

Intelligence, employment
and team sports

COMMUNITY CONSERVATION IN THE KUNENE REGION

Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) in Namibia has been working to protect the Critically Endangered desert-adapted black rhino for more than 36 years. This unique, desert-adapted species is found across the Kunene and Erongo Regions in the northwest of the country and is the last truly wild population.

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The place these rhinos call home is remote and rugged, with few fences, no national park status and no control over who comes or goes.

Given that the area is large (around 25,000 km²) and has no hard borders, it is testament to the team's dedication that despite ever-present environmental challenges, poaching here has reduced by 80% since its peak in 2013. This has been achieved largely by a 360% increase in patrol effort and a marked rise in the number of trained and well-equipped conservancy-based rhino rangers, with 55 rangers across 13 conservancies. But that's not all the Trust has done to stop poaching. SRT also recognises the importance of working closely with the communities that share the land with rhinos and other iconic African wildlife.

SRT has engaged fully with communities, training and employing local people as informants on any possible poaching activities. In doing so, they have built up a reliable intelligence network that can report wildlife crime and trigger action.

Thanks to this voluntary pre-emptive intelligence, six separate poaching attempts were foiled by law enforcement in 2017 and the poachers responsible for killing the last rhino that year were caught red-handed.

In addition, SRT has trained over 60 community game guards and 19 rhino rangers across 10 conservancies, increasing the understanding of, and participation in, rhino conservation by the people that live next door to it.

ALL IMAGES SRT The wider community also sees direct benefits through increased tourism. This connection is a steadfast defence



against the growing temptation to join poaching activities, proving the animal is worth just as much (if not more) alive. Income generated from rhino tourism is distributed back to local communities, increasing substantially since 2012. SRT staff also support a black rhino tourism protocol, limiting the human impact on rhinos: it's vital, in the harsh desert of the Kunene, that a rhino is not scared away from the only water source for miles.

Embedding this community-led thinking into schools is another key aspect of SRT's work. To date, 12 Rhino Clubs run at local schools and 14 Youth Rhino Groups have been created, helping to promote awareness and inspire the next generation of conservationists. With activities including rhino-themed football and netball leagues, SRT has been able to engage with more than 800 unemployed youth (roughly 75-80% of the total estimated local youth population).

Creating communities that champion rhino conservation is a crucial step in addressing the poaching crisis and keeping rhino numbers up. This, alongside SRT's close working relationship with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Namibian Police, Traditional Leaders and other NGOs, has been key to the success in curbing poaching incidents. With SRT continuing to work in this way, the beautiful desert-adapted black rhino will be more protected than ever.

