

The age of Smart Parks

"We'll call you Captain Vomit", a good friend of mine said when I told him that I will be getting my pilot's license. There's good reason for that. I have never taken well to flying... I loved it, but I was always the reason the flight was cut short. So I felt a bit of a hypocrite when the opportunity to get my pilot's license landed on my lap, thanks to Save the Rhino.

Eduard Goosen | Conservation Manager, uMkhuze Game Reserve



ALL IMAGES EDUARD GOOSSEN

Eduard getting his wings after training. Thankfully for his teachers, he didn't live up to his nickname...

has changed my life. Now, I love flying, and the addition of the Light Sports Aircraft has had a significant impact on our work at uMkhuze.

With a continuous drastic reduction in resources, especially staff, our emphasis has to be on making the best of what we've got, and using what we call 'force multipliers', whilst maintaining a high standard of law enforcement integrity. Flying has proven to be a game changer. Our rhino monitoring efficiency has multiplied, and better monitoring equals better data, equals better management.

Our rhino monitor, Joshua Rogers, (whose role is funded by Save the Rhino) is also a pilot. His enthusiasm, passion, and excitement in reporting back the number of successful sightings after each flight is often a light at the end of a dark tunnel.

A year down the line, a Foxbat AP22 has joined our team in the fight to protect our heritage. And a beautiful thing she is. I've said it before, we have two rules at uMkhuze:

1 You can never win, but the second rule is more important, and that is;

2 We'll die trying!

That is our commitment.

For me, gaining my licence was a personal journey that

In addition to our new ability flying capabilities, we've been boosting our tech.

As a recognised Rhino Intensive Protection Zone, to address issues around staff and resource shortages, uMkhuze is quite far in the process of becoming a Smart Park. This basically means integrating more technological resources into our work.

Because of the support from Save the Rhino, alongside other partners such as Peace Parks Foundation and WWF, uMkhuze has developed an extensive technological system to bolster our capacity. This is no mean feat for any geographically isolated protected area in Africa.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Internet of Things (IoT) are now commonplace around uMkhuze. They have enabled us to not only monitor an extensive and growing network of movement detection cameras on our perimeters, but also allowed us to cost-effectively trace assets, track wildlife, monitor solar power management at remote picket camps, and report live patrol coverage.

Whilst we are continuously learning, we have had some significant successes stemming from the use of this extra technology. No doubt, each year the tech will continue to improve. Unfortunately, these systems are not only finicky but also require expert knowledge and support.

Needless to say, they're often costly.

As I always state, we cannot do it on our own. As such, we are very reliant and eternally grateful for the support from all of you. As contributors and supporters of Save the Rhino, we salute you all for everything you have given us!

