

Patrons: David Gower OBE, Nick Price, David Pocock, Kim Hughes.

President's Report

Hello everyone, I'm still in London looking after my mother, nearly four years now, and she turned 100 last July and is now totally bedridden. I have to say she's a source of inspiration and pride for me.

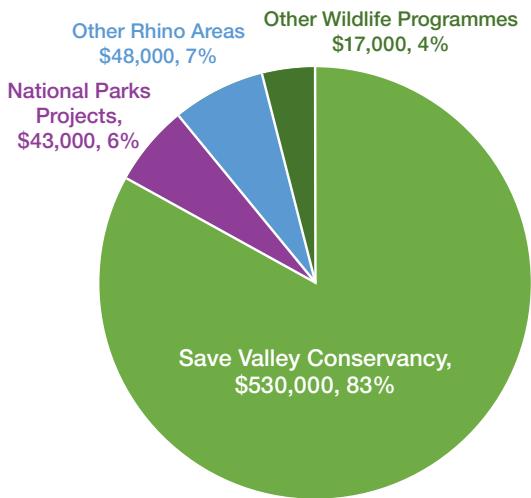
In this newsletter there are nine articles on differing involvements we have around the region, including NW Namibia. Plus there are plenty of photos to enthuse you so please read on till the end, you might as well get your money's worth!

On the rhino front, 2023 was a pretty good year around Africa, though South Africa lost 500 and the Namibia figures were a bit up. However, Zimbabwe had another stunning year with a 10% increase from low 1,100s to low 1,200s, with just five poaching deaths, four at one time. The private conservancies in the Lowveld still lead the way with about 90% of the country's total.



We managed to raise just over \$636,000 for our financial year and, coincidentally, **donated \$638,000 to our core projects, with \$530,000, 83%, being targeted on Save Valley Conservancy, our key programme, \$43,000, 6%, to National Parks projects, \$48,000 to other rhino areas, 7%, and \$17,000 for other wildlife set ups, 4%.**

Expenditure \$638,000



Over the last 12 years we have gradually increased the annual support for **Save Valley** from \$20,000 to our current level. In the same time their rhino numbers have doubled from **132 to 265**, so our reasoning speaks for itself. To **Bryce, Pete and all their team**, we send our congratulations on a job well done! For the third consecutive year we were the sole sponsors of their annual rhino operations, in which they ear notch all young rhinos between 18 and 30 months, thereby giving them an ID number in the national rhino population.



Ear notching a young rhino

At the same time, our members donate \$2,500 to name one for life, thus helping our fundraising for the project.

Our 36th Annual General Meeting was held on 3 August at Perth Zoo, with 42 members in attendance in person and another 15 on zoom. The same committee was re-elected; **President – Nicholas Duncan, Vice President – Nia Carras, Secretary – Evan Litis, Treasurer – Heather Atwell**, Committee members – Evelyn Wong, Steve Harrison, Cameron Murray, Mark Beamish and Julie Bain. It's a very big thank you to you all for doing what you all do to make things happen for the rhinos. Just about everyone has been involved for at least ten years, a monumental commitment, thanks again.

Our special remote guest was Bryce Clemence, who enthusiastically updated us all on the latest situation in Save Valley – all very positive.

Since then, due to work pressures, two have had to retire, **Mark and Steve**. Mark has offered wise counsel for seven years and Steve has been in charge of our 4x4 'fleet' for the last 20 years. He has sourced our minibus and three canter trucks from Japan, five 1987 Landrover Defenders from the Singapore army and one 1994 Toyota land cruiser from WA's south west. **They've probably driven the best part of two million kms between them, congratulations Steve, for your choices.**

Our next AGM is on 20 June, details elsewhere in this newsletter.



Steve in one of the Landrover Defenders

The vast majority of our income, \$533,000, comes from donations and our two safaris. We had three major appeals, being those with **membership renewals/EOFY, Wildlife Ranger Challenge and Giving Tuesday**. You kindly donated **\$60,000 by 30 June**, another **\$41,000 for the ranger challenge**, brilliantly doubled by a corporate sponsor and we reached our target of a further **\$15,000 from Giving Tuesday**. Our African trips brought in another **\$44,000 in donations** and our usual benefactor chipped in with **\$250,000**. Our special thanks goes to **Karin, Nola, Donald, Evan and Nicholas** for their most generous contributions.

We experimented with some new options for membership renewals this year, **offering a choice of the usual one year, plus a three year one, ten years or lifetime**. About half of our supporters chose the last three methods, and we'll be continuing it this year and encourage as many of you who can to consider a longer term option, thus reducing our, and your, administration.

The two Zimbabwe trips were for the ranger experience and ear notching in mid August, and the 'fancy' game viewing safari for 18 days. We had nine guests on the rhino trip and what an experience that was. The safari to Hwange, Victoria Falls, Chobe, Okavango and Etosha was pretty good, as always, and a whole variety of game was seen at the different localities.



