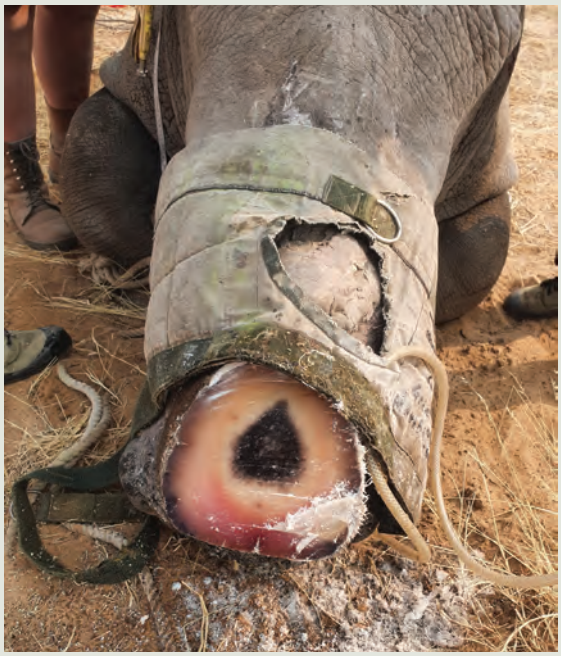
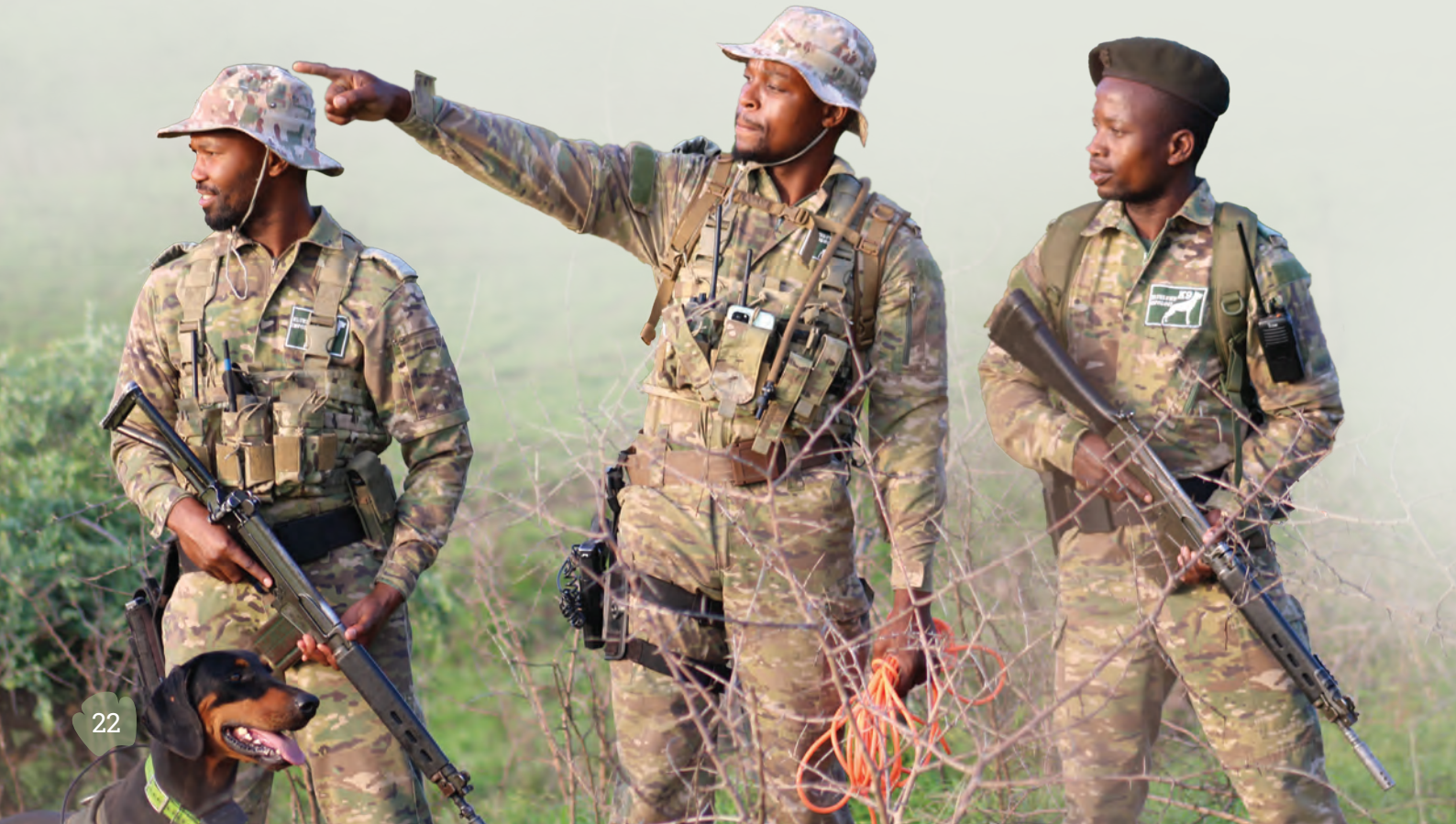
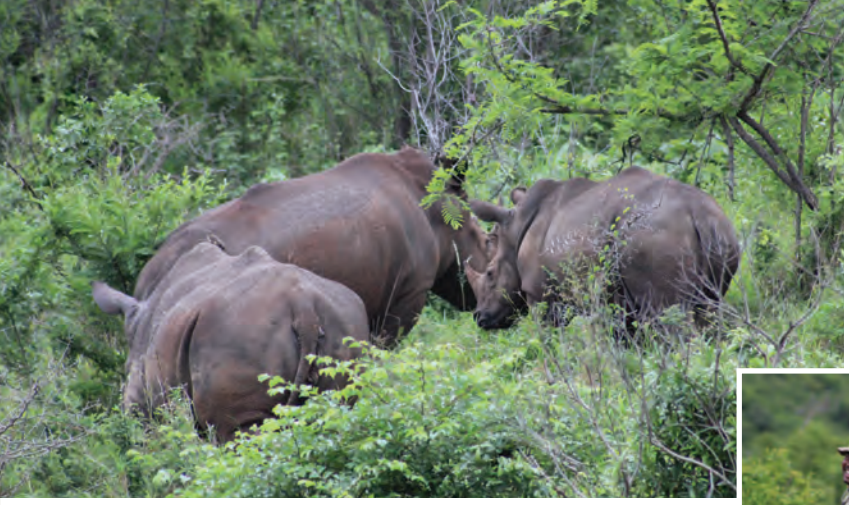
Protecting the 'birthplace of the white rhino'

