

RHINO RANGER INCENTIVE PROGRAM – 2014 PROGRESS REPORT



A Conservancy Rhino Ranger stands proudly before a cow and calf that he has tracked during a patrol. Over the past 12 months, patrol effort (man days) and ranger rhino sightings have increased across the region by 51% and 60%, respectively, thanks to the combined efforts of an expanded Rhino Ranger force and support organizations.

Africa's majestic rhinos are under siege from ruthless poachers that are **currently killing 3 rhinos per day** to feed the black market demand for rhino horn. Namibia is the stronghold for Africa's critically endangered black rhinos, supporting over a third of the global population. The remote and rugged northwest Kunene region is home to the last truly wild population of desert black rhino. For over 30 years, government, local communities, conservation NGOs and, more recently, private sector tourism, have built lasting partnerships to help protect this unique population of black rhino.

Under the Namibian government's innovative Rhino Custodianship Program, rhinos are being returned to communal lands. This has created a demand for rhino tourism from local communities. This benefits the rhinos because it is a new opportunity to further expand and secure their range. However, to ensure this expansion is carried out effectively in the face of the growing rhino poaching crisis, communities (known as "rhino custodians") must remain vigilant and even increase protection efforts. Essential support for rhino from communities can only be maintained by designing and implementing innovative strategies that deliver clear benefits back to the local custodians. Thus, in 2012, after numerous requests from Rhino Custodians, the Rhino Ranger Programme was born to support a new generation of local rhino tracking teams that, through their critical monitoring work and emerging role in tourism, improve rhino security while increasing the value communities place on keeping rhino alive.

Program Progress:

September 2014 marked the program's second full year in operation with many new initiatives and promising improvements achieved. The most noteworthy of achievements was the training and implementation of 2 new rhino tracking tourism activities led by Rhino Rangers. These new activities will serve as a pilot and stepping stone to inspire expansion into other areas to help improve security and increase rhino benefits to local communities. Also, with the addition of 8 new Rhino Rangers, we have increased both our total ranger field days and rhino sightings by 51% and 60%, respectively. This is a much greater increase than we expected and are hopeful that through the procurement of two new vehicles we will continue increasing and expanding our Rhino Ranger reach.

Key Milestones Achieved

- **4 new Rhino Custodians officially joined the program** adding 8 new Rhino Rangers to the team
- **Complete field kits for new rangers and full replenishment kits for second-year rangers** including tents, bedrolls, jackets, field shirts, pants, shorts, boots, hats and packs were provided to each ranger
- **Specialist rhino monitoring equipment** including digital cameras, GPS and binoculars were provided to new teams
- **1 multi-day workshop** was held to provide training and hand out training awards and certificates
- **New training in Event Book Monitoring was provided to all Rhino Rangers** by Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation staff
- **New Rhino Report Cards were created and distributed** (see photo above)
- **Advanced Rhino Monitoring training was initiated** with rangers who passed their basic exams and includes advanced knowledge in rhino ecology and conservation issues and advanced uses of digital cameras and GPS
- **8 Rhino Rangers received and passed Rhino Conservation Tourism training**
- **949 total rhino ranger field days** were recorded (an increase of 53% from 2013)
- **667 ranger rhino sightings** were recorded (an increase of 60% from 2013)
- **Over N\$125,000 (US\$ 11,300) in rhino bonuses** were paid out
- **98% coverage of the Kunene black rhinos range** on community land is now being provided by rhino rangers (increase from 85% in 2013) with the final Rhino Custodian team ready to begin (full 100% coverage!)
- **2 new rhino tracking tourism activities began operating in August 2014**
- **Created and distributed Rhino Profile Cards** to assist the rangers in accurately identifying the rhino they see
- **3 new fly camps have been constructed in high security risk areas** to provide a permanent field base for Rhino Rangers to be in closer proximity to their rhino
- **NO RHINO WERE POACHED IN THE RHINO TOURISM AREAS**



A Ranger completes his Rhino Report Card to track sightings of their rhino while helping improve the feedback on monitoring results to community leaders

Next Steps for 2015

We aim to continue increasing the number of ranger field days while also expanding the number of teams leading and receiving support by emerging rhino tourism enterprises, pending approvals from Ministry of Environment and Tourism. We also hope to make the most of the new fly camps by extending our ability to spend more time in the field closer to the rhino areas. For questions about the program or learning how you can help please contact Boas Hambo (081-6270982) or Jeff Muntifering (081-3122738 / jmuntif@gmail.com). Thanks for all your support!

How We Got Started

In 2011, in the face of an escalating poaching threat, local community leaders and game guards saw the need to improve their capacity to protect the rhino on their lands and better fulfill their obligations as 'Rhino Custodians'. A small group of dedicated field conservationists together with support from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism formed an informal working group that sought to provide targeted support to these Communal Rhino Custodians. Our first initiative was to design and implement a programme to strengthen and expand the capacity for Communal Rhino Custodians to monitor the rhino on their lands. We called this the Rhino Ranger Incentive Programme. This program utilizes specialists from dedicated field-based organizations, namely Save the Rhino Trust, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation and Minnesota Zoo, to train a new generation of "rhino rangers" - highly talented groups of local people, chosen by and accountable to their communities to conduct rhino monitoring. The program provides an enhanced training curriculum, state-of-the-art rhino monitoring and field patrol equipment, and performance-based cash bonuses that enable and incentivize rhino ranger teams to complete quality patrols. Once rhino ranger teams acquire the basic skills needed to effectively monitor the rhino on their land and pending necessary approvals, training in rhino tourism will help guide the development of community-led rhino tourism activities that would improve rhino security by generating the critical finances needed to sustain rhino monitoring and enhancing the value that people place on keeping rhino alive. At the heart of this approach is the belief that a future for Africa's wild rhino will only be secured when poaching is simply not tolerated by the local people, when rhino become more valuable alive than dead, and where innovative solutions – grown from the grassroots – are supported through authentic partnerships between government, NGOs and private sector.



Karl So-orbeb (far right) receives his Basic Rhino Monitoring training certificate from Specialist Trainers Jeff Muntifering (far left) and Boas Hambo (center). 18 Rhino Rangers received training certificates in Basic Rhino Monitoring and 8 Rhino Rangers received training certificates in Rhino Conservation Tourism in 2014.

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