Game seen on Safari

We are very sad to learn of the passing of two of our long time members, **Graham Matheson** and **Iain MacGregor**. Graham heard me on ABC radio in Sydney back in 1992 and booked to come on the safari I was promoting. After that, he became a member until recently and has very kindly remembered us in his Will. I've known Iain for more than 40 years through our tennis club and he's been a supporter for ages. To the families of both men, and especially to **Mavis**, we send our sincere thoughts and good wishes.

Thank you to **Evelyn Wong** for arranging our recent Chinese supper, a full house of 50, and I gather it was a huge success and enjoyed by all. A couple of thousand dollars was raised and every bit counts – that can pay the wages of ten ranger recruits for two months, so well worthwhile.



Dinner organised by Evelyn

We've been supporting rhino projects in different National Parks for the past 36 years and you can read about two of them, **Matobo** and **Sinamatella**, further on. We fund through local **NGOs, Dambari Wildlife Trust** and **Bhejane Trust**. Plus, we've supported the oldest rhino charity, **Save the Rhino Trust, Namibia**, for the last 30 years.

One of our projects late last year was to raise some money for vehicle repairs to be done by a registered Toyota workshop. There were six land cruisers to be given a treat and thanks very much to **Glen Murray of Harris Motors** who kindly donated all the labour whilst we paid for the parts. What a difference it has made to the 'fleet'. Now to keep them properly maintained.

I hope you enjoy the rest of our newsletter, thanks for all your support for the past year and we all look forward to continuing our remarkable efforts for Zimbabwe rhino conservation.

Thank you,
Nicholas

Savé Valley Conservancy (SVC) Rhino Review 2023

2023 marks the first year since 2012, when SARF initiated the inaugural, dedicated rhino protection programme and began endorsing the SVC, that no rhino were lost to poaching. SVC has exceeded the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the IUCN for protecting black rhino: 6.3% growth rate (5% IUCN goal) and 0% poaching mortality rate (less than 2% IUCN goal). It is a significant milestone, and we commend the rangers and everyone who has played a role for the SVC, in this team effort. Congratulations!



Bryce and the rangers



A ranger with one of the K9s

Some other **very exciting news** in the review, the SVC is about to hit a monumental achievement, with just 3 more calves and no losses, they will have **doubled the rhino population from 132 animals in 2012, to 264 in 2024**. The accomplishment of the population growth signifies a major step forward in rhino conservation, and we are very aware of the enormous task that the team have been dedicated to for the past 12 years.

The growth rate means that the next **ear notching ops**, in August 2024, will be a **record-breaking, 33 rhinos**. Usually sitting between 13 - 17 calves to notch, this will be the largest number of rhino notched in the history of the SVC! **We hope you will celebrate with us, please get in touch if you would like to join in on the annual trip to Zimbabwe, where we are generously hosted by Sango, in their wonderful, riverbed, luxury tented camps.**



A SVC rhino

Regrettably, this record was unfortunately cut short in February 2024, when the **SVC lost two rhino in poaching incidents**. The continued attack underscores the constant vigilance these creatures require, and the critical need for our continued support.

While the setback is deeply felt by the team, the SVC is moving forward with determination, and resolve. The ATS dog unit is bigger and more active than it has ever been, and the SVC has been exploring all avenues to increase resources and boost ranger numbers. SARF remains committed to the resilience of the SVC, and we will be doing everything we can to ensure the survival of rhino in this important part of Africa.



Poey the rhino undergoing ear notching

Field Report From Bryce Clemence

Bryce Clemence, Head of the Security in the SVC, Director ATS, Anti-poaching Tracking Specialists.

2023 was a busy year on the ground for us. The rhino have kept us active, and we are very proud of the team, who have shown ongoing commitment and grit. We have had a large amount of rhino needing extra care this year, with 7 animals on a 'watchlist', requiring additional monitoring and resources. If you have named these rhino, you may be interested in the particular details:

- **Martin**, injured from fighting.
- **Nia**, deep snare wound to the right back leg.
- **Kuhle**, we noticed afterbirth hanging from her body, with no expected pregnancy.
- **Xavi**, (Kuhle's calf) has been the most concerning case, he was showing poor condition for several months. Xavi was due for notching, so did well to benefit from the opportunity of the vets while under anesthesia. An X-ray ruled out a theory of a broken jaw or other bone, and he was given supplements for his immune system. Still, after a few weeks we thought he might need to be penned for closer observation, but thankfully Xavi has been presenting vast signs of improvement, and is moving and eating well.
- **Tony**, an interesting case that vets suspect could be a cross species of black and white rhino!
- **Nice**, limping badly with an infection underneath the foot.
- **Winsome**, injured from fighting, the veterinary team intervened with SARF funding.

