

The life of a rhino monitor

Being a rhino monitor is an incredible job. It's one that many of us would love; searching for rhinos every day, tracking their behaviour and supporting actions to boost their conservation. To find out more about the role, we asked Joshua Rogers, Rhino Monitor at uMkhuze Game Reserve, to share his insights with us.

Joshua Rogers | Rhino Monitor, uMkhuze Game Reserve

Tell us about uMkhuze and your role

uMkhuze Game Reserve is home to both species of rhino found within southern Africa, the black rhino and the white rhino. The ever-increasing threat to these species has created an environment that is dangerous and unpredictable, requiring a team that is motivated and dedicated to the protection of such an endangered species, a team I am proud to be a part of. I am currently employed as a Rhino Monitor, a position that carries great privilege and responsibility.



How did you get into rhino conservation?

Having grown up on a game reserve just outside Kruger National Park, with a father who is a wildlife veterinarian, much of my childhood was filled with the capture and treatment of some of Africa's most iconic species. This instilled a deep passion for conservation within me. Having then seen first-hand the plight of South Africa's rhino, I knew I wanted to play my part in their protection.

What is a typical day like for you?

As part of the uMkhuze team, I have come to learn a diverse set of skills that are needed to work within wildlife conservation, and particularly, to focus on rhinos. On a typical day, we walk patrols of 10 to 15 km, searching for rhinos in tough environmental conditions. Creeping carefully up to rhinos that might be only a few metres away, you've got to keep calm and remember that at any moment a small change in wind direction could cause a change in behaviour.



When I'm not tracking on foot with the team, I'm up in the air flying the Reserve's light aircraft, searching from above for all the rhinos we can find, photograph and identify.

What is the biggest challenge in your day-to-day?

The most difficult part of my job is trying to find specific rhinos. Finding any black rhino in the Reserve is hard, but specific animals can feel almost impossible to find at times. This is because they often opt for thick areas of bush as opposed to their white rhino cousins, which prefer more open areas. This can create dangerous situations, especially on foot. It's a species I could best describe as being highly inquisitive with an unpredictable temperament. Black rhinos are never shy about keeping you on your toes!

What's the best part of your job and your favourite memory?

The best part of my job is being able to patrol on foot and fly a plane over a Big 5 Game Reserve: a camera could never do justice to the sights and sounds. I have been very fortunate to see some incredible sightings ranging from rhinos with newborn babies to lions on kills.

It is impossible for me to highlight one particular moment as my favourite, but if I ever had to choose just one experience, it would be sitting at a waterhole at night, during a full moon, watching black rhinos come to drink right in front of me. You'd be surprised how well you can see at night on a full moon once your eyes adjust. Simply being there, watching the animals interact with one another, is a wonderful and humbling experience.

What do you hope to achieve for the future?

My hope is that we are able end the rhino-poaching scourge that has been plaguing us for so long. If we fail to achieve this task, we would have not only lost the iconic rhino from our planet, but it does not bode well for the future of other endangered species. This is why it is important that we all play our part in raising awareness in protecting our natural environment for generations to come.

