

All in a day's work: charging rhinos

Here two of our partners in Zimbabwe tell us a little about what they do...

Jackson Kamwi
Senior Rhino Monitor
The Lowveld Rhino Project

I started working with the National Parks Department when I was 19 and learnt to track rhinos in the Zambezi Valley when poaching was very serious. I helped to translocate many of the rhinos out of the Valley, and now I track some of these translocated rhinos and their offspring nearly every day in Save Valley Conservancy, Zimbabwe.

As a Rhino Monitor it is my duty to confirm rhinos by identifying them and to take photographs. One day I was checking on Rumbidzai, who had a new calf. When I got to a position of taking some photos suddenly the wind changed and the rhino smelt me. While my eyes were now looking through the camera, I saw her turning to me and putting me in her sight. The rhino did not give me a chance, it charged.

I asked my feet to take me away, but my speed on two legs was not as fast as the animal with four legs. She was running at double my speed. When I looked back,

the rhino was close and about to hook me. I don't know how, I dropped down, seeing the rhino jumping over me. The calf was behind the mother. I jumped over the calf. Rumbidzai turned to check for her calf and saw me running. Again she came. I ran to a dead tree and tried to climb up but again I was not that fast. I managed to climb, but not that high, the rhino managed to hit me on my buttocks and helped me to go up. I was injured but in five days I was back behind the rhino tracks again.

Apart from my work with rhinos in Zimbabwe, I have been sent to find rhinos in Cameroon, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia.

Natasha Anderson
Rhino Monitoring Coordinator
The Lowveld Rhino Project

I became involved in the project through a rhino called Lemco, who lived on the same property as me. Lemco had been found with two wire leg snares that needed to be removed. Raoul du Toit, who runs the Lowveld Rhino Project, flew in with wildlife veterinarian Chris Foggin to immobilise Lemco and remove the snares. Snaring had become a serious problem since many areas of the Bubiana Conservancy had been settled by subsistence farmers. I was asked if I could help with monitoring the rhinos in these areas and thus began my career in rhino monitoring.

Rhino monitors like Jackson bring me their information and photos to be incorporated into a database to guide our management of these rhino populations, and we discuss monitoring priorities. Each week I get fantastic rhino photos and stories of relaxed rhinos like Ulemule or sometimes near misses with protective mothers like Rumbidzai. Interactions between rhinos are also recorded along with births, occasional deaths and poaching issues.



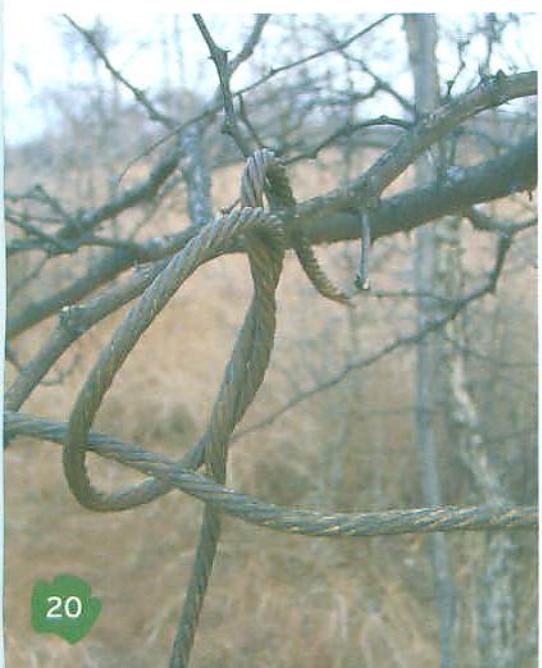
Snaring remains problematic and we have had to move many rhinos out of unsafe areas. If a cow has a very small calf we have to catch it by hand after the mother has been immobilised, which always provides lots of excitement and bruises. Minimizing the time that young rhinos are under immobilising drugs is important, so the occasional calf gets a once-in-a-lifetime helicopter flight to deliver it as quickly as possible to the release area.



Left:
A snare discovered in the Lowveld

Above:
Natasha at work

Top: Jackson



ALL IMAGES: RHINO CONSERVATION PROGRAMME

Grants

Our thanks to the Marjorie Coote Animal Welfare Trust and the Walker 597 Trust for their grants totalling £1,200, which will go towards rhino monitor salaries and snare removal in the Lowveld. The Lowveld's rhinos will be featured in a BBC Radio 4 broadcast appeal on Sunday 25 May. You can make a donation via the BBC appeal, or contact cathy@savetherhino.org