

Bowling For Rhinos — Helping in the Fight Against Poachers

By Patty Pearthree

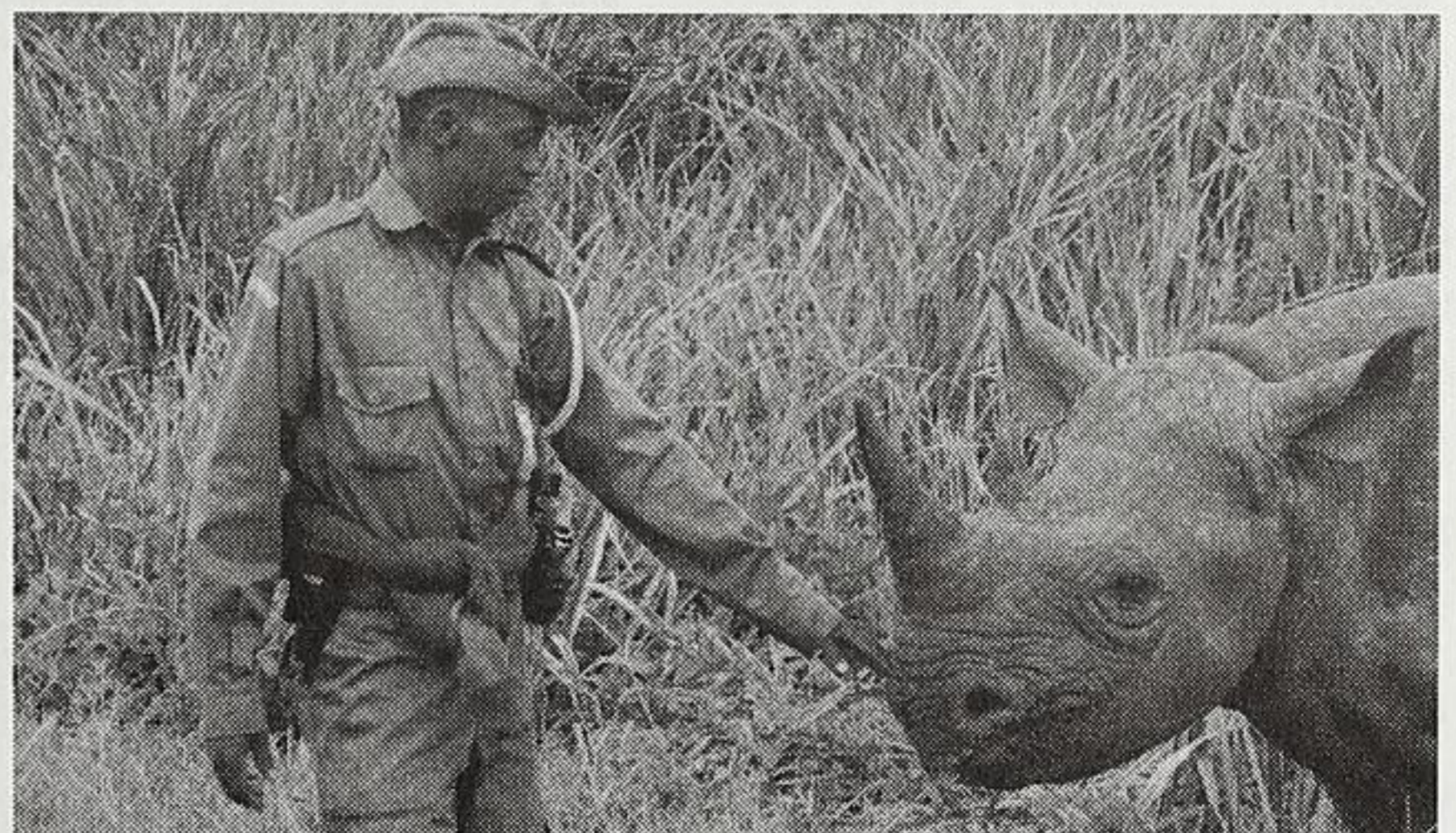
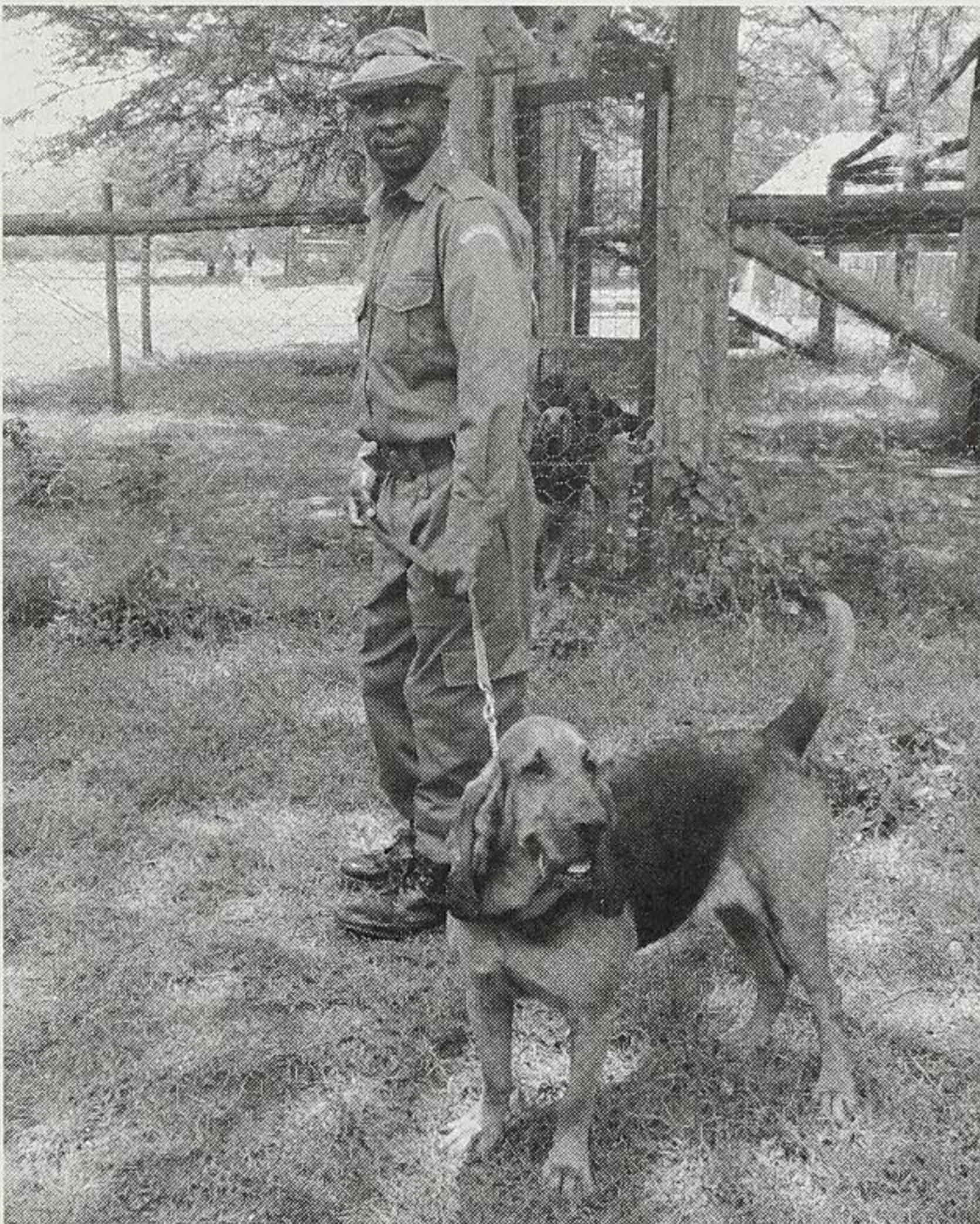
National AAZK BFR Coordinator