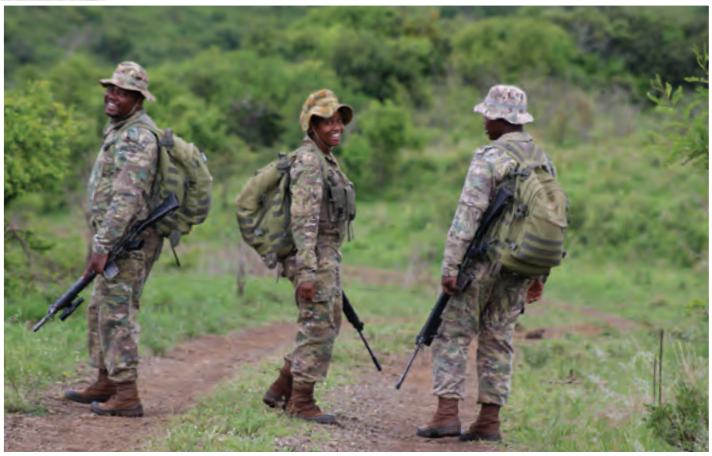


"During the early 1900s, the world's sole remaining Southern white rhinos consisted of a small population of fewer than 100 individuals in South Africa's Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. However, thanks to 'Operation Rhino' in the 1950s and 1960s, which saw translocations of white rhino from the Park all over the world, global numbers rose to more than 20,000 by 2010, earning Hluhluwe-iMfolozi the name 'the birthplace of the white rhino' "
Amos Tembe, Park Manager, Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park

Chris Kelly | CEO and Co-Founder, Wildlife ACT

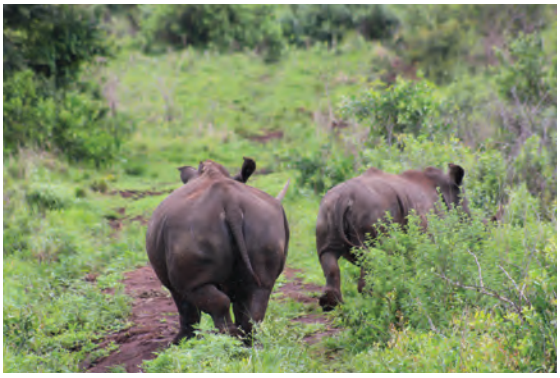






Right: *Alongside interventions such as dehorning, providing simple items such as boots, uniforms and rucksacks to rangers is essential for them to continue their critical patrols safely and effectively.*

Unfortunately, poaching pressure has increased significantly in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park (HiP) in recent years. In 2023, the Park lost 307 rhinos to poaching (60% of the annual South African total). As a result, in an attempt to protect this critical population, the difficult decision was made to dehorn HiP's rhinos. The impact of dehorning was immediate, with monthly rhino poaching mortalities reduced by an average of 79%.



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This decrease in poaching has provided much-needed respite for all of the teams working at HiP, allowing rangers, monitors and conservation managers to focus on implementing and improving other measures that enhance security and support the recovery of the rhino population.

The technology teams have been focusing on improving and maintaining the status of cameras that can remotely monitor and detect poaching activity. In just four months, the proportion of active cameras has increased from an average of 33% to 86%. Alongside this, the Park has been strengthening its incursion detection systems, including by installing 'smart fences' that send triggers to the operations centre when there has been a breach, thus decreasing the unit response time. The anti-poaching canine unit has also used the time to conduct a specialised training programme for its team of tracking and detection dogs. All of these initiatives have dramatically improved HiP's security capacity.

In addition to security, we have also been able to focus on rhino monitoring. During the dehorning process, a number of rhinos were fitted with tracking pods. These pods allow teams on the ground to remotely monitor the rhinos' movements, better understanding their home ranges and behaviour and aiding the detection of poaching activity. The dehorning also provided a unique opportunity to collect critical information on both the black and white rhino populations, including data relating to genetics, diet and population demographics. The biological camera trapping programme has also been expanded, not only improving the remote monitoring of black and white rhinos, but also other priority species in the Park, including elephants, vultures, leopards and hyaena.

Though there is still more work to be done, the incredible work of all staff has meant there has been huge progress in the long-term protection of rhinos on HiP this year, highlighting the importance of collaboration in order to ensure effective conservation.

This success is also credit to the work of all partners involved, notably, the dedicated ranger teams within HiP, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, WWF-South Africa, Wildlife ACT Fund Trust, Peace Parks Foundation and Save the Rhino International.