

The Trip of a Lifetime: Travelling with Bowling for Rhinos Conservation Partners

Kym Janke
BFR Program Manager

Everyone who participates in Bowling for Rhinos should be so proud that 100% of the funds raised go directly to benefitting rhinos, cheetahs, their habitats, and the communities they support. The BFR Program team is working hard to really demonstrate how far our conservation partners can stretch a dollar and provide our membership with tangible costs of goods and services (see the infographics in this issue and included in the BFR Resource Drive). The wonderful thing about Bowling for Rhinos funds is that it is an unrestricted donation;

*View of Lewa from Ngiri House
(photo by Kym Janke)*



meaning that our conservation partners can utilize these funds on the most deserving aspects of their programs. As a token of their appreciation both of these organizations sponsor trips to allow BFR contributors the chance to see first-hand the impact that Bowling for Rhinos has in Kenya and Indonesia. These trips are meant to inspire, motivate, and encourage our members to continue with the amazing work we are doing and bring this determination back to their Chapters where these trip participants can help grow their events. To say that the BFR trips are the Trip of a Lifetime is an understatement!

All of our members should be aware of the Anna Merz Rhino Champion Award, named after one of the founders of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and awarded to a member who has contributed significantly to their Chapter's BFR event for the past three years. New for 2020 the BFR Program is honouring two other exceptional individuals by naming the funds-based trips. From here forward the remaining trips will be named the Ian Craig Rhino Champion Award, after Lewa's co-founder, and the

African Rhino Champion Award, both with travel opportunities to Kenya; and the Susie Ellis Rhino Champion Award, after IRF's Executive Director, and the Asian Rhino Champion Award, both with travel opportunities to Indonesia. Both of these destinations offer trips that are life changing experiences and provide opportunities to view an incredible array of wildlife, connect with communities and organizations committed to conservation, meet and learn from rhino protection teams, and explore the habitats that we work so hard to protect. The trip to Kenya is spent on Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and the surrounding area, while the trip to Indonesia is spent travelling through the islands of Java and Sumatra to three National Parks: Ujung Kulon, Bukit Barisan Selatan, and Way Kambas.

We ask that each trip recipient write an article that summarizes their trip and every person thus far has reported that words just can't do the trip justice! With that being said here are some excerpts in an attempt to convey the wonder and excitement of the trip of a lifetime!

Indonesia with International Rhino Foundation



Rhino Footprint (photo by Jenna Wingate)

During my trip to Indonesia, I had the opportunity to see rhinos and witness the work being done by Rhino Protection Units (RPU). The funds raised through our BFR events are used to pay the salaries of the RPUs, so they are very thankful to the "bowlers" that come to visit. They treated us like kings and queens as we island hopped around Indonesia.

They were always willing to give us a hand while hiking through the National Parks, carried dozens of water bottles for us, cooked extravagant meals-including fresh-caught lobster, got out and pushed our boat when it got stuck in a low tide, carried our luggage on and off boats, climbed 50 foot coconut trees to spoil us with fresh coconut water, drove us hours on bumpy roads and inspired us all along the way. These guys are my heroes!

Ujung Kulon National Park is on the coast and beyond beautiful! We were SO lucky and came across Javan rhino dung, urine spray on a tree that hadn't dried yet, a rhino bed, mud-covered plants from a recently wallowing rhino walking through them, a recently used wallow and a few footprints! It was incredible, we saw everything but the rhino! When we came across the footprints the RPU's immediately began measuring it and recording all of the necessary data. This was easily one of the best experiences of my life. Spending time with the RPU teams and seeing the work they do was amazing and inspiring, and also very fun.

Jenna Wingate - Cincinnati

My first reaction at hearing that I would be traveling to Sumatra and Java was one of disbelief quickly followed by exhilaration. Experiencing Indonesia was an awe-inspiring adventure of a lifetime.

