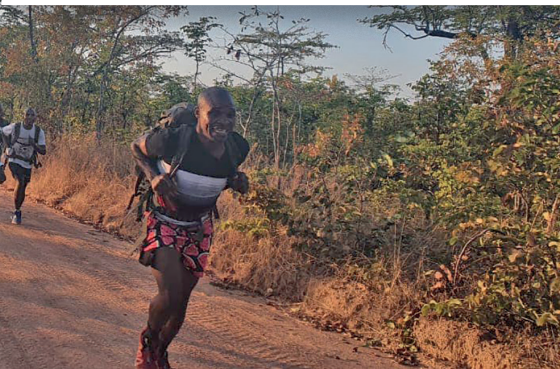


Why Team ZimZam runs the London Marathon

Since 2018, teams of runners from Zambia and Zimbabwe have joined us for the London Marathon, switching wilderness trails for 26.2 miles of city streets. We sat down with Claire and Joanna, team leaders in Zambia and Zimbabwe respectively, to find out why the London Marathon is special for team ZimZam.

Claire Lewis
Programme Manager,
North Luangwa
Conservation Project

Joanna Craig
London Marathon
team manager,
Gonarezhou
Conservation Trust



How do you choose who will join the team each year?

Joanna: Rangers who excel throughout the year are offered the opportunity to run in the London Marathon as a recognition of their efforts and achievements. The same opportunity is given to recognise dedicated members of the administrative team.

Claire: We change the selection criteria each year, so it is not a 'reward' only for certain groups of people, but for anyone that commits to fitness. For example, in 2018 Paimolo and Cosmas were chosen as two great examples of leaders, and in 2019, Patrick and Amon were given the opportunity because they were so committed, turning out to every training run and consistently running exceptional times.

How do you and the team prepare and train for the race?

Joanna: We do a lot of running up and down Gonarezhou's airstrip and fence lines! The team fits in training around their usual day-to-day responsibilities. And of course, they're also juggling the challenges of running in a remote, wild location.

Why is taking part in the London Marathon such an important experience for the runners?

Joanna: The London Marathon gives our runners the opportunity to experience a culture and landscape different to their own. It's a chance to connect with a wider network of conservationists while acting as ambassadors for the wilderness of Gonarezhou National Park. The Marathon is both a morale boost and an adventure of epic proportions!

Claire: Running is a great motivator and it is something we all do together as a team, it doesn't matter if you are the boss or the office cleaner. There is great camaraderie and a bit of healthy rivalry on all our runs, and being selected to go to London is an extra incentive. Most of our team have never been on an intercontinental flight, some have never had a passport before, so the whole experience is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

NORTH LUANGWA CONSERVANCY



DOUG GOODMAN



NORTH LUANGWA CONSERVANCY

Claire: Each week, we complete three one-hour runs on dirt tracks in the middle of North Luangwa National Park. We always have a safety car with us as there is nothing to stop elephants and lions making us stop or change course... snakes, leopard, buffalo and even black rhino have been known to disrupt our runs! Once or twice a month we try to do longer runs outside the Park. A lot of training takes place during the rainy season, which is soggy and muddy underfoot, and also hot and humid.

Team ZimZam raises funds to support each conservancy – just how important is this?

Joanna: Tragically, Gonarezhou National Park has twice witnessed the loss of its black rhino population due to poaching; in the 1940s and then again in the early 1990s. In March 2017, the Gonarezhou Conservation Trust was formally launched, with the objective that black rhinos will once again be reintroduced. Since then, huge amounts of work have been done to improve security operations and create stable funding resources.

On 10 June 2020, work began to construct an Intensive Protection Zone, bringing Gonarezhou a step closer to being home to the magnificent black rhino once again. Funds raised from the marathon are helping us to make our dream of reintroducing black rhinos safely, a reality.

Claire: It is very expensive to ensure that our rhinos stay protected, so every penny counts, but for us, it is much more than just the money. It is a direct link between black rhinos in Zambia and the global effort to save the species. Running in the London Marathon wearing a Save the Rhino and North Luangwa Conservation Project t-shirt, with strangers on London's streets shouting your name to cheer you on, is mind-blowing. For the runners who have never left Zambia before, this is a huge eye-opener. It is, without doubt, one of the highlights of the year. Everyone in North Luangwa follows the runners on social media and tracks them during the race, cheering them on from rural villages and remote outposts. It is beyond words to describe what that means.

Team ZimZam will be back in London in October 2021. We can't wait to see them running through the city!



DOUG GOODMAN