

# Conservation careers

**John Gitonga** began as the Administrator for the Association of Private and community Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS) in Kenya's Laikipia region four years ago. Today, he not only supports APLRS members, but also gathers black rhino data from national parks as well as private and community conservancies across the country to inform conservation plans. We asked John about his career so far.

**John Gitonga** | Administrator, Association of Private and community Land Rhino Sanctuaries



## What activities do you do each day?

One of my core duties is to act as secretariat for quarterly APLRS meetings. But my role is much more than administration tasks from a desk. Under the guidance of Kenya's Rhino Programme Coordinator, I actively engage in field visits, interacting with the people collecting rhino data each day.

In addition, I conduct capacity-building workshops on database management (*below*), data analysis and report

generation, and I am a member of the our national Rhino Steering Committee. As a trained rhino instructor, I also work alongside the KWS and Wildlife Research and Training Institute to provide comprehensive training on



various patrol-monitoring techniques, rhino tracking, identification and rhino biology to equip rhino monitors with essential skills for effective monitoring.

Participating in ear-notching activities is another fascinating aspect of my work (*top left*). By putting permanent V-shaped marks on a rhino's ears we identify each animal, which makes monitoring much easier and more accurate.

## What sparked your passion for data?

I developed a passion for programming, particularly for data analysis and visualization, in 2019, when I cleaned the national black rhino database. I find joy in executing lines of code that run successfully, and I am excited about the prospect of creating data models that can contribute to rhino conservation in Kenya. I want to make a positive impact and am excited about the potential of data-driven approaches to enhance rhino conservation efforts in the country.

## How did you begin your career?

In 2017, I graduated from the University of Nairobi with a Bachelor of Science in Range Management. Soon after this, I started as an Intern for the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, before moving to Ol Pejeta Conservancy (OPC), where I worked as a coordinator between the communities and the Conservancy.

At OPC, I concentrated on raising awareness of the importance of using sustainable natural resources. In 2019, I began as the APLRS Administrator and alongside this, I am currently completing a Masters in data science and analytics from Strathmore University.

## What are your top priorities as the APLRS Administrator?

Since starting in May 2019, my role has undergone significant growth and transformation. Initially, my focus was coordinating rhino activities between members and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) through the National Rhino Office.

Now, my responsibilities have evolved into much more data management and analysis. I play a vital role in tracking the implementation of Kenya's Black Rhino Action Plans, overseeing and managing the rhino database at both APLRS and National levels.

