh crime scene means fresh evidence is collected. In turn, this means we have a better chance of identifying the perpetrators, and the criminal groups involved in the relentless drive to profit from



Main, left: New tents, rifle-mounted tactical torches and ration packs for the Park's field rangers and anti-poaching units



the rhino horn trade. This is just one way Save the Rhino International and people like you, its donors, have enabled us to improve our work. We now have a spotter aircraft, new camping equipment,

safety tactical equipment for night-time operations, ration packs of lightweight food for long missions away from home, and many other essentials that, when pieced together, have allowed the field ranger force in the Park become better equipped, more prepared and motivated. Thank you.

Grants

Since November 2015, we have sent the following to Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park: £7,680 from miscellaneous donations and our "Help a Ranger Save a Rhino" appeal; £1,423 from Boras Djurpark; £1,835 from Zoo Zlin; €2,771 from Zoo-Salzburg; €2,000 from Zoo de la Boissiere du Doré; \$515 from SRI Inc.; £911 from West Midland Safari Park; \$1,387 and £16,174 from Just Wheels & Tires; £5,448 from Colchester Zoo for canine units equipment, solar system gear at rangers' camps and ration packs; \$50,000 from USFWS RTCF for roof repairs, solar panel installation, water tanks and stands etc. at ranger camps, and another \$35,957 for a new vehicle; €2,500 from Parc de Lunaret-Zoo de Montpellier; and £468 from Hamilton Zoo.

ALL IMAGES DIRK STEWART

