

Project RHINO

STOP WILDLIFE CRIME



MONITORING.PROTECTING.CONSERVING.TOGETHER.

UPDATE: PROJECT RHINO

January 2024



1. Project Rhino Founding Statement

[Project Rhino](#) is an association of 36 like-minded organisations, facilitating rhino conservation interventions aimed at eliminating rhino poaching and securing the white and black rhino populations of KwaZulu-Natal. The members of Project Rhino recognise that the work in conserving and protecting rhinos from the threat of poaching is symbolic of the broader threat faced by all wildlife and that all wildlife will benefit from actions taken by Project Rhino. The association is also aware that the poaching of rhino is symptomatic of the overall, bigger environmental crises facing South Africa and its neighbours.

There are numerous fundamental projects that fall under the Project Rhino umbrella and all are essential to combat wildlife crime, a complex problem that must be approached in a holistic manner. Our initiatives are seen as tools in a bigger toolbox that work hand in hand to stop rhino poaching.

2. Project Rhino's Approach

Tackling wildlife crime requires a holistic approach that responds to the complex range of factors that drive it. Immediate measures like K9, equine and aerial response units are urgently needed to combat poaching as it happens. In parallel, deeper initiatives that engage youth, the public and communities are being implemented to build understanding at community level of the value of wildlife and biodiversity.

A critical success factor of Project Rhino is its status as a representative body, which carries powerful leverage ability. Through collaboration, we are able to rapidly mobilise stakeholders and deploy resources where they are needed. Working together also avoids duplication of effort, and costs.

Definition of the Problem

KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) is renowned for bringing the southern white rhino back from the brink of extinction in the late 1800's and for reintroducing this rhino species into former habitats, including the Kruger National Park, during Operation Rhino in the 1960's and 1970's. It is thanks to KZN's rhino conservation pioneers such as the late Dr Ian Player, Magqubu Ntombela and others that by 2010 southern white rhinos around the world numbered 22,000 - the greatest rhino conservation success story ever. The Province is also home to a healthy population of the critically endangered black rhino. Through the work of protected area authority Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Black Rhino Range Expansion Programme (BRREP), new black rhino breeding populations are being established as their ranges are being expanded in partnership with private land owners.

Today, KZN holds the second-largest and most genetically diverse populations of white and black rhino in South Africa, found in many Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife-managed parks as well as private and community-owned game reserves. However, due to the escalating threats of rhino poaching that began in 2007, driven by on-going demand from particularly Vietnam and China and vast sums of money offered by criminal poaching syndicates, KZN's rhinos are under increasing threat. The lives of field rangers who are trying to protect these animals are also at risk.

These risks are increasing exponentially in the Covid-19 context, which is crippling the ecotourism industry and amplifying existing food insecurity, joblessness and poverty.



The Project Rhino Response:

To combat poaching threats, Project Rhino takes a four pillar approach:

1. **Coordination Unit:** The team that keeps the engines running by 1) mobilizing stakeholders; 2) gathering and synthesizing information; 3) prioritising needs; and 4) sourcing funds and donations. Without effective coordination, we would see a disjointed and dysfunctional response to wildlife crime – resulting in higher poaching numbers.
2. **Ranger and Technical Support:** 1) Direct training and material support to rangers; 2) providing and operationalizing K9 and equine patrols units; and 3) ZAP-Wing aerial surveillance including lease and support costs of Hluhluwe airfield.
3. **Education and Engagement:** Activating youth and communities through 1) Rhino ART (Art, Recreation and Theatre); 2) Youth camps; 3) Leadership forums; and 4) the bi-annual World Youth Wildlife Summit.
4. **Wild Economy and Enterprise:** Building and supporting a network of responsible use landscapes and identifying business opportunities within them. For example, hunting and meat processing, ecological agriculture, agro processing and ecotourism.

Project Rhino's Activities

The **goal** is to significantly reduce wildlife crime in KZN.

Specific objectives (aligned to Project Rhino's overall approach) are to:

- Ensure high levels of communication and collaboration between Project Rhino members.
- Build and safeguard anti-poaching capacities in all 32 partner reserves
- Facilitate education and outreach within communities in proximity to rhino populations.
- Provide immediate, material support to households facing extreme food insecurity.

Our **activities** are grouped into four Work Packages (WP's).

WP 1 (Stakeholder coordination)

The Project Rhino Coordination unit convenes regular events with its members to identify needs and avoid duplication of effort (and cost). The goal is to pull everyone's resources together and work as a team to be more efficient and successful. Ongoing strategic direction, communication and resource mobilisation is a core function of the unit.

WP 2 (Capacity Building)

2.1 K9 anti-poaching unit

This unit has been put to work effectively in the Zululand District of KwaZulu-Natal. Dogs have proved to be an essential tool to fight wildlife crime by tracking down poachers, detecting wildlife products and recovering illegal weapons and ammunition. Our K9 unit works alongside land-owners, ecotourism businesses, community based institutions and the South African Police Service. The team consists of trained and certified tracking, apprehension and detection dogs that help to locate poaching suspects and gather important real-time intelligence.

2.2 [Zululand Aerial Patrol Wing \(Zapwing\)](#)

The ZAP-Wing Patrol is a vital anti-poaching intervention that has contributed to numerous arrests and disruptions of poaching gangs. Established in 2012, ZAP-Wing provides daily helicopter reaction support and fixed-wing aerial surveillance to 26 state and private game reserves (+300,000ha) and to rhino security operations in northern KZN. Working in collaboration with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the airfield also serves as a vital base for the collaboration and information sharing between leading security and anti-poaching specialists, State and Private conservation agencies, and other task forces such as the Operation Rhino 9 Team.

2.3 [Ranger Training and Reserve Support](#)

Field rangers and anti-poaching teams are the first line of defence and need on-going support to maintain morale and improve their skills & abilities in the face of heavily armed poaching gangs. Project Rhino targets 100 rangers per annum by delivering 1) formal accredited skills training and 2) in-field mentorship. We also provide equipment and resources to private, community-owned and state game reserves, so that they are able to improve intra-reserve communications and respond to poaching incidents in an integrated manner.

2.4 [Dehorning](#)

In 2017 Project Rhino set up the 'Dehorning Programme' in response to expressed need of Project Rhino members. A national and international call for funding to have approximately 200 rhino de-horned annually in KwaZulu-Natal was made to assist in covering the high cost of this rhino security measure. Since dehorning started, poaching numbers have been reduced significantly, with not a single rhino poached in participating private reserves for more than 24 months.

2.5 [Horse anti-Poaching unit](#)

Project Rhino is equipping and supporting horse patrols at selected game reserves. Mounted rangers are able to patrol off-road and have a higher vantage point, helping them to see above the long summer grass. Horses are quiