

## Large Scale Community-based Rhino Conservation in North-West Namibia

# Annual Progress Report – 2021



PHOTO 1

Despite an incredibly challenging 2020 with persistent drought, COVID-induced tourism collapse and 4 rhinos lost to poaching, 2021 produced a dramatically different scene. While rainfall remained sparse and patchy, the resilient desert rhinos of Namibia still managed to **successfully produce 7 new rhino calves (Photo 1)** and only a few natural mortalities of old rhinos. Further, our exceptionally high ranger effort was essentially maintained across the majority of metrics with substantial increases in foot kilometers. In fact, **the distance covered if we combine ALL foot kilometers walked throughout the year by each individual ranger was over 80,000 kilometers – or roughly walking around the world...twice!** Most importantly, these field efforts helped record yet another year of **ZERO poaching** for one of the world's last truly wild population of black rhinos. In addition to these special feats, we are pleased to have made significant progress towards a number of new and exciting projects including a new Ranger Welfare Project, Expanding our Ranger Programme to Nyae Nyae Conservancy in northeastern Namibia and placing the final touches on our design of two new innovative outreach projects: Rhino Cup Youth Champions League and Reading with Rhinos schools initiative.

*Below, we reflect on some of the highlights in 2021*



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 – held the line on their commitment in 2021 and while the increases in performance were not as substantial as 2020's remarkable effort, we are proud to have been able to keep performance to a very high level.

Below are a few specific milestones – *illustrating our core rhino monitoring performance with our newly developed 'Rhino Monitoring Dashboard' customized in our SMART database:*



## ANNUAL RHINO MONITORING PERFORMANCE MEASURES



### 2021 Annual Performance Results



TEAM FIELD DAYS

**4,894**



RANGER FIELD DAYS

**9,480**



TEAM FOOT KILOMETERS

**44,405**

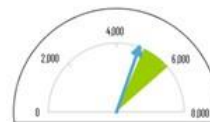


CONFIRMED RHINO SIGHTINGS

**3,397**

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE RELATIVE TO ANNUAL TARGETS (+/- 10% OF 2020 - GREEN REGION)

Team Field Days



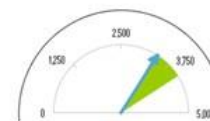
Ranger Field Days



Team Foot Kilometers



Cumulative Rhino Sightings



1. **We met/nearly met our annual targets in 3 of 4 key performance indicators** including Team Field Days, Team Foot Kilometers and Rhino Sightings.
2. Ranger field days did decrease from 2020 possibly due to the extremely high number of rangers seeking field time – *safer in the bush* - during the first COVID year
3. **Our teams covered an astounding 44,405 kilometers on foot – an all-time record – far surpassing our targets for the year.**
4. **Although rhino sightings were slightly down from 2020's record year, we still produced well over 3,000 confirmed rhino sighting** with full data (date/time stamped photo plus GPS) and another 210 rhino sightings without GPS for a total of 3,607 (*the 3,397 indicated above only includes rhino sightings with GPS location attached*).
5. **Most importantly, we recorded yet another ZERO poaching year**



PHOTO 2

6. We officially **launched our new Ranger Welfare Programme** which included providing basic first aid training to 34 rangers (**Photo 2**) including individual first aid kits to each (**Photo 3**) and 30 comprehensive team first aid kits. Further, a total of 60 rangers were provided with an exclusive health screening by a physician which included prescriptions. The physician will conduct bi-annual visits to ensure everyone has an opportunity to see a doctor. Two staff were seconded to the programme and trained to manage the inventory and records of welfare incidents in the field.

