

Protecting rhinos with our community

I am delighted to report that despite the challenging times we are facing this year, Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) is doing well and our team's morale remains high.

Simson Uri-Khob | CEO, Save the Rhino Trust

Covid-19 has been tough for all of us at SRT. The overnight halt in tourism means that our budgets are extremely tight, many people within our community have lost their jobs and, without tourists looking out for wildlife, there are fewer people around to deter poachers. To improve the situation, we were able to continue our rhino-sightings bonus scheme, providing a small reward for our rangers and monitors each time they spot a rhino, helping our team members that may have been struggling, and ensuring that rhinos stay protected.

Covering an area of 25,000 km², the skills of our trackers are tested during long patrols on foot, on rough terrain, in an area with no national park status, no fences, and no controls over who enters and exits. Every time I spend time in the field with our teams, I am pleased to personally touch base with them, and be reminded of their motivations to keep up their monitoring and patrolling efforts to protect the Critically Endangered black rhino found in our region, in the Northwest of Namibia.

Engaging and empowering local people has always been central to our community-based rhino conservation model. This area is home to the world's largest truly wild black rhino population. While ensuring proper monitoring (i.e. 'boots on the ground') is fundamental to minimise the negative

impacts of poaching, our core belief is based on who fills those boots, and how we can be successful by harnessing the values that they attach to saving the rhinos they monitor.

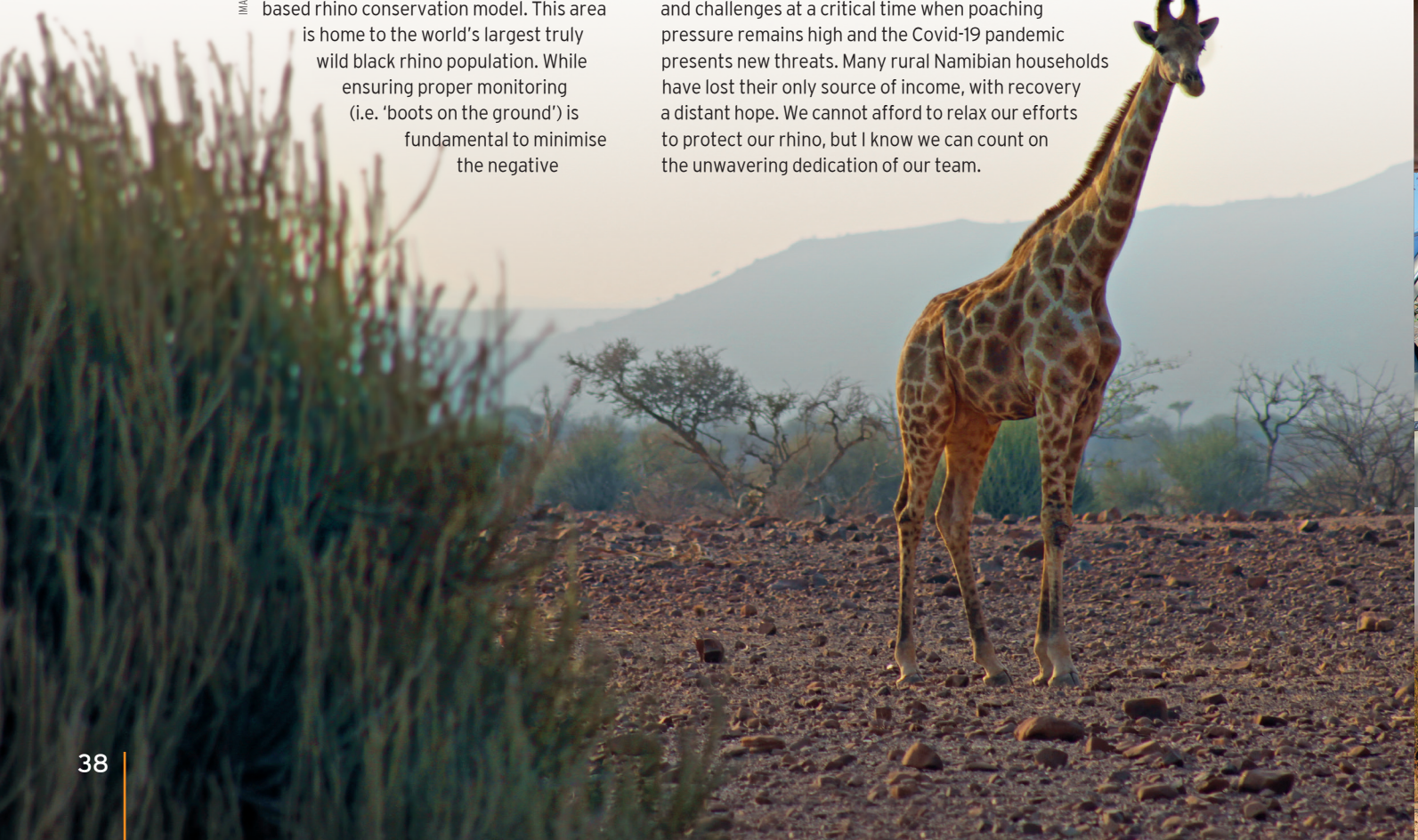
Designing the right mix of incentives is key to cultivate 'pro-rhino' behaviour. Our community-based approach is underpinned by Namibia's National Black Rhino Custodianship Programme, initiated by the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, which helps to benefit communal conservancies.

Through our Conservancy Rhino Ranger (CRR) incentive programme, initiated in 2012, we support conservancies to fulfil their monitoring obligations and maximise benefits. The programme is jointly implemented between a consortium of field-based support organisations, providing a suite of incentives to maximize local-led monitoring and income-generating opportunities from rhino conservation.

Since the inception of the CRR programme, monitoring outputs such as field days have increased 12-fold, and rhino sightings across the region increased five-fold. Critically, rhino poaching has virtually been eliminated: only six cases have been recorded in the region within the past three years. Thanks to the support of local people, the teams have also prevented dozens of probable poaching attempts, saving rhinos before it's too late.

However, our success has also brought increased costs and challenges at a critical time when poaching pressure remains high and the Covid-19 pandemic presents new threats. Many rural Namibian households have lost their only source of income, with recovery a distant hope. We cannot afford to relax our efforts to protect our rhino, but I know we can count on the unwavering dedication of our team.

IMAGES SAVE THE RHINO INTERNATIONAL AND STEVE AND ANNI TOON





Every day, trackers at Save the Rhino Trust patrol for hours to locate and identify black rhinos. The teams are working in tough conditions – it's very hot, and the terrain is exhausting. Thankfully, they've been able to keep going throughout Covid-19.