Our highlight event, as always, the rhino notching ops, was held on 16 - 24 August 2023. **17 rhino were notched in 8 days, 13 black rhino and four white; of these, 10 males and 7 females.** Notching takes an enormous amount of resources and weeks of preparation. The notches are essential for us to do our jobs and tell the rhino apart, **thank you to SARF for making this possible every year.**

In other areas of anti-poaching, we are very pleased that there has been significant progress in a strategy to consolidate all SVC protection, in a Conservancy-wide intention to be more coordinated, and operate as a whole APU. This is going to be a huge step forward to relieve some stress off the ranches, and will make the anti-poaching team's job much more efficient. We continue to strive for a capacitated wildlife area, protecting the biodiversity for a stronger SVC.

Addressing the bushmeat endemic, poaching and snare collection has so far been a secondary benefit of the ATS K9 unit, which is funded and capacitated as a quick reaction team for the rhino. **The K9s are on daily detections on boundaries and threat areas**, in the new implementation of the greater APU, we will be able to cover much more ground with the dogs. We also hope that this will help to address the growing concern of illegal logging and charcoal production in the SVC. As well as a deterrent, the K9 results speak for themselves. A few months ago, a dog tracked trespassing human spoor, through the Conservancy, into a village, and directly into the hut of poacher who was found cutting impala meat. In the past year, **May 2023 - March 2024**, there have been over 850 K9 deployments, 560 snares removed from the Conservancy, and 79 arrests of poachers.



Ranger and K9 with the removed snares



The team with K9s

The **Fence Guardian project**, managed by AWCF and ATS, is now in the second year running, we've added new guardians in 2023 and it is yielding good results: information regarding poacher entry and exit is being reported to the teams, and the morale is high for the guardians with employment for the community.

Also this year, we have started the training of 18 female rangers in a dedicated **Community Ranger Project**, an initiative facilitated by the UK International Development through the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Fund. The training emphasised the importance of community collaboration to enhance livelihoods, conflict resolution, data collection, and methods of ensuring a holistic approach to conservation of natural resources.

We are very grateful to Save African Rhino Foundation and all its members for assisting the APU with patrol equipment this year. The rangers have tents, bedrolls, mattresses and sleeping bags. SARF has also serviced all the vehicles and motorbikes that we use in the unit. Thank you! Having vehicles not fully operational is a huge waste of resources, they are all back, up and running smoothly and safely, and the team have been able to access areas of the Conservancy that have not been reached in months. It was a very big concern for the drivers who carry multiple rangers on the back of the vehicle, thank you.



SVC Rangers

The team has been using the **SARF donated drones to great effect**, in particular to closely watch all the injured rhino that we had on our hands. The drones allow for efficient location of animals, and their manoeuvrability enables much better inspection, without putting the rhino in further stress. The valuable footage can be easily shared, providing remote vets with a clear view of the animal's condition, when they can't be physically present. In addition to helping us for monitoring purposes, the drones are an extremely valuable asset to the anti-poaching team. Situational awareness can save lives in conflict or emergency, and the thermal vision gives an unprecedented advantage for night deployments.



Drones have been effective in monitoring the rhinos

We continue our engagement and assistance of the **Manyuchi Community Clinic**. With help from SARF, we have been able to keep the maternity wards renovated and maintained, with solar power and a water pump servicing the patients, and the connected school. Several of our ranger's families are cared for at this facility, and it is the first point of call for medical emergencies. We are very proud of the rangers who recently volunteered to donate blood to the Zimbabwe National Blood Service, honouring our colleague, **Gift**, who was badly injured by a buffalo while on duty.

Thank you for reading, and thank you to SARF, without your efforts, none of this work would be possible, and Zimbabwe's rhino situation would be in an unimaginable position. We are looking forward to having Nicholas and the SARF guests in the SVC with us in a couple of months, seeing old friends and new. It is going to be a huge op this year! We are ready this side. Thank you for the commitment and friendship, Nicholas.

Bryce Clemence | Director ATS,
Anti-poaching Tracking Specialists



Water Pump at Manyuchi Clinic Nicholas with Rangers

What the cameras have told us...

This year marks a quarter century since Dambiri Wildlife Trust became involved in rhino conservation in Zimbabwe. Much of our journey since then has been in partnership with Save African Rhino Foundation – an invaluable ally in the quest to grow rhino populations in Zimbabwe. In Matobo National Park, we're delighted to report the white rhino population – despite a disease outbreak and some poaching losses since 2020 – is almost back to its 2007 number (which was prior to the tough poaching years of 2008-13). The black rhino population has also made a strong recovery post-2013 and is likely to reach its 2007 total by year-end if the cows we expect to calve deliver the goods!

A key component of our activities has been **monitoring rhino populations in Matobo National Park using camera traps since mid-2011, sponsored by SARF**. We've previously reported some of the interesting sightings obtained, but the data also give us insights into behaviour and population dynamics. Camera data are especially useful for the black rhinos, which are much more active at night and tend to rest up in inaccessible places amongst the rock during the day.



