

UPDATE ON THE RHINO DOG SQUAD APPEAL

Two years ago, in 2015 we launched our single-most successful fundraising appeal to date: the Rhino Dog Squad. We were raising funds for canine units based at Lewa, Ol Jogi and Ol Pejeta, which are used to detect illegally smuggled wildlife products, track and apprehend poachers, and find lost children and stolen property. How have your donations been put to good use since the appeal?

Katherine Johnston | Former Communications Manager

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy



Funds from the Rhino Dog Squad appeal have helped Lewa expand its canine team. In April 2016, three dogs were relocated all the way from Wales to Kenya, after being trained by a specialist academy for sniffer, security and patrol dogs. Lewa and Borana Conservancy, which now operates as one unit, has four dogs and eight handlers trained to work with them.

The canine unit plays a vital role in helping to solve crimes across the region and has been called upon by the local police services. Last year, the dogs responded to 20 instances of road banditry and robberies beyond Lewa's fence-line. By supporting the local community living adjacent to Lewa, the Dog Squad brings the benefits of conservation to the wider community.

In April of this year, three men broke into a lodge at Buffalo Springs to try to access the safe. The night-watchman spotted them while making his rounds and scared them off. Lewa's canine unit was deployed and tracked the scent trail to Archer's Post, some 15 km away, where they called together the local elders and gave them the names of the suspects. The elders said to leave the matter to them; they would talk to the fathers of the suspects – and they did so; community policing at its best.

Similarly in May, there was a report from some game scouts that one of the camera traps on the elephant corridor had been stolen. The canine unit found footprints, picked up the scent, and followed it for 5 km. There it ended in a village, where the scent trail was too confused with that of other people to make a definitive identification, but once again the village elders said that they would call a meeting, find out who had stolen the camera trap and deal with him.

In the words of Joseph Piroris, who is in charge of Lewa's dog unit, the dogs have become something of a local "peacekeeping force".

Ol Jogi

Sadly, one of the stars of our appeal, Nyota the bloodhound, had to be put down not long after featuring in our video, as she became ill with cancer. Despite her loss, Ol Jogi's canine unit is going from strength to strength.

Ol Jogi has two Belgian Malinois patrol dogs, trained to bite and hold a poacher so rangers can then safely arrest them. The Conservancy is also home to Biza and Bagbo, two fully trained detection bloodhounds, and four more bloodhound puppies are currently learning the ropes. Ol Jogi's puppies can now follow a scent trail up to 2 km, having started their training at just 100 metres. Eventually they will be able to follow a scent for several kilometres or more.

Peter Maina, who is in charge of Ol Jogi's canine unit, has worked at the Conservancy for 21 years. He specifically asked to join the unit as he has always loved dogs and has his own dog at home to help guard his livestock.

Peter and his team often use evidence picked up by detection dogs to help prosecute poachers and have given evidence in court. Sometimes the dogs help identify suspects in a police line-up, by standing on their hind legs and pawing at the person's chest.

As Ol Jogi adds to its unit, they're planning to expand and upgrade their kennels; all using funds generously donated by supporters like you. Kenya's Rhino Dog Squad has made a huge difference to rhinos across Laikipia and Meru Counties.

All four rhino Conservancies, Ol Pejeta, Ol Jogi, Borana and Lewa, have growing populations of rhinos with new calves born in the last year. A dog really is a rhino's best friend.



Images: Lewa (left) and Ol Jogi (right) canine units



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