Our tour of three national parks, UK on Java, and Bukit Barisan Selatan and Way Kambas on Sumatra was 14 days of non-stop adventure and unique experiences. Everywhere we went, we were welcomed as family. CeCe, Kelly and Inov were exceptional guides, introducing us to the culture and lifestyle of Indonesia, from the delicious food to batik in Bogor, a beautiful city known for its gardens and near daily rainfall. We would stay in a luxury hotel one night, then next day be tramping through the jungle searching for rhinos and learning to avoid leeches. At Way Kambas we were privileged to spend two days touring the facility with the veterinarians and meeting the seven Sumatran rhinos who live there. Our experiences during those two weeks were vast and complex, and this short retelling cannot express all the wonders of those days. The truth I realized is that there is amazing work being done all over the world and our event called Bowling for Rhinos has made a lasting and profound impact. We can all be proud of our contribution and perhaps strive just a little bit harder to raise awareness for this cause, which is simply this: to ensure the survival of the rhinoceros on earth.

Toni Piccolotti - Jacksonville

That afternoon we travelled by boat up Way Kanan river for a jungle hike. We were given a demonstration on snares from the RPUs. First, they set up a snare and asked if we could find it. It was a great example of the challenges they face while on patrol. They showed us how the snares were constructed and dismantled. We made our way back to the boat for the return trip to the SRS. The river was lined with exotic birds, primates, crocs and even a few Sambar deer!

Charlie Hyde - San Diego



Indonesian trip winners

Kenya with Lewa Wildlife Conservancy

Lewa is more than just about its wildlife. It exists and is growing because of its vast and diverse programs and projects beyond its borders. The only way to describe it is to say that each program is like a gear in a machine and each one needs to be functioning for the system to work. The programs and projects we visited on our trip included the security and communications centre, conservation education centre, Lewa sponsored community schools, an irrigation project and health clinic. We learned about the other successful programs including adult literacy, women's microcredits, bursaries and community security assistance and outreach. One of our speakers explained that they believe that if first Lewa improves the lives of the people, then the people will be receptive to being educated about the issues concerning wildlife. The fuel that makes the model work is without a doubt the passion and buy-in of the staff. It is hard to even label them staff as they come across much more as a family. They made us feel like we, BFR team members, were an important part of that family even though we were all from North America.

One of our days included a walking safari with a security ranger and we learned to identify tracks, spot rhino urine scent marking and a big highlight for me was finding Hyenas! That day also included spotting a beautiful Martial Eagle, secretary birds up in a nest but my most memorable moment was our rhino trio! Although we had found rhinos before today, this was the most notable moment for me as I watched interesting behaviour occur between a male and two female whites. The girls were shoulder to shoulder, ears flattened back, lips curled, telling him right off! He was being thoughtful as he approached, not aggressive but still very interested in the approach no matter what the cost. Our rhino trio in Toronto would do this exact "dance" and within a few days we would see our male breed the female that was receptive and I wondered if we would come across this group again this week and see breeding!

Deserrai Buunk – Toronto

We arrived at Ngiri house. "Ngiri" is Swahili for warthog which I had always thought was Pumba. We were told that Pumba means "silly" The first of so many things we would learn. After meeting the amazing staff, we were shown our room options and settled in to our home. The true magic of LEWA became apparent very quickly. There are resident vervet monkeys and hyrax as well as birds and insects. Zebra and the occasional water buck or cape buffalo wander through the lawn area, even a lion on rare occasion. We did see tracks one morning from an overnight lion visit.

On our one night drive among the bush babies and other nocturnal critters, we found a caracal, which had not been seen on LEWA in a long time. All of this would seem like the highlight of any trip, but it just got better. We happened to be there during a time that the group conservancies were translocating nine bull elephants that had been marked as trouble makers in the communities. We were invited to go with the team for two of the days where four elephants were darted by helicopter then loaded onto a truck, still sedated for the trip to a local town. The elephant was then hoisted onto a sliding platform, and moved into a container truck, then the sedation was reversed. Once the elephants were standing and alert they were shifted into large cargo trucks that two at a time could be driven to Tsavo, the final release spot.

Jill Werner – Los Angeles



Lewa group meeting with rangers
(photo by Jill Werner)