Matobo National Park

For example, changes in the distribution of rhino bulls can herald changes in dominance or potential losses. From camera trap records, we've noted a trend for subadult black rhino bulls to venture into peripheral areas and marginal habitats. Photographing them again in prime areas marks their attempts to establish territories. In 2022, following the loss of two territorial black rhino bulls to poaching, a big shake-up in the distribution of bulls was evident and it took several months for their ranging habits to become more predictable.

Similarly, in 2023, a shift of nearly all the territorial white rhino bulls out of their usual ranges in one section of the Park indicated that something had changed. Sure enough, a bull seeking territory had migrated from another section, and had displaced everyone else.

Six months on, the bulls still haven't settled down completely and photos showing superficial facial wounds confirm that skirmishes are still ongoing. The new bull is defending a very large range, which will probably contract over time as he focuses on prime areas frequented by females.



A rhino bull with superficial facial wounds

For cows, we can get a good idea of when a new calf has been born by noting when a female's previous calf ceases to be photographed with her. In Matobo, calves tend to stay with their mothers until they're about to give birth again, even if that's past the age at which calves usually gain independence. Since cows hide their calves for some time after birth, we don't always get photos of them until they're about a month or more old. The sudden absence of a previous calf can indicate the approximate birth date of its sibling, enabling us to narrow down the estimated birth rate when the new calf is photographed. And of course, photographs are often handy for confirming the sexes of calves early on.



A mother photographed with her calf

These valuable insights underline the importance of ongoing close monitoring of populations. Through this, we're able to detect when something has changed, and respond effectively as required.

Nicky Pegg | Dambiri Wildlife Trust, Senior Research Officer

SARF has been supporting DWT for more than 20 years, particularly with \$15,000 pa for their camera trap work, as well as helping out with funding their annual rhino ops for ear notching and dehorning.

An update from Amos Gwema, Wildlife Detective

Intelligence Work

He has changed the way intelligence work contributes to the protection of Zimbabwe's wildlife. **Over the last 16 years, he has facilitated the arrest and conviction of the highest number of poachers of any officer in the Parks authority, most of whom are currently serving prison time.**

Reduction in Elephant and Rhino Poaching

His greatest achievement has been the massive reduction in elephant poaching in Hwange National Park. Through his work, poached elephant numbers have declined from over 300 in 2013 to 25 in 2019, with no elephant poached in Hwange in years 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Community Engagement

He believes that the community is the first line of defence for effective wildlife conservation. He has been engaging with the community through drama and poetry to raise awareness about conservation and wildlife crime. For the past 16 years as the Wildlife detective he has worked with the community getting intelligence about illegal wildlife trafficking. **Amos has spent 80 % of his time working with the community leading to successful arrests and recoveries.**

He has recovered rifles, ammunition, ivory, live pangolins, cyanide, wire snares, game meat and other various wildlife products through the assistance of the community members.

Below, Amos is holding two live pangolins handed in by community members for release in Hwange National Park.

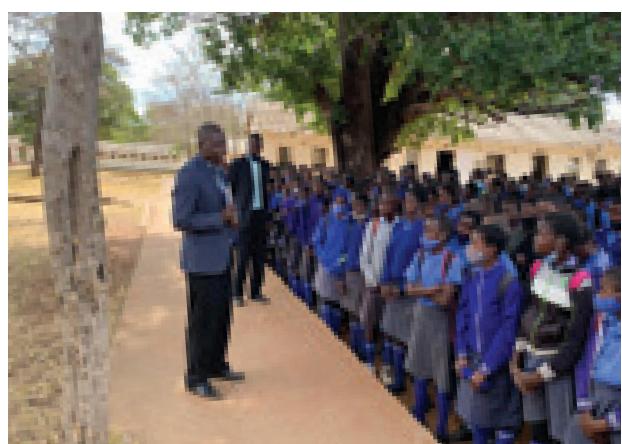


Amos holding two live pangolins

He also involves school children on Environmental educational awareness programmes because school children are the future of wildlife conservation.

The picture below shows Amos Gwema with school children doing awareness campaigns under the slogan

"If you see something say something and do something"



Amos educating school children on environmental awareness

Rehabilitation

He also focuses on the rehabilitation of ex-wildlife crime convicts to prevent them from going back to committing wildlife crimes. He believes that rehabilitation should be both for human beings and animals if we want to succeed. This has seen him involving ex-wildlife convicts in community educational awareness campaigns against wildlife crime.

He believes in teaching the community against wildlife crime but for those who commit the crime he applies the law without fear and favor.

The pictures below show success for wildlife conservation evolution through rehabilitation of poachers to be wildlife conservation ambassadors.



A poacher



Amos with the rehabilitated poacher

The photo below shows an elephant poacher on the left hand and on the right it shows Amos Gwema with the rehabilitated poacher.



An elephant poacher

Amos with the rehabilitated poacher

Leaving National Parks

He left National Parks in 2023 but he is still involved in Wildlife conservation and currently works like a consultant for wildlife Intelligence and Investigation. He is still working with Police, National Parks and the Judiciary for wildlife conservation.

