

# Rhino Africa Safaris cycling to save their namesake

A NEW philanthropic project is set to not only raise rhino antipoaching funds, but also potentially lay the groundwork for the formation of a new wilderness expanse.

With the goal of cycling for seven days across 300km through the sand, dust, and heat of Namibia's Damaraland desert — the cyclists are due to reach their final destination this weekend — Challenge4aCause is not your average staff outing. But then the founding trustee of the new nonprofit Challenge4aCause initiative, Rhino Africa Safaris, is not your average tour operator, and their 18 desert-cycling volunteers are not your average team.

Their short-term target is to raise R350 000 for the Save the Rhino Trust — enough to sponsor a Namibian antipoaching unit for a year. In the long term, the plan is to cement the idea as an annual initiative that will support the chase of land along the eastern upment of southern Africa

financially — to create a migratory route for wildlife. For now, they're starting with a single species.

The collective name for a group of rhinoceros is a crash. It is fitting given the plummeting tally of rhino populations worldwide. Having been reduced to tiny pocket populations, the three Asian species of rhinoceros — Indian, Sumatran and Javan — are on their last legs, while Africa's black rhinos are also critically endangered. Africa's white rhinos are faring slightly better, but they too are vulnerable, and at increased risk from poachers.

In 2007, only about 10 rhino were poached in SA; last year 74 were killed, the majority of these (37) were slaughtered in SA's flagship conservancy, the Kruger National Park. Steps have been taken to combat the trade in rhino horn, which include a moratorium on rhino hunting; sawing off the horns of live animals to deter poachers; marking and regulating all stockpiled horns; more funding

for rhino antipoaching units; the formation of a special Green Scorpions team to tackle sophisticated multicultural poaching syndicates; and a proposal to use DNA testing on potions thought to contain rhino horn.

With budgets stretched, money needs to be found from the private sector. Rhino Africa, SA's largest online inbound tour operator specialising in southern and east African travel, has created Challenge4aCause as a nonprofit initiative. With this year's Namibian desert cycle, Challenge4aCause aims to raise awareness and money for rhino antipoaching units. With each participant footing the bill for the expedition themselves to ensure all funds raised go to the right places, the Rhino Africa team are taking it upon themselves to get involved where they're needed most.

MD and founder David Ryan says: "In the past six months 156 rhino were lost to poachers across southern Africa. For a species as



**VULNERABLE BEAST:** The challenge is on to save Rhinos from poaching.

vulnerable as the rhino, this is simply unsustainable, and for an animal that indicates a healthy ecosystem, it would be criminal

for us not to act."

If the response for donations is strong enough, the Challenge4aCause initiative will continue

the trend with similar annual challenges open to the public as well as business representatives.

Participants will experience an amazing wilderness adventure while supporting the initiative.

Charities ear-marked for attention through the initiative include the Selous to Cape Corridor project (second natural migratory path for wildlife undertaking); 441 Nhlaysa Nutrition Solutions, which provides cereal to orphanages nationwide; and a collaborative effort with the Bill Gates Polio Fund and Rotary International to assist Polio in Africa, a cause close to the heart of David Ryan as he suffered from polio as a child.

While the inaugural Challenge4aCause is a closed event, Rhino Africa Safaris plans to encourage as many interested parties as possible to get involved from next year.

■ [www.rhinoafrica.com/challenge4acause](http://www.rhinoafrica.com/challenge4acause).