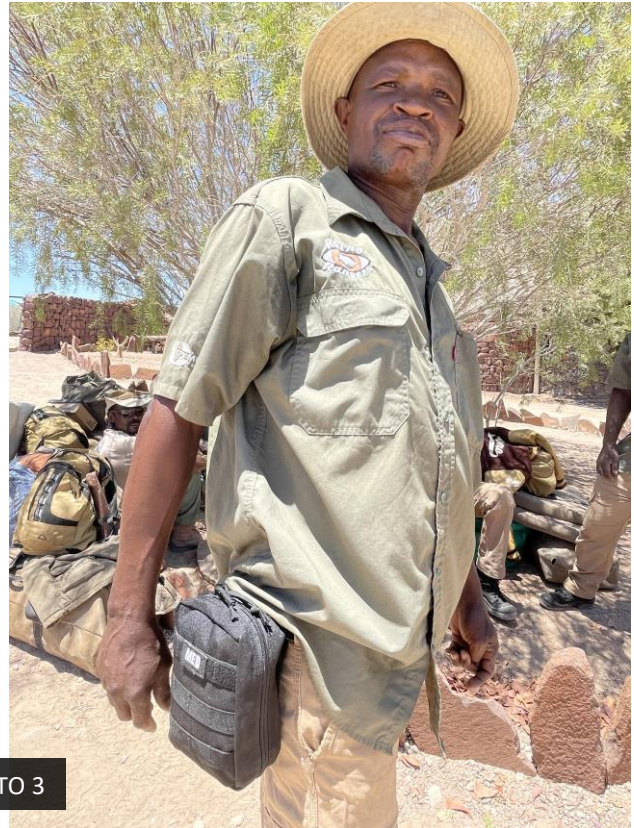


PHOTO 3

7. Lastly, upon invitation from Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, we **expanded our Conservancy Rhino Ranger programme for the first time out of the northwest into an entirely new landscape and culture with the San Community of Nyae Nyae Conservancy on Namibia's eastern border with Botswana** (see Map below). Our first step was signing agreement letter with the Conservancy and then providing training to 20 candidate rangers (**Photo 4**) – of which the top 5 were selected to become the first Nyae Nyae Conservancy Rhino Ranger cohort.