Currently he is affiliated to Bhejane Trust and Wildlife Conservation Coalition, a grouping of wildlife conservationists supporting National Parks, Police and the Judiciary.

He is currently the Wildlife Crime Coordinator, this task is easier for him since he has got a pool of informants, sources and contacts in the Matebeleland Region and some around the whole country. At the international level he also has some sources whom he works with for the protection of wildlife conservation.

Recent Achievements

Conviction of rhino poaching kingpin:

http://opr.news/7470f2ca240328en_zw?link=1&client=news

Arrest of notorious poacher Austin Sibanda, who had recently been released from prison, he now has another 12 years to serve.

Writing a Book and a Wildlife Documentary

He is currently developing a documentary titled “**Wildlife Detective**” The book he is writing will have the same title. He is doing that to pass on intelligence tactics to new wildlife Investigators so that his works will not die. He is still in the field and training junior Investigation Officers and he said that he wants to train five Investigators who will achieve more than him.

The book will guide junior rangers and other conservationists. The documentary will be an awareness campaign tool against wildlife crime.

Conclusion

Amos Gwema is still in conservation full time without any hindrance. Resources permitting he can be anywhere for the purpose of wildlife conservation, especially the Matebeleland Region.

Amos Gwema | Wildlife Detective

We continue to support Amos with his living expenses, 4x4 repairs, fuel and reward money.



Safari 2023, Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia

I travelled on the safari offered by the Save African Rhino Foundation in 2023, taking along 3 of the family. For our first get together in many years, this trip was chosen.

Our first major stop was **The HIDE in Hwange National Park** - a really great camp, drives go out three times a day and there is a waterhole in front - great viewing in the evenings - really good drivers/guides who go out of their way to give information and to find lots of animal life, including birds to spot. This was one of our favourites.



Elephants at The Hide



Cheetahs spotted

Victoria Falls and we stayed at the colonial hotel offering not only a moment of the past, but a view of the falls, The helicopter rides etc, and a trip to see rhinos should not be missed.

Chobe had more tourists, however offered a chance to do day drives and cruises - so you can see hippos along with many of the big animals.

The **Okavango Delta**, described as magical, is just that - I loved the flight in - view from the air is special. The camp was **Xakanaxa** and was another great stop. It's a special place.



Lionesses in the shade



A Leopard

We opted to do the **Etosha** add on section as this was of particular interest because of wanting to see the rhinos - which we did! So many animals in Etosha - Namibia is hot - but hey, it's Africa and we are Queenslanders. At **Okakeujo** camp there is a floodlit waterhole, so lots of animal sightings as they come in to drink.

We are all well-travelled - somewhere over 50 countries for me - and this trip sits right up the top as an **experience never to be forgotten** (I have travelled here previously). For the family, it was a new special experience - an experience they reflect on from time to time. We have seen the Big Five and many, many more.



Animals at Etosha



A Rhino by the floodlit waterhole at Okakeujo

To sum up - food was good, drinks mostly supplied, wonderful drivers, and happy staff at the lodges. There were good camps, the chartered flights are a blessing, the cost was fine, you do not need a lot of luggage, great guides - Paul and then Nicholas, There was a focus on animals, but there were many beautiful birds to spot throughout, the keen birders notching up 184 different sightings! I also find there is something magical about the African landscape - the shape of some trees, and the great red sunsets.

More important is that any proceeds from the safari go towards the conservation of an animal that has suffered so much in the past, an animal that we must save - the amazing rhino.

Would I recommend this safari - ABSOLUTELY!

Robyn Rawlins

There are still **TWO** places remaining, please contact me: nicholas@savefoundation.org.au



37th AGM

Notice is hereby given that the Thirty-seventh Annual General Meeting of the Save African Rhino Foundation (Inc) will be held on Thursday 20 June 2024 at 6.30 pm, in the Education Centre at the Perth Zoo, Labouchere Road, South Perth.

AGENDA

1. Acceptance of the minutes from the 36th Annual General Meeting held on 3 August 2023
2. President's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Election of Executive Committee
5. Any other business

At the completion of the formal part of the meeting, we will be joined, by Zoom, by one of our VIP colleagues in Zimbabwe for a general update and Q&A:

Bryce Clemence, Head of Anti poaching in our main project, Save Valley Conservancy.

Your attendance via Zoom is most welcome, please register by email.

Nomination forms for positions on the Executive, together with proxy forms, are available by emailing nicholas@savefoundation.org.au and nominations should be lodged at 229 Oxford Street, Leederville WA 6007, or by email, by 6.30pm on 15 June 2024.

Please feel free to bring your family, friends and acquaintances along. Would you please confirm your attendance by emailing us, nicholas@savefoundation.org.au

The Desert Rhinos of Damaraland, NW Namibia

In 1983, when the **Save the Rhino Trust (SRT)** was established, a severe drought, combined with uncontrolled hunting, left the **Kunene Region** in northwest Namibia with hardly any wildlife. SRT mobilised teams of men, most of whom had grown up in the area, to monitor the remaining black rhinos. During the late 90s, numerous communal conservancies were set up which strengthened local people's control over and responsibility for wildlife. The communal conservancies allowed for local people to make decisions over the management of their wildlife.

