

**Project 3792**  
**Black Rhino Conservation**  
WWF Expenditure 1986/87 — US\$ 27,147  
(Project initiated 1987)

**Project Executant:** Dr W. Nduku, Coordinator, Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management.

**Objectives:**

- 1) To provide a helicopter for transporting anti-poaching patrols within the Zambezi Valley;
- 2) To translocate rhinos captured in the valley to safer areas elsewhere.

The largest population of black rhinos (*Dicoris bicornis*) left in Africa is in Zimbabwe's Lower Zambezi Valley. The valley has some 700 animals, but highly efficient and well-armed gangs of poachers cross from Zambia to threaten this population. Between July 1984 and April 1988, 400 black rhinos were killed there. Anti-poaching efforts are hampered by the size of the valley, approximately 15,000 sq km, of which about 12,000 sq km are protected as designated wildlife areas.

This project paid for the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management to hire a helicopter for anti-poaching operations. The helicopter was also used in the translocation of 12 black rhinos from the Zambezi Valley to Swaziland.

Documents taken from captured poachers showed that nearly all came from Zambia and most lived in the Lusaka area. The poachers were armed with AK47 and 375 rifles. Gangs varied from four to eight people, spending up to 14 days in Zimbabwe with base camps established up to 50 km inside Zimbabwe territory. One eight-member gang killed six rhinos in one morning before returning to Zambia. Staff reported a significant decline in infiltration by poachers when the helicopter was in operation. It used to take over 24 hours for an anti-poaching unit to make contact with the poachers. With the helicopter present, an anti-poaching unit can be on the tracks of a gang in about an hour. The majority of poachers have resisted arrest, making follow-up operations extremely dangerous for Department staff. Since 1986, 30 poachers have been captured and 37 killed in contacts with anti-poaching units. Prison sentences for those captured range from six to eleven years.

Poaching is still a lucrative business, and despite the helicopter patrols, 67 rhinos were killed in the area in 1987. This was mostly when the helicopter was not available for use in the valley, or when poaching took place too far outside the helicopter's operational area.