



## Inka

**AGE: 11 YEARS**

The trackers have monitored **Inka** ever since she was born.

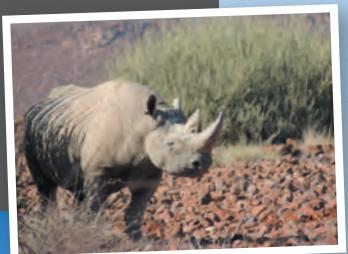
The trackers named her after the daughter of Bernd (SRT's Director of Special Operations and Services). **Inka** is very secretive and not often seen by the trackers on patrol. According to Bernd 'she is very careful where she walks and tends to disappear like a ghost'. **Inka** had her first calf in 2009, a male who was named **Ikarus** by Bernd's daughter.



## Don't Worry

**AGE: 23 YEARS**

A firm favourite of the SRT staff, **Don't Worry** is friendly and loved by tourists at Desert Rhino Camp who catch sightings of him. **Don't Worry** has been the focus of research into human-induced disturbance on rhinos that has helped develop a black rhino viewing protocol for organisations and tourists to view rhinos responsibly.



# NAMIBIA'S REMARKABLE RHINOS

As we drove through the vast Namibian desert, we searched for fresh spoor (tracks) of rhinos passing through the area. I scanned the horizon, hoping to witness my first desert-adapted black rhino with Save the Rhino Trust (SRT).

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

**A**s we climbed up the steep terrain on a mountainside under the blazing sun, I appreciated just how tough the work is for a tracker; the rhinos are agile and the trackers have to work closely together to search for clues of any rhinos passing through the area and scan the scenery in case any rhinos are hidden.

Suddenly, out of the bushes emerged Mike; just one of the desert-adapted black rhino found in the 25,000km<sup>2</sup> of tough desert environment in the Kunene and Erongo regions of Namibia. He is a true survivor, living on communal land with no formal conservation status. SRT, with the support of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), other organisations and community groups, work tirelessly to protect and monitor this unique rhino population.

I spent a month working with SRT this year, and took part in scene-of-the-crime training with SRT's trackers and Community Game Guards, observed a North West Wildlife Security Workgroup meeting and digitised maps of the area to help with SRT's research into human-induced disturbance on the rhinos. I also collected research for our 'Operation Wild & Free' appeal which is raising much-needed funds for SRT.

## Allowing rhinos to roam

The behaviour of the desert-adapted black rhino drives SRT's work, as they seek to protect and increase the world's largest free-roaming black rhino population. During the day, as rhinos rest for around six to eight hours, the trackers work hard to actively monitor the rhinos with patrols by foot, vehicle or mounted patrol. Donkeys, mules and camel are hardy species that aid SRT in patrolling in areas inaccessible to vehicles; 35% of the rhino's roaming range in the region can't be accessed by vehicles. These patrols also act as a deterrent against poaching, in conjunction with other stakeholders such as the MET and Protected Resource Unit.

The trackers are careful to view the rhinos without disturbance, giving them time to check the rhino's ears and horns to identify which



# OPERATION WILD & FREE

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individual it is, and examine its overall condition. SRT staff also check on the condition of pregnant cows and their calves. Cows become very protective of their calves and if the mother is disturbed she will flee, running for miles. Such a distance is difficult for a young calf to cover, and they may be left behind or become dehydrated.

## Spotting the secretive rhinos

SRT works hard to track all the rhinos, even secretive ones like Inka, by using technology such as aerial surveillance and stealth cameras. Stealth cameras are hidden in hard-to-reach spots, such as by waterholes. The stealth cameras help SRT respond to the challenges of covering vast distances to monitor all the rhinos, who have home ranges of up to 600 km<sup>2</sup>. The footage also provides sightings of other endangered species.

## Thanks

Josephine would like to thank Sue, Jeff, Alta, Bernd, Simson, Sebulon and everyone at SRT for hosting her and making her visit so enjoyable.

A big thank you to USFWS RTCF for its grant of \$68,100 for ongoing rhino monitoring costs and to Save Our Species for the final instalment of its \$100,000 grant. Thanks also to all our **Operation Wild & Free** donors, including Woburn Safari Park (c. £7,000), Zoo Bassin d'Arachon (€1,000) and rhino's energy GmbH (c. €1,000).

## Kangombe

**AGE: APPROXIMATELY 37 YEARS**

SRT's camel-based tracking team usually find **Kangombe**, an old dominant bull, every month or so and he was most recently seen in June. Over the years, **Kangombe** has been sighted with many female rhinos and calves, so he is likely to have fathered several offspring in the region!



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## Ben

**AGE: APPROXIMATELY 37 YEARS**

As the dominant bull in his area, **Ben** has been known to fight with **Don't Worry**. He is also father to many calves. He's a favourite of the tourists and two children have been named after him!



## Mike

**AGE: 23 YEARS**

**Mike** was one of the founding rhinos in the Southern range and was named after the late Michael Hearn, who worked at Save the Rhino Trust, and in whose memory the internship programme was established.



Help support the work of SRT by [donating to our Operation Wild & Free appeal](#). You can even 'friend' one of the rhinos by donating £50 to receive a personalised certificate. To donate, visit [www.savetherhino.org/operationwildandfree](http://www.savetherhino.org/operationwildandfree)

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