

# THE Perfect DOG

When I received an invitation from Save the Rhino International to participate in a workshop on Conservation Dogs, the timing couldn't have been more perfect. We have been thinking of getting new dogs here at Lewa, and bringing in new breeds that'll help overcome the challenges we're currently facing.

Edward Ndiritu | Head of Anti-Poaching, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy

Lewa's Dog Unit is a vital section of our Anti-Poaching Team. Since we introduced working dogs to our team over a decade ago, they have been a game-changer in how we operate.

The dogs act as trackers, enabling us to follow the trail of suspects by tracking their unique scent for lengthy distances, a feat that no human can achieve.

Since we introduced the dogs, we've achieved tremendous successes during follow-ups to poaching attempts and other criminal activities in the surrounding communities. However, there are challenges when we use the dogs in very hot areas, such as in northern Kenya, where we do close to 80% of our deployment. Our current dogs, though excellent trackers, are only able to cover 4-5 km each, and we therefore have to rotate them during follow ups. Ideally, we need dogs that can cover 15 km each. Additionally, our two star trackers, bloodhound brothers Tipper and Tony, will be retiring soon.

The trip on working dogs in conservation took place in South Africa. I was eager to gain new knowledge about what dog breed would help us overcome our current challenges, as well as to learn from other people as to what has worked well for them. I visited Kruger National Park, where I saw a breed that would be ideal for us. At Kruger, they use dogs that are 75% Bloodhound and 25% Doberman.

These dogs perform well, they are agile and do not get as easily fatigued as bloodhounds do. I got to see the dogs in action, working hard to protect some of Africa's largest rhino populations. Whilst Kenya and South Africa are vastly different, the challenges we face remain largely the same. I appreciated the techniques that they've perfected while facing poaching threats daily. We also exchanged knowledge with other like-minded participants from various African countries such as Namibia, Zambia, Uganda and DRC Congo.



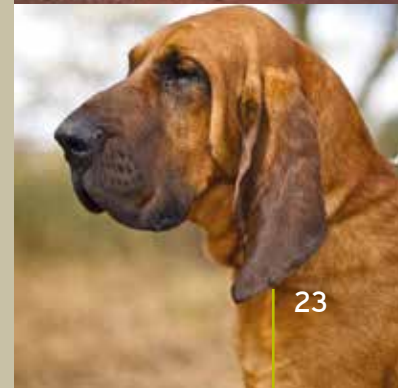
After the visit, I was empowered with the new knowledge I acquired. I was also happy to finally get a chance to visit South Africa. It's always great to learn new things, and also teach others new things.

I believe that such collaborations amongst African countries, and sharing of tested practices, is a really great thing. Poachers don't care if a rhino's horn is from South Africa or Namibia. By working and learning from each other, we can help each other be a step ahead.

Joseph Piroris, Head of the Canine Unit, explains:

"The Lewa Canine Unit has achieved great impact over the years. The dogs not only support anti-poaching work on the Conservancy, they are also often called upon to support in follow-up to criminal activities in the neighbouring communities. Every year, they have helped our rangers and local law enforcement authorities recover hundreds of stolen livestock, saving the affected farmers from financial ruin. The dogs have also helped track road bandits, robbers, illegal firearm holders and more.

"At the moment, the unit consists of two bloodhounds, two Belgian Malinois and their handlers. We take good care of them, and the handlers are people who love dogs. We feed them well, ensure that they live in clean kennels, and that they are taken out for walks and training daily. Our vet constantly checks on them to make sure they are healthy."



Top: Edward at the workshop

Centre: The relationships between dogs and handlers are true bonds

Bottom: Bloodhound breeds are often used in detection work

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