

Sensing **success**

Tracking, as we know it, is an ancient art that was developed and used by hunter-gatherers. It kept our ancestors alive. It was a skill passed down from generation to generation, and was based on observing signs left by animals, as well as anticipation based on experience. This art evolved over millennia and became a tactical feature in many conflicts throughout human history.

Dennis Kelly | Section Ranger – Makhamisa, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

In Africa, where wildlife conservation efforts have been persistently challenged by poaching, anti-poaching ranger teams have honed these skills to track suspected poaching gang members who trespass into protected areas. This dangerous 'game' changes daily, according to the experience and learned behaviour of both the suspect and the law-enforcement staff.

Whilst the human skill of tracking is based on sight and cognitive anticipation, a dog, with a sense of smell up to 100,000 times stronger than our own, uses its nose. Using dogs to track humans has been a game changer in law-enforcement. Dogs' noses can track a human in situations where humans can see no sign. The very finest human trackers can track with very few visual cues; however, the process is painstakingly slow. Trained working dogs have no need for any visual cues – their only requirement is scent, dropped by a human while walking through the environment.

The Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park K9 Unit has been through changes over the last few years, but is now beginning to settle in as an effective team and a key part of our anti-poaching strategy. Having said that, we still have a long way to go to reach the levels to which we aspire.

When I was asked to take over the running of the K9 Unit, I had very little knowledge about working dogs, particularly in the law-enforcement context. However, as we have seen throughout this horrific rhino-poaching saga, there was and still is an incredible stream of people that want to help.



Without this help, we could never have achieved the successes we have made to date, in this ongoing battle. Thank you to everyone that has supported our work.

Our canine response unit in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi is a young team of dogs, with the most experienced member being Ghost, our cold-scent Doberman X Bloodhound. She is the rock upon which the unit is built. Our two young Dutch Shepherds, Captain and Chief, are slowly growing in skill and experience and will be a daunting prospect to any suspect who finds them on their trail.

Thanks to these dogs and the growing team built around them, we are boosting our anti-poaching efforts and are committed in our aim to protect more rhinos.



DENNIS KELLY (HP)