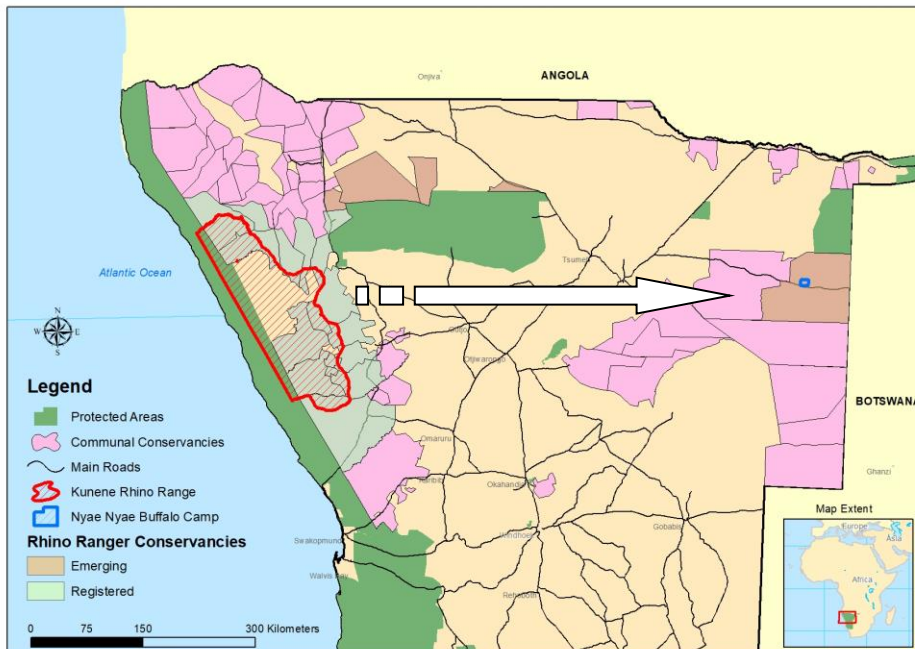


PHOTO 4





# Rhino Pride CAMPAIGN

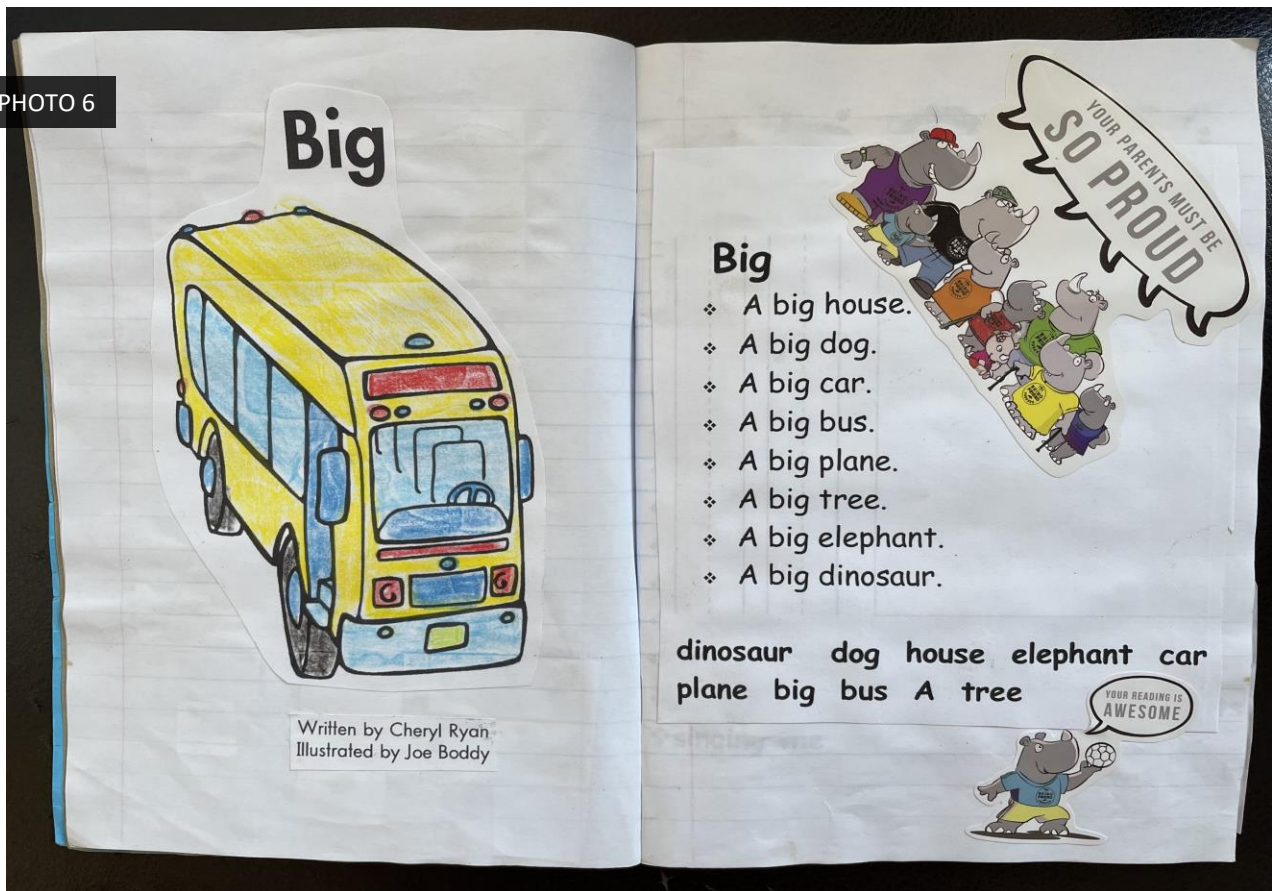
2021 continued to challenge our Rhino Pride Campaign given the COVID measures and all the associated restrictions on any large gatherings and group activities. However, we pushed ahead with strengthening the design of a handful of new initiatives and held steadfast to ensure our most impactful events were delivered. Below are a few specific highlights from 2021:

1. **We held our 2<sup>st</sup> Annual Ranger Award Ceremony** which we split into two separate events this year: one for the Conservancy Rhino Rangers and one for SRT & IRDNC staff. In total we brought together over 48 Conservancy rangers and 35 NGO staff who received over 120 medals and a number of other rewards across 8 different award categories including Most Active Field Days, Most Foot Kilometers, Most Rhino Sightings and Photo of the Year (**Photo 5**). Moreover, our ceremony attracted the attention of dignitaries including the US Ambassador, WWF-Namibia Director and USAID Chief of Parties. One of the highlights was musical performances by local Namibia artists Pire Guri and Bullet ya Kaoko.



