

Large Scale Community-based Rhino Conservation in North-West Namibia
Annual Progress Report – 2020



A rhino cow with a new born (< 1 month) calf photographed by a Conservancy Rhino Ranger. 2020 was a tough year for both rhinos and humans (COVID) but a few healthy baby rhinos help to see there is hope on the horizon.

2020 was a year like no other. While drought continued unabated in Namibia, COVID-19 also struck causing widespread tourism collapse as well as significant reductions to conservation funding. Yet, despite the setbacks, we are proud to report on the achievements and accolades for our collective efforts to protect Africa's last truly wild population of black rhino in Namibia. Overall, 2020 can be seen as the year our rangers really rose to the occasion to produce yet another record-breaking year in patrol performance while being dealt with a number of critical challenges. This signifies that our team is truly committed to this cause – not just complying with orders and instructions.

Below, we reflect on some of the highlights in 2020 from both our Conservancy Rhino Ranger programme as well as our Rhino Pride Campaign

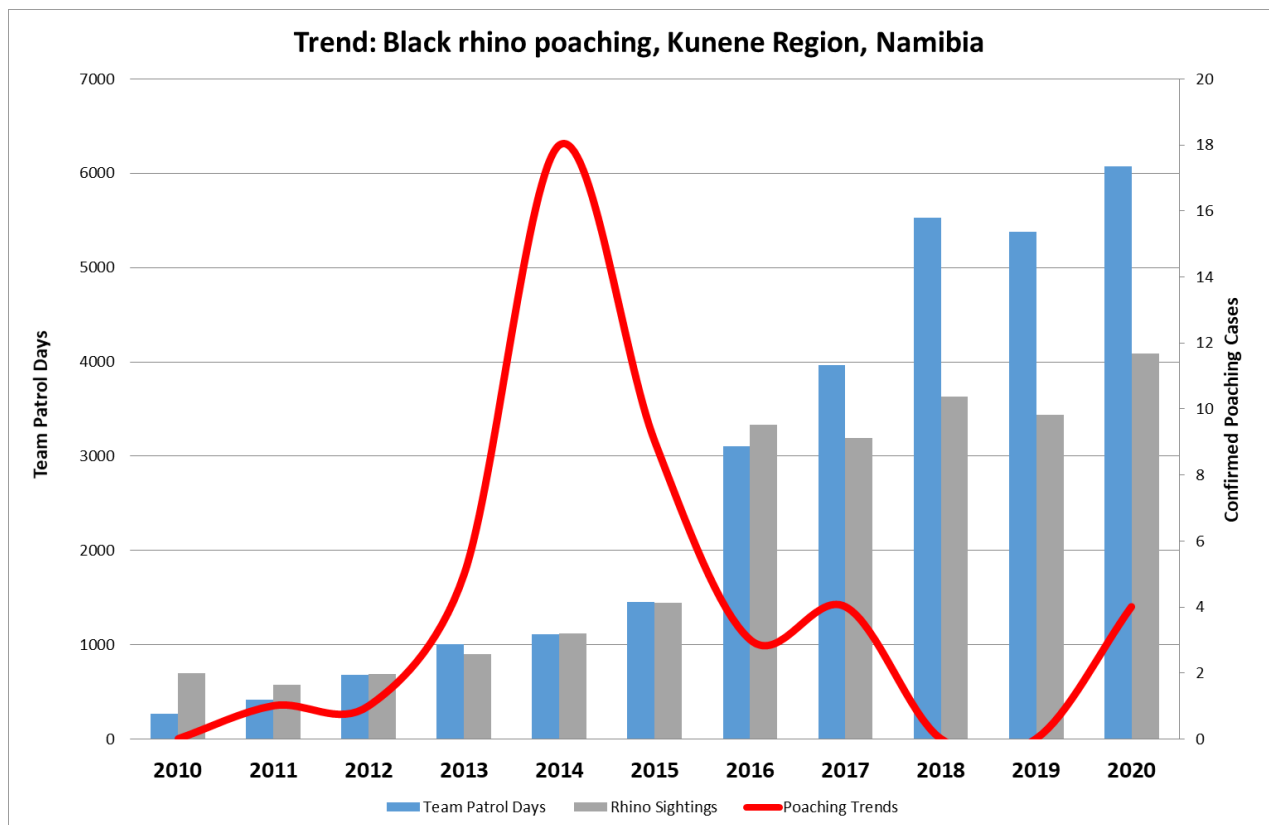


Firstly, despite all the COVID-related funding reductions, our **Conservancy Rhino Ranger Program** – which remains strongly supported by local field-based NGOs specifically Save the Rhino Trust and Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation – rose to the occasion and doubled-down on their commitment in 2020 to record double-digit improvements in patrol performance despite large reductions

in vehicle support, patrol food and equipment.

Below are a few specific milestones:

1. **Overall Team Field Days have increased by 13% from 2019 and helped increase overall patrol effort by over 1,350% since 2011 (before program inception)**
2. **Overall Ranger field days rose 12% from 2019 with Conservancy Rhino Rangers holding strong by contributing 48% of the total ranger field days (NGO and Gov't staff provided 52%).**
3. **Rhino Sightings have increased by an astounding 19% from 2019 and surpassed 4,000 confirmed sightings in a calendar year for the first time in history! These results helped increase overall rhino sightings by over 600% since 2011 (before program inception)**
4. **Distributed 30 new SMART data collection devices and provided training to rangers**
5. **Initiated a new Ranger Welfare Project (Photo 1)**
6. **Conservancy leadership overwhelmingly agreed to increase their recognition of and support for their Conservancy Rhino Ranger Programme (see Photo 2).**
7. **Sadly, despite these herculean efforts, we lost 4 rhinos to poaching in 2020 – all happening after the COVID restrictions were put in place in Namibia**





Rhino Pride CAMPAIGN

2020 was a tough year for our Rhino Pride Campaign given the COVID measures and all the associated restrictions on any large gatherings and group activities. However, we still did manage to pull together a handful of activities that we believe kept folks engaged. Below are a few specific highlights from 2020:

1. **Held our 1st Annual Ranger Award Ceremony (Photo 3)**

that provided awards in over a dozen categories to over 60 rangers spanning both NGOs and Conservancy rangers.

