

# Appreciating the importance of RANGER MORALE

It's Christmas Day 2014

1.30pm, 43°C with the humidity way above 80%.

It's a nice warm day in uMkhuze Game Reserve.

Where were you that day?

Eduard Goosen | Conservation Manager, uMkhuze Game Reserve



**F**ield Rangers Zulu and Mageba\* are not so lucky as to be able to spend time at home this Christmas. Instead, they are out on patrol in rather uncomfortable, yet very common conditions doing their duty to conserve our heritage...blah blah blah...just another day on patrol...

To cut a very long story short, they run into armed rhino poachers, get shot at whilst trying to effect an arrest, which leads to the uMkhuze Anti-Poaching Unit following up in hot pursuit of the four armed poachers.

In the end, one suspect is fatally wounded in self-defence by the field rangers following up. Later the same afternoon, after all the trauma, these

basics. Trying to make sure field rangers are equipped with the bare necessities to do their job. In many instances, this translates to simple items such as decent boots and some uniform. Go the next step and provide the guys with maintained accommodation and some basic amenities, and the results are amazing.

Thanks to the support of Save the Rhino's donors, and other kind supporters, we've come a long way.

The appreciation from the field rangers is a humbling experience. The difference in morale is profound and very tangible in their gratitude. This is instantly reflected in the performance and commitment of the teams on the ground. Whereas before, threadbare uniform was a significant barrier to effective patrols during long cold nights, decent uniform and the knowledge of a hot shower upon return to camp really does, as you can imagine, impact our work.

It is the small things we tend to take for granted that have a significant impression on the morale at the frontline of conservation. Due to continued and generous support, we have now moved beyond those initial basic requirements and focus on not just maintaining systems, but continuously improving operations, always hoping to make a breakthrough in this ongoing fight against rhino poaching, no matter how small.

In addition, spare a thought for the Conservation Managers. Conservation is always considered a very glamorous occupation. Quite the contrary, my dear! 75% of the job is pure human resource management and the bulk of the rest is trying to make do with the little financial resources you have.

So from my perspective, receiving donor funding is better than having Christmas at home...I'd rather be on station to support my guys! Thanks so much for your support. You don't know how much it means, no matter how small.

*\*Names are fictional, the event was real.*

field rangers are arrested and spend the next three nights in custody for murder, with the resulting stresses of litigation continuing for almost three years.

Never mind maintaining morale, how do you build it? How do you motivate people working where the money is not that good and corruption is a real daily threat: syndicates knocking on doors daily with the promise of some real incentives? Sure the theory is there, but the divide between discourse and reality is real where the boots meets the trail.

Let's face it, conservation is not a major government priority in Africa and funding is scarce. So we stick to the



Above: Rangers wear specialist kit for patrols, keeping them safe and comfortable

Centre: The radio system used by rangers to share monitoring and patrol updates

Left: The shelter and benches at one of the camps on patrol



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