We all know the war on poaching is going to continue for some time to come. Poaching will continue as long as the demand for rhino horn is present. Debate continues over how best to decrease the demand. Is the CITES ban on rhino horn trade going to remain in place? How soon will the experts come to an agreement on what to try next and will it work? Through this *AKF* issue dedicated to the poaching crisis, we have the opportunity to become an educated voice.

While worldwide policies and strategies are being worked out, AAZK's Bowling For Rhinos (BFR) will continue to wage the war against poachers. We help those in the field protect rhino every day. At the same time we keep poachers at bay, we are working to save habitat for not only rhinos but everything from orchids to elephants. BFR has always supported the highest priority needs to save rhinos, so our main focus has always been funding the anti-poaching costs.

When AAZK's Bowling For Rhinos first began in 1990, it was not known whether rhino would be around in the year 2000. Since 2003, wild rhinos have grown in numbers by 60%. BFR protects 60% of the Sumatran rhino and 100% of the Javan rhino population. With Lewa's management of its neighboring wildlife conservancy called Ol Pejeta, Lewa protects 25% of Kenya's black rhino population. In Kenya we protect over 1.5 million acres of white and black rhino habitat under Lewa's conservation charter. In Indonesia we save 1.4 million acres of crucial lowland rainforest habitat for the survival of the Javan and Sumatran rhinos. AAZK's BFR supports ALL five species of rhino plus hundreds of other endangered species that share their habitat. Had it not been for organizations like AAZK many of these species would not be around today!

Since 1990, BFR funds have built a protective fence around Lewa, purchased surveillance airplanes and transport trucks used to translocate rhino and giraffe. BFR funds now provide a good portion of



(Left) Bloodhounds are used by Lewa guards in their anti-poaching patrols. (Top Right) Bowling for Rhinos protects so many species other than rhinos, including the hyena (*Crocota crocuta*). (Bottom Right) A Lewa guard with an orphan rhino. Despite their best efforts, poaching is always a threat within Lewa's borders.

the yearly operational costs at Lewa. The operational costs include such items as anti-poaching team salaries, security patrol salaries, fence and vehicle maintenance and security equipment to combat poachers. In Indonesia, funds allow the operation of three rhino protection units in Ujung Kulon National Park, five units in Way Kambas National Park and eight units in Bukit Barisan National Park. Thanks to these Patrol units there have been no cases of rhino or large mammal poaching in these parks for several years. With only 200-300 Sumatran and perhaps as few as 25 Javan rhino remaining, these patrol units are vital to the survival of both species. Funds from a number of donors, including IRF, US Fish and Wildlife Service Tiger and Rhino Conservation Fund, WWF, and AAZK have funded the intensive protection of these species over the past 15 years. Without this commitment, the Sumatran and Javan rhinos would surely have perished.

Over the past two years, BFR funds through the Conservation Resource Grant allowed the International Rhino Foundation to radio collar six translocated Indian Rhinos. The IRF was then able to move these vulnerable animals to more secure locations to protect them from poachers and monitor them. So BFR is now helping to save all five species of rhino from extinction!