2. **Launched a new 'Drive out Poaching' campaign (Photo 4)** working with area taxi drivers to raise awareness and interest within the small urban setting in the region



Photo 3: Teams of rangers stand proud before their peers at the 1st Ranger Award Ceremony

3. Held our first **virtual World Rhino Day event (Photo 5)** using an online platform to facilitate competitions in Rhino art, music and dance.
4. Received ~ 9,000 **books donated from Books for Africa (Photo 6)** that will be distributed to Kunene primary and secondary schools in the 'name of the rhino'.
5. Conducted our pilot **Reading with Rangers** programme which aims to expose youth to nature in general and rhino conservation specifically by having Rangers lead them on a 'patrol' and sharing their knowledge of the plants and animal behavior.
6. Finalized our books for our **Reading with Rhinos** programme together with Mondessa Youth Opportunities. This included created **custom Rhino Characters (Photo 7)** that will adorn cover pages placed over the main reading tool (Reading A-Z books) as well as **9 tailored rhino booklets** written to cultivate compassion, gratitude and pride in rhinos.

PHOTOS



Photo 1: Visiting medical doctor Chris Ingram (MD) from New York performs health checks on rangers.

In 2020 we initiated a new Ranger Welfare Project which will consist of providing annual health screenings, team and individual first aid kits for patrols, and first aid training to all the rangers.



Photo 2: A group of Conservancy Leadership join an awareness and exposure trip lead by Conservancy Rhino Ranger Support Group leaders with the aim to strengthen Conservancy support.

PHOTOS



Photo 4: Rhino Pride Campaign leader Karel Werta poses with his newly recruited taxi drivers in Khorixas and their custom seat covers to raise awareness and spread Rhino Pride!



Photo 5: World Rhino Day 2020 Virtual Campaign advert video

PHOTOs (continued)



Photo 6: Namibia's Ministry of Education National Library staff pose with Dr Muntifering following the preparation of ~9,000 books donated by Books for Africa that arrived in 2020.

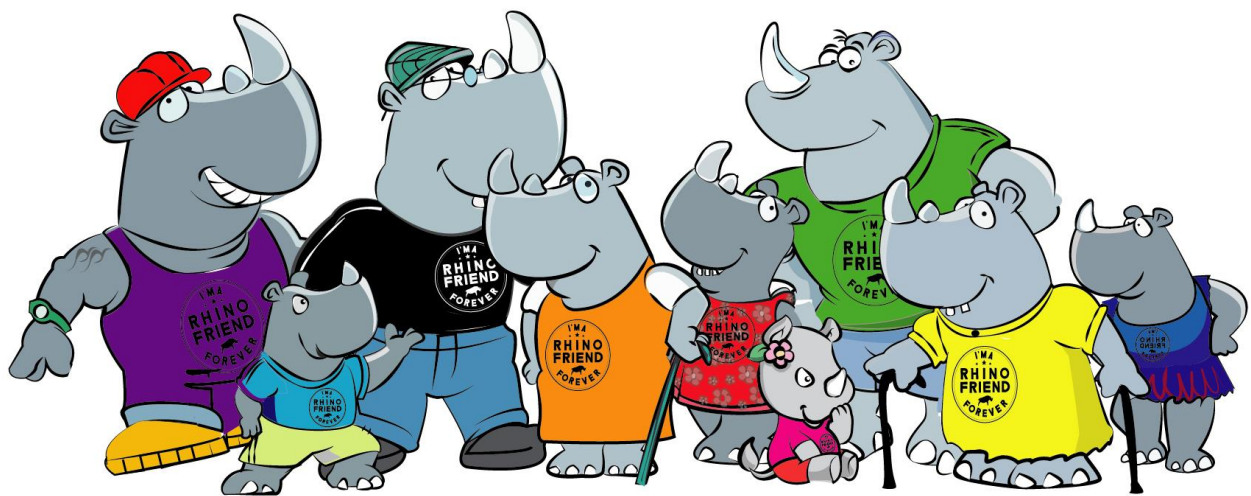


Photo 7: Custom designed Rhino Characters that will feature in our upcoming 'Reading with Rhinos' books and booklets. We will be launching the new literacy and rhino pride project in 2020 together with a local school Mondesa Youth Opportunities

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



A Rhino Ranger in action

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.

We deeply thank our main donors & partners:

(who's gifts directly support the Conservancy Rhino Rangers)

USAID, Houston Zoo, North Carolina Zoo, Minnesota Zoo Foundation, Dietrich American Foundation, SwissAfrican Foundation, Nature Friend Safaris, Conservation Travel Foundation, Tourism Supporting Conservation, Sustainable Wildlife Trust & Nakara

Field Partners: Thirteen Communal Conservancies (Puros, Otjikondavirongo, Sesfontein, Anabeb, Omatendeka, Ehrovipuka, /Khoadi #Hoas, Torra, Doro !Nawas, Sorris Sorris, //Huab, Uibasen/Twefelfontein, Tsiseb), Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Save the Rhino Trust, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation, Namibia Nature Foundation, Conservancy Safaris Namibia, Camelthorn Safaris, Journey's Namibia, Ultimate Safaris, Wilderness Safaris Namibia and the Minnesota Zoo