Today, the number of black rhinos in the landscape has tripled since SRT started its efforts. Moreover, the global black rhino population has increased over the past few years. This is due to concerted conservation efforts and strategic relocations and introductions throughout the continent.

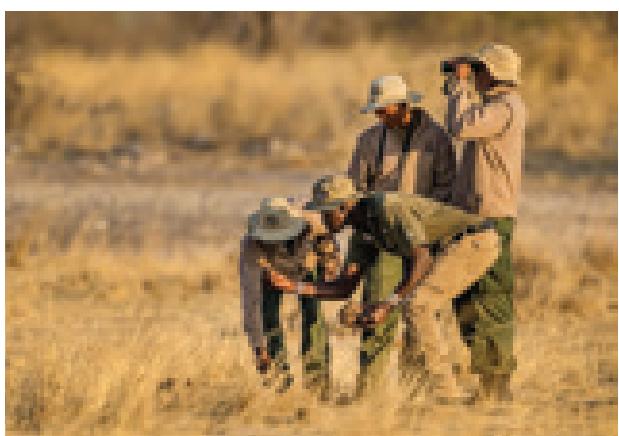


Black rhinos

More than 40 years later, our efforts continue to produce solid conservation gains. **Zooming into 2023 in review we can highlight with pride another exceptional year.** In terms of rhino monitoring – our focus as an organization – we met or exceeded all of our key performance targets. 2023 was only the second year in history where we confirmed over 4,000 individual rhino sightings. We also logged over 50,000 ranger foot kilometers. For context, the distance around the circumference of the earth is 40,075 kilometers. This is an impressive effort considering most of the kilometers are walked in the sweltering heat of the Kunene region, famous for its desert landscape and harsh conditions.

During the past decade we have demonstrated that **boots on the ground act as a deterrent to would be poachers.** It is important to add that our policy at SRT is to ensure that local rangers fill these boots.

Also now boasting more than a decade in existence the flagship rhino ranger programme has increased the number of local rangers by more than double, this is in addition to the SRT trackers who continue to conduct monitoring patrols. The rhino ranger programme makes use of community rhino rangers to conduct rhino patrols. SRT and NGO partners provide training, uniforms, cash-based patrol performance incentives and logistical support including rations and transport to the rangers on patrol. Through this innovative partnership we have increased field presence by a huge margin. Communal conservancies continue to pay their rangers salaries using joint-venture tourism dollars which is a big help for SRT.



Local Rangers

Major challenges faced by SRT include a long-term drought which has placed pressure on the rhino population, a rise in mining applications, particularly for lithium, to supply the renewable energy market and massive increases in fuel and food costs which have necessitated a reduction in rations for field teams and a reduction in patrol coverage by vehicles.

Our existence for over four decades is testament to the tenacity of SRT. From the founding members to the trackers and field staff who have worked at the Trust over the years, special acknowledgment should be given. We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us. To our funding partners, **Save African Rhino Foundation** among them, without long-term funding commitment our important conservation work cannot move forward. It is due to these partnerships that we continue to protect the largest free ranging population of black rhinos on the planet.

Andrew Malherbe | Chief Operating Officer, SRT

Ranger Experience and Rhino Ear Notching Operations

Save Valley Conservancy August 2023. Trip notes and highlights by Neill Stevens.

The trip started with our SARF group of 9 gathering for dinner at the Bronte Hotel in Harare. **Akashinka founder and CEO, Damien Mander**, joined us and we were briefed on the great progress being made by his group, empowering women in anti-poaching roles, and growing through community involvement, brand development, international exposure and donor engagement.

Enjoying world class hospitality at **Dadiso Tented Camp, Sango**, we set out each day for a diverse range of activities. With excellent game viewing from and around the camp we were privileged to observe a large family of painted dogs at close range.



