

One voice to save our rhinos as SRT revises strategic plan

Lazarus Hoxobeb, Headman of the //Khoadi-//Hôas Conservancy, knows that the safekeeping of rhino is absolutely crucial to Namibia – not only for future generations, but also for the local economy. The presence of rhino brings tourism to the area, which results in job creation. This, in turn, supports local empowerment and improves living conditions in this secluded part of the country.

Marita van Rooyen | Communications/PR Coordinator, Save the Rhino Trust

Hoxobeb is not the only one who feels strongly about the protection of the world's last free-roaming black rhino population. Chief Josef Max Haraseb, of the /Ao-Daman, and Chief Petrus Ukongo, of the /Ao-Daman, share his sentiments. As custodians of the land, the Chiefs speak for their people when they stress, "We are all working together towards zero poaching and will do whatever it takes to protect our rhino."

The Kunene Region, where Chiefs are guardians of the land, is arid, desolate and exudes an unforgiving harshness. However, despite its hostility, it features a remarkable selection of plant and wildlife species, and is home to the last truly wild population of any rhino species on the planet; the largest to persist outside national parks. The country itself hosts 34% of the world's remaining black rhino population (*Diceros bicornis*), and 90% of the south-western subspecies (*Diceros bicornis bicornis*). As a result, Namibia's success in protecting the species from extinction has landed it a prominent position in the global spotlight. But these men know that protecting such a valuable resource is no easy task. Such high demand for rhino horn, at a price that is often difficult to resist, means that the threats these animals – and those who protect them – face are often immense.

To help overcome these challenges, in August 2016, Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) launched a national outreach campaign to take a stand in support of rhino conservation and against poaching. With this campaign, we aim to boost information sharing and education, and build a sense of rhino custodianship nationwide. Furthermore, SRT is currently revising its Internal strategic plan with the help of key

conservationist and rhino expert, Dr Rob Brett. Dr Brett is a long-standing member of the African Rhino Specialist Group, also responsible for developing the Kunene Rhino Data Base, and is Director of Fauna & Flora International's Africa Programme. The plan will be implemented within the coming months, and to help his review, a Strategic Planning Workshop was held in July at Wêreldsend, in the heart of rhino country.

The workshop discussed the future of the desert-adapted black rhino, how to strengthen collaboration between stakeholders, reviewed policies, and highlighted strategic objectives for the next five years. Key partners from the Kunene and Erango Regions were also invited to participate, and the event was well attended by the traditional authorities, conservancy leaders, tourism enterprise owners, representatives from NGOs and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). Whilst there was a clear consensus on the importance of safekeeping Namibia's rhinos, it was also agreed that the role of information sharing, education, and capacity building and training should be strengthened.



Save the Rhino Trust's monitoring and protection work is supported by Rhino Rangers recruited from local communities and by tourism operations; The Kunene Region's rhinos range over particularly large territories



“If the rhino is not there anymore, what will be left for our youth to conserve, protect, and be proud of?”

“How sad would it be if our children will one day only be able to see images of rhinos in books? And how would we then explain to them why we didn't take proper care of these animals?” said Gerson Namiseb. As representative of the Doro Nawas Conservancy, Namiseb understands the importance of rhino conservation, but highlighted the necessity of spreading this message to the people living within rhino area. “Community members need to be more involved in the protection of rhinos. Only then will they understand the value of taking care of such a special species.”

The Chiefs and all other people in attendance at the workshop also supported the “No Bail for Rhino Poachers” action taken by MET. We believe that if released on bail, poachers only go back and interfere with the investigation, or worse, go back to targeting rhinos.

All in all, the stakeholders agreed that rhinos are a valuable resource and should be taken care of accordingly. Simson Uri-Khob, CEO of SRT, summarised the common feeling by stating, “These rhinos do not belong to a single group or government. They are a national asset belonging to each and every Namibian, and we should be proud of having this very rare species in our country. We can only combat the crisis by working together.”

Working closely with MET, Save the Rhino Trust, with support from WWF, IRDNC, NACSO, conservancies and local community members, is proud to be part of ensuring that Namibia's rhino population has grown and expanded over the past three decades.

Grants

The Strategic Planning Workshop and Dr Brett's fact-finding mission to Namibia was generously supported by Flora & Fauna International, Save the Rhino International, Save African Rhino Foundation Australia and Nicolas Duncan, the David Shepherd Wildlife Trust, B2Gold, and IRDNC.

Since November 2015, we have sent £750 raised at our annual dinner, £4,051 in miscellaneous donations, £2,000 from Madeleine Scott, £7,750 from the Desert Heart party, €2,000 from Zoo Krefeld, £3,250 from core funds, \$25,000 from the Glen and Bobbie Ceiley Foundation, and \$94,814 from USFWS RTCF, all to help cover SRT's ongoing operating costs.

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