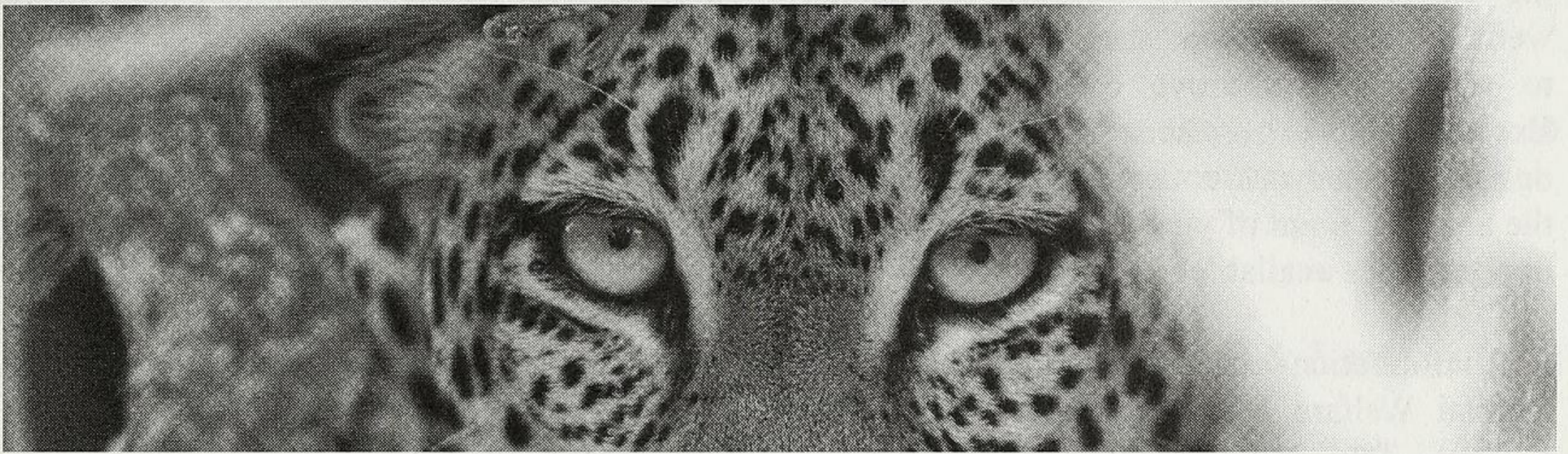
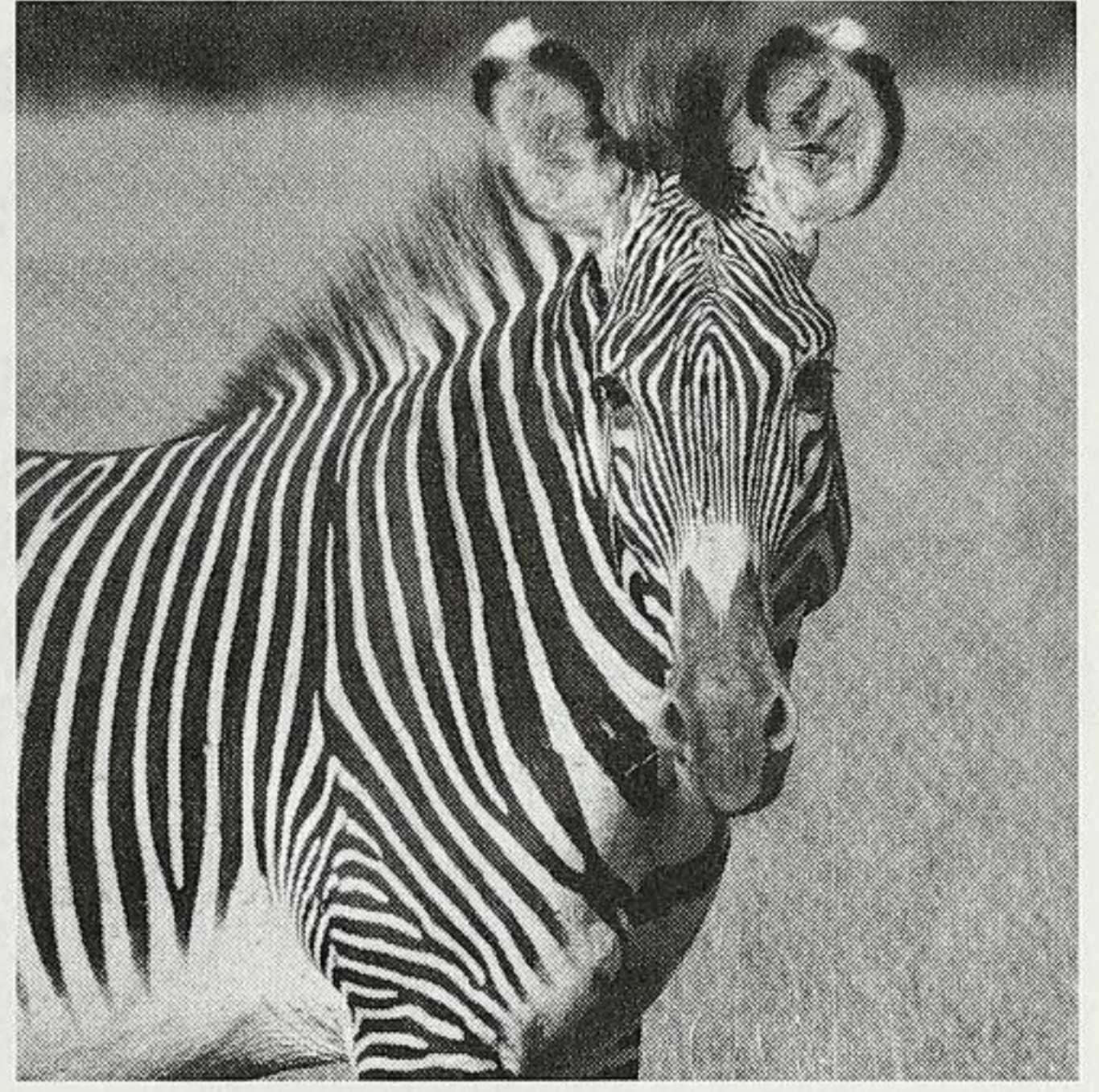
“Bowling For Rhinos” is more than just saving rhinos. Lewa has the second largest population of elephant in Kenya and 25% of the world’s Grevy’s zebra population (*Equus grevyi*). Lewa also helps protect the wildlife in the Northern Rangeland Trust area including the extremely rare hirola antelope (*Beatragus hunteri*) that numbers only 300. Indonesia’s Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park contains tracts of highly threatened lowland forests, which, in addition to Sumatran rhinos (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*), is home to Sumatran elephants (*Elephas maximus sumatranus*) (fewer than 2,000 are left island-wide) and the Sumatran tiger (*Panthera tigris sumatrae*), which number no more than 400 animals.