Bryce and the rangers

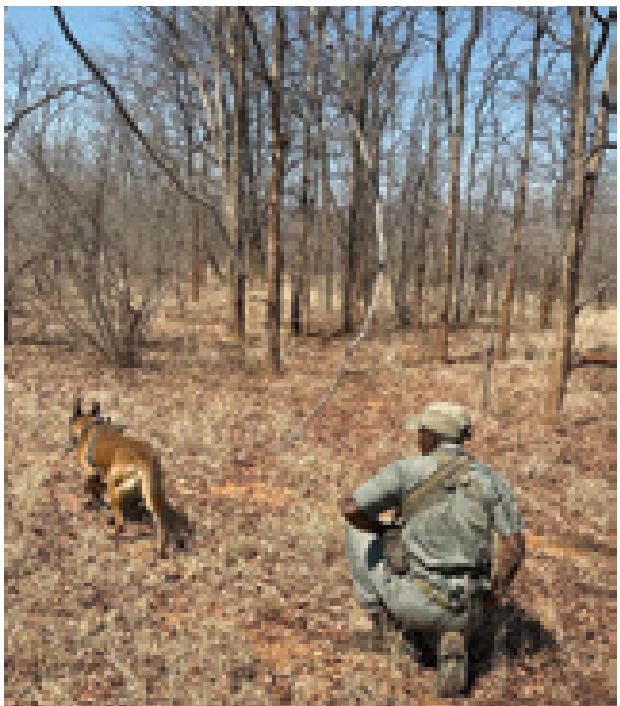
Immersed with Bryce Clemence and his anti-poaching team we saw how rhinos are tracked and located in the wild, on foot and motorbikes and ultimately with Bryce's new drone which has proven to be a game changer for the team. Some of the many highlights of the ranger activities included:

- Walking with rhinos tracked by the rangers, who could identify the individual rhinos based on their ear notches, providing vital information for the rhino population data base.
- A poacher tracking and apprehension demonstration exercise by the Save Valley canine unit.
- Hearing talks from Bryce on some of his more harrowing experiences with poachers, and the science being applied to protect and verify the rhino population.
- Attending a ranger parade and training demonstration and learning about the elite level

ranger recruitment and training program, linked with local community involvement.

- Experiencing the rangers' very strong appreciation of SARF's support, and Nicholas in turn thanking them on our, and the World's, behalf.
- Above all, the unbridled pride, enthusiasm, commitment and demonstrated professionalism of every member of the team stood out.

In the last 4 days, we became a welcomed part of the rhino ear notching operations, aiming to notch 16 young rhinos.



A poacher tracking demonstration by the Save Valley K9 unit

The tightly coordinated and managed operation involved overnight tracking and location by two-man ranger teams on foot, ground movement of the vet and support team and drone monitoring. Darting and tranquilising of rhino calves took place from a helicopter which then shepherded the mother rhinos away so the ground team could do their work unimpeded. The SARF team was integrated by allocation of tasks to assist the operation, applying water to keep darted rhinos cool, temperature checking and painting an X on their backs to mark that they had already been notched.

We were told that the professional team were delighted to include us, as without SARF there would be no ear notching operations, as **we funded the complete costs, about \$60,000.**



Bongani the rhino undergoing ear notching

Chamu and Chipo

Our good friends, Chamu and Chipo, who we've assisted from time to time in their journey around various national parks, firstly Lake Kyle, then Tuli, then Binga and now Turquie. They've always tried their very best for the rhinos and conservation and community agriculture. Recently, Chamu lost his hand and lower arm in an accident and we wish him well with his recovery. Meanwhile, if anyone has an old laptop that his teenage daughter could use at secondary school, then that would be very welcomed, please. Thank you.



Overall impression? An absolute privilege to be able to witness and participate in what can only be described as a world class conservation program, staffed by professionals at the top of their game. Thanks very much, on behalf of the group, to Nicholas for arranging the trip and to Bryce, his family, Save Valley management and every team member who so wholeheartedly welcomed us and so proudly demonstrated their amazing skills. A highly recommended trip and experience of a lifetime, for a vital cause.

Final thoughts and reflections:

- In Africa, our money goes a long way and makes a real difference.
- There can be no respite, poachers will exploit the briefest of lapses.
- Save Valley Conservancy has an incredibly talented, committed and enthusiastic team.

Neill Stevens | SARF Member

There are still **TWO** places remaining, please contact me: nicholas@savefoundation.org.au



DART Anti-poaching and Wildlife Protection Activities

SARF Update – April 2024

The DART Team is grateful for an opportunity to update our kind SARF donors and supporters on some of the many successful outcomes we achieved for wildlife conservation and the surrounding rural community over the last 12 months.

Not only has DART continued to rescue snared and injured wild animals in this fragile wildlife buffer area bordering Hwange National Park but the Team has also gone a long way to help to improve the lives of the impoverished villagers in the surrounding rural communities.

1. DART Wildlife & Environmental Protection Activities

(a) Poacher's snares, Traps & Illegal Charcoal Making Operations

In addition to removing poacher's wires snares, the DART Team's daily foot patrols, in conjunction with Park Rangers & Police Officers, brought an end to other forms of poaching in this area like the use of hunting dogs, spears & other more horrific poaching devices known as 'gin traps'.



Poacher's wire snares and spears



Gin trap

The DART patrols have also eradicated many other environmentally destructive practices in this fragile wildlife buffer area bordering Hwange National Park including illegal cattle grazing, tree cutting and charcoal making.

