

## How do horses help rhino conservation?

My wife Bronwen and I had listened to the reverberating call of a patrolling lion since earlier that evening. Later that night, when I heard a commotion coming from the far end of the Nqumeni Outpost, I knew it could only be one thing...

**Dennis Kelly** | Section Ranger, Nqumeni Outpost, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

I rushed across and found Corporal Simon Nyawo and the Horse Groom at the stables talking excitedly. According to them, a lioness had tried to get into the stable area but had been thwarted by the electric fence that separated the horses from the surrounding bush. Three months earlier, a horse had been killed and eaten by lions when it wandered off in search of food. I was relieved that we had not lost another. Nqumeni Section, which is one of five management sections in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP), has five horses. They are used during patrols, both for law enforcement and rhino monitoring.

Horses have been used in Zululand for a very long time and, as in many other instances around the world, are the unsung heroes of many proud stories in South Africa. Horses featured heavily in both the Anglo-Zulu War and South African Wars, and subsequently became an integral part of early conservation efforts in Zululand. Nick Steele, who was based at the very remote Gome Outpost in the 1960s, relied on horses to patrol the vast area without roads under his control. He also used horses to travel to and from Mpila, the iMfolozi logistical base where Dr Ian Player was stationed.

Perhaps the horses' most famous conservation role was during Operation Rhino, when white rhino, whose numbers in Hluhluwe and iMfolozi had been growing well since proclamation in 1897, were captured to repopulate areas from which they had long since disappeared. Rangers mounted on horses followed darted rhino and these small mounted units became an integral part of a very successful operation that saved Africa's Southern white rhino population. Horses were later used in pioneering the mass capture of antelope in HiP, where extremely skilled horsemen including Jan Oelofse and Nick Steele chased animals such as zebra and wildebeest into capture bomas. The horses' role in these types of operation has now been taken over by helicopters.

Generally, people walking through the bush are fairly conspicuous to wildlife. We may think that we are following all the rules by remaining as neutral as possible and taking note of the wind direction, but we still stick out like sore thumbs. Horses blend in and animals respond differently when a person is on horseback; our outline is broken up and our scent masked by the horses. Game such as buffalo and white rhino can be approached without them so much as lifting their heads (although there are exceptions).

Some black rhino can be very intolerant and several patrols have returned in tatters after bumping into a grumpy black rhino, with the rider only just managing to hold on as the horse beelines back to the outpost. The mere smell of lions is enough to stop an experienced bush horse in its tracks and no amount of pulling and tugging will get it to continue, with the only option being a large detour around the suspicious patch of bushes. This can be hugely frustrating, but why question an animal with better senses than our own? I am sure many incidents have been avoided due to a 'stubborn' horse that has sensed something into which we would have otherwise blundered.

### Recent grants

We sent €3,250 from a €7,500 grant from Safaripark Beekse Bergen for stable maintenance, securing the electrical fence, buying feed, medical supplies and riding tack. USFWS RTCF awarded \$21,534 for aerial surveillance (a new Bathawk has just been delivered to replace the Bantam microlight that crashed in January). Colchester Zoo's Action for the Wild has given £4,930 for anti-poaching kit. And SRI has awarded \$2,430 from our core funds for equipment including a metal detector and rifle mount.

HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK



# 'RHI-KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!'

**£109,000 raised and counting!**

## How this year's marathon team beat our fundraising record

The Virgin London Marathon is one of our favourite annual events. On 21 April 2013 we had 51 runners at the Greenwich Park start line. Some were nervous, others excited and the atmosphere was buzzing.

**Josephine Gibson** | Former Michael Hearn Intern (now Corporate Relations Manager)

At the start line, we helped our 15 costume runners into their rhino suits and made some last-minute adjustments for their 26.2 mile run. Our runners were able to have a quick catch up, after having got to know each other during our rhino team evening and via our Facebook group, and after a couple of photos they were off.

Our rhinos were cheered along the route by huge crowds on a lovely sunny but cool day, and we were excited to greet them at the finish in

St James's Park. The marathon was a real family affair, with team members including brothers, partners and a father and daughter. This made it even more special when family and friends came to join our post-race picnic. We welcomed in team members from as far afield as Canada, Australia, South Africa, Singapore and the USA.

A big thank you to the team and volunteers. Everyone worked hard to support Save the Rhino and we would like to share the stories of three of our fantastic fundraisers: **Shelly**, **Justin** and **Nicholas**.



### Shelly

Shelly was touched by the plight of the rhino following a visit to her conservation hero, Lawrence Anthony, in South Africa for an article she was writing.

After an up-close experience with baby rhinos Nihombi and Thabo playing in the mud, and the passing of Lawrence Anthony, Shelly was keen to run the London Marathon with her partner Giorgio.

In her first week Shelly raised more than £2,500 but she didn't stop there. From fashion sales to enthusiastic asks to friends, families and colleagues, she worked hard to fundraise as much as she could. With the support of Giorgio, who collected £600 in donations when he signed up to run in a rhino costume, Shelly raised almost £9,000.



### Justin

Long-term supporter and repeat runner, Justin Wateridge,

the MD of Steppes Travel, was determined beat his 2006 time running as a rhino.

After months of hard training, Justin finished the race as 2013's fastest rhino, in less than five hours, much to the dismay of fellow runner, ITV Royal Correspondent Tim Ewart, who wrote about being beaten by a rhino. The cheers Justin received as he ran, including 'Rhi-know you can do it' were clearly spot on! Justin used creative techniques such as promising a puppy for his children if his supporters helped him reach £5,000.

Justin's fundraising total came to £5,152 and his family welcomed a new furry friend after the race.



### Nicholas

After running marathons in Kenya, Nicholas was eager to visit

England for the first time and run the London Marathon to raise awareness for rhino conservation.

Nicholas is personally involved in rhino conservation as the lead horse-riding guide at Borana Conservancy in Kenya, which Save the Rhino supports.

Nicholas gained fantastic support from Borana's guests, and has raised over £11,000 for Save the Rhino!

ALL IMAGES: JOSHUA DONLOP



Interested in joining our Virgin Money London Marathon 2014 team?

Watch our marathon video to see our amazing London Marathon day:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek6yUG9Qy8c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek6yUG9Qy8c) Email [rory@savetherhino.org](mailto:rory@savetherhino.org) for more information