In addition, BFR supports Action for Cheetah in Kenya (ACK). This adds to the protection of not only cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) but also rhino through education and conservation of habitat that is home to both cheetah and rhino. This creates a larger buffer zone of protection from poachers.

Communities surrounding these protected areas are also vital to the war against poachers. BFR funds have helped build important relationships with these communities by building schools, hospital clinics, water projects, and education programs. The surrounding communities are now keenly aware that there are great benefits to conserving the wildlife and notify authorities if they become aware of any poaching activity.



Children at one of the schools near Lewa, supported with funds from Bowling for Rhinos



Clockwise from top left: Danny Pearthree with a three month-old, orphaned black rhino at Lewa in 2004. Lewa is home to 25% of the world's Grevy's zebra population. Lewa is also home to many large cat species including cheetah, lion, and leopard such as the one pictured on the bottom.

Indonesia's Rhino Protection Unit's (RPU) annual budget is \$650,000 including field, administrative, and operations costs. These costs are escalating by about 10-15% per year. Lewa's annual budget runs \$3 million and increases at 10% per year. Bottom line is all this takes money. We have to march on, increase our fundraising goals and meet those goals while spreading the word about the plight of the rhino and the various species under attack. It certainly is a long, tough war but one that we are all passionate about winning. There is no other option.

Back in 1990, 40 BFR events raised \$138,000. The top chapter raised \$15,000. In 2011, 63 Chapters/events raised over \$280,000 and the top chapter raised \$32,000! Chapters that were not as successful with bowling in their areas did not give up. They were innovative and had "Rummage for Rhinos", "Racing for Rhinos", "Rhino Wii", "Art for Rhinos", "Rhino Auctions", "Rock-n-For-Rhinos", "Sailing for Rhinos" and the list goes on and on. I invite you to visit the website: <http://aazkbfr.org> for information on how to run a successful event and get ideas on how to increase your event's success.

AAZK's Bowling for Rhinos fundraiser has now raised over \$4 million for conservation worldwide. This was an enormous effort by hundreds of dedicated individuals who at the same time informed thousands of people about the plight of the rhino and other wildlife. Our goal is to raise \$500,000 annually and be a force that can help win the war against poachers. Together we can do it!

So, can we win the fight against poachers? I believe the answer is yes, but we cannot let our guard down. We need to keep up the battle. We need to raise increasingly more money each year as the demand increases. At the same time we must find a way to cut the demand whether that is changing policy, an educational blitz or a combination of strategies. We need to get the poaching crisis into the minds of the public so that together we can find a solution. It's up to all of us to stay in the fight against poachers and win the battle.

For additional information see aazkbfr.org, lewa.org, rhinos-irf.org or actionforcheetahs.org.