(b) Some memorable DART Wildlife Rescues from the last 12 months include:

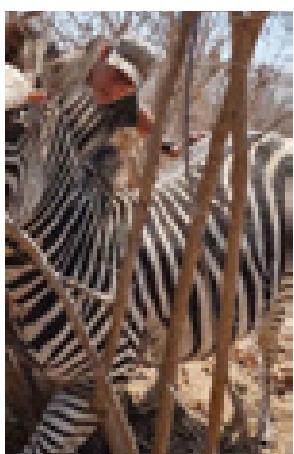
- (i) Rescue of elephant calf stuck in water trough & reunited it with its mum.
- (ii) DART immobilisation & treatment of injured Elephant plus Zebra snare removal.
- (iii) DART treatment of rural livestock injured by lions.



Elephant calf rescue



Injured Bull Elephant



Snared Zebra

2. Rural Village Assistance & Support

(a) Solar Boreholes

Over the last 12 months DART drilled a number of desperately needed solar pumped boreholes providing clean drinking water for villagers in the nearby communal areas & new drinking troughs for their livestock.



Solar pumped borehole and water tank



DART built livestock drinking

(b) Rural School Renovation Project

Thanks to the kind help and generous support of a major DART donor the rebuilding, repair and renovation of a large block of 4x classrooms at Chezhou school is well underway. This repair is being carried out in partnership with the parents and residents of Chezhou Communal Area who have volunteered their time and energy to manually dig deep foundations, load tons of sand and cement and mix large quantities of concrete for the project.

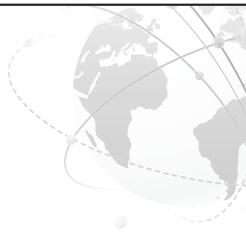


Chezhou School

With grateful thanks to the kind DART Donors who helped to make all these wildlife protection and rural community assistance projects possible.

If you'd like to help and make a tax-deductible donation: Please speak to Nicholas Duncan or visit the DART Website www.dartwildlife.org or contact DART directly at dartwildrescue@gmail.com

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An Update from Sinamatella Camp

Bhejane Trust (under a different name at the time) started work at Sinamatella, in Hwange National Park, in **2009, so 2024 is our sixteenth year here. Rhino conservation and SARF have been a part of us for the whole time** so we're happy to report that the rhino are still here and we are still doing our best to look after them. Our **Rhino Monitoring Unit** is in the field on a daily basis tracking and checking on the rhino but they are **just three men**, covering thousands of square kilometres so we don't get as many 'visuals' as we would like. **SARF helped us recently with some camera traps** which make a big difference to our coverage and towards the end of last dry season we got a good number of rhino (and other endangered species) 'sightings' by camera trap.



A rhino sighting by camera trap

Unfortunately, the big story of last year wasn't rhino, but drought. The 2023 rains ended very early and by October, still some weeks away from the first rains, the food for the herbivores was so low in nutrition that animals started to die. There was nothing we could do about the food supplies but one of Bhejane Trust's most important tasks in Hwange is running the pumps that supply water for wildlife. It wasn't easy, but we kept the water flowing – the trouble was, it just wasn't enough.

Our biggest 'customers', in terms of both numbers and sheer bulk, are elephants and they crowded the troughs and outlets at the water points until there was nothing available to other species. We don't know how much that might have affected the rhino but the camera trap picture above was taken near one of our pumped pans and no doubt that animal was relying on drinking there. I was at that very pan one evening, having been stranded with a flat battery and waiting for rescue. Elephants had been there all day, drinking at the water outlet and churning what was left of the water in the actual Pan into mud soup. Small animals like impala and baboons were getting a drink from the film of water on top of the mud but I wondered how the rhino would cope.

Amazingly, because we hardly ever see them without hours of tracking, I nearly got a chance to find out when a rhino appeared out of the bush and headed for the water/mud. I kept still as she moved around the Pan to get to the easiest drinking place but as she came downwind of me and the car she lifted her head, snorted and trotted off. Not long after that I was rescued so maybe she was able to return. I hope so.

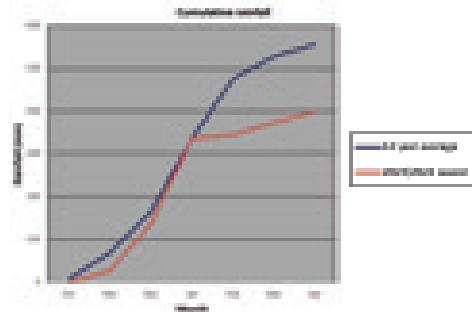
As the 2023 dry season went on and the next season's rains failed to come, we saw the result wherever we went.



The result of an extended dry season

No doubt other species were dying as well but were not as visible as the elephants. By the time the rains finally arrived, hundreds of elephants had probably died – which isn't too much of a problem, given the size of their population in Hwange. We have no idea what else died though, but our long-running giraffe monitoring project isn't showing any great fall in their numbers so we hope it is the same for everything.

I'd love to be able to end this by telling you of the great rainy season we had this year but....



So it looks as if we are going to have to do it all again...

Stephen Long

We've been supporting Stephen, his wife, Sue, and maintenance and repairs, for these 16 years, at around \$20,000+ per annum.