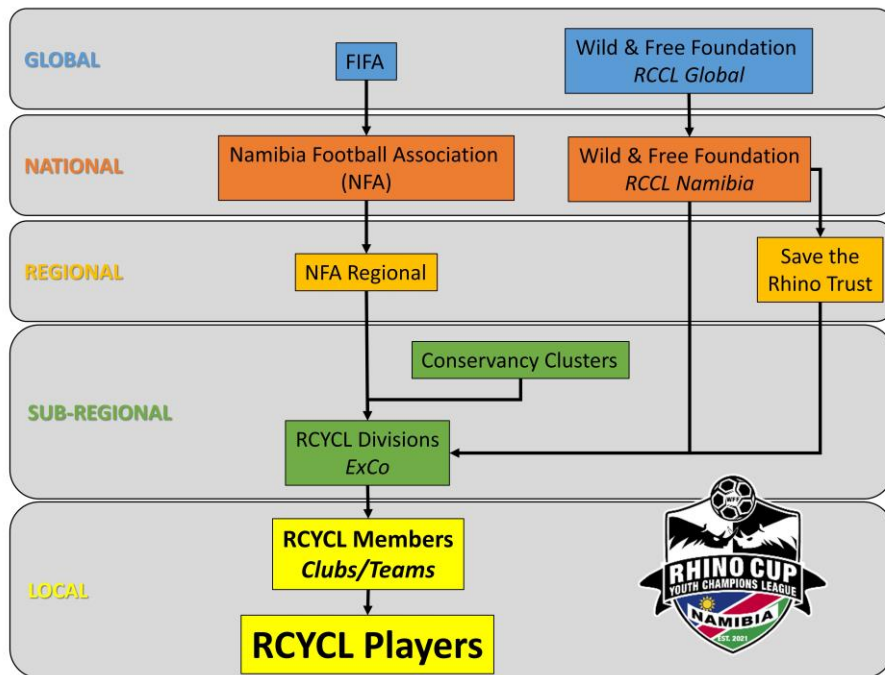
2. We conducted a series of **additional 6 Reading with Rangers events** which exposed over 50 youth to nature in general and rhino conservation specifically by having Rangers lead them on a 'patrol' and sharing their knowledge of the plants and animal behavior. They also learned about SRT's history and important work during exclusive tourism of their field headquarters.
3. We added a critical dimension to our **Reading with Rhinos** programme together with Mondessa Youth Opportunities that included creating custom take-hold 'My Rhino Storybooks' that will capture each book the children learn how to read and enable them to read the book aloud to their parents at home. Using our custom Rhino Characters, we also developed unique stickers with motivational quotes that each student will receive to add to their storybook (**Photo 6**).

PHOTO 6



4. We advanced our organizational development and preparedness for the launch of the **1<sup>st</sup> Rhino Cup Youth Champions League** – in partnership with Wild and Free Foundation - which had to be postponed due to COVID sporting restriction. Yet the year gave us to time to establish League Statutes, Rules and Regulations, become officially endorsed as affiliate with Namibia Football League and Kunene Football League, upgraded 12 football fields including brand new constructed goal posts, procured full uniform sets (**Photo 7**) and training kits for 16 teams (320 youth) and devised a new Women's Clinic to bolster interest in football for the under 13 women. We also developed Agreement Letters with partners including an organizational diagram (see below). Our league is set to launch in April 2022.

PHOTO 7



## 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 / Rhino Pride Campaign)

**USAID, Tusk Trust, B2Gold, Houston Zoo, Great Plains Zoo, Minnesota Zoo Foundation, North Carolina Zoo, Dietrich American Foundation, SwissAfrican Foundation, Wild & Free Foundation, Conservation Travel Foundation, Cymot**

**Field Partners: Thirteen Communal Conservancies (Puros, Otjikondavirongo, Sesfontein, Anabeb, Omatendeka, Ehrovipuka, /Khoadi #Hoas, Torra, Doro !Nawas, Sorrh Sorrh, //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**