

A poaching case, a remarkable rhino and a major grant

A round up of recent news from Save the Rhino Trust (SRT), which recently responded to the first poaching incident in the Kunene in 17 years.

Sue Wagner | Fundraising and Communications Manager, Save the Rhino Trust

On 25 October 2011, SRT's trackers were patrolling with Community Game Guards when they came across the carcass of a rhino calf that had been caught in a snare and had both horns removed.

It was estimated that the calf was about two years old and that it had died some four weeks previously. The probable cause of death was dehydration and starvation. There was evidence that the mother had remained near her calf in its dying days and repeatedly returned to the site long after its death. Fortunately, she did not fall victim to the poachers' snares (four other snares were found in the area).

The newly-formed North West Regional Security Committee responded to this incident, with SRT's Director of Field Operations and pilot, Bernd Brell, flying to fetch the Protected

Resource Unit's (PRU) investigating officer. MET officials were soon on the scene and great support of free food and accommodation for the investigating team was received from Wilderness Safaris, the tour operator in the region.

The communication and co-ordination between all the stakeholders involved in rhino conservation was very encouraging,

as teamwork is the name of the game when it comes to successful investigation after a poaching incident. Unfortunately, no arrests have yet been made.

An exceptional patrol and a rare 'homing' event of a translocated rhino

In September, SRT deployed two teams on a focused foot and donkey patrol in a very remote area of north-west Namibia. Due to the remote and rugged terrain, these patrols require extensive pre-planning and only take place a couple of times per year, with satellite image maps used to plan the route. *National Geographic* photographer Dave Hamman and wildlife artist Neil Taylor joined the patrol to provide images and artwork to support SRT's work.

It was an exceptional patrol resulting in 23 rhino sightings over eight days – the most ever for this eco-zone in a single patrol – including numerous rhino cows with relatively old,

healthy calves. The teams had one epic day of foot-slogging, notching up nearly 40 km as they packed out from their camp deep in the mountains. A most unusual discovery was made on this patrol. A rhino cow that was originally captured and airlifted into Orupembe Conservancy in the far north west was sighted. She had returned 'home' and had walked roughly 250 km (155 miles) to almost the exact spot where she was captured in July 2010. It is regarded as a very rare long-distance 'homing' event for black rhino.

SRT awarded IUCN's Save Our Species Grant

Just before Christmas, Save the Rhino Trust received a wonderful Christmas gift in the form of the very exciting news that our proposal to Save Our Species, developed in collaboration with SRI, had been successful. The grant has been provided to support monitoring work in response to the African rhino poaching crisis.

Save Our Species is a joint initiative of the Global Environment Facility, the IUCN and the World Bank. A fundamental goal is to ensure the long-term survival and well being of threatened species and their critical habitats for biodiversity conservation

Save the Rhino Trust, in collaboration with Namibia's Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), has been monitoring black rhino for three decades with four teams of dedicated trackers. Monitoring data is used to inform decision-making on the management of this unique black rhino population – the last truly free-ranging black rhino population in the world. Save the Rhino Trust feels most honoured to have been selected as a recipient of this grant from SOS.

The rhino had returned 'home' by walking 250km to almost the exact spot of her capture



DAVE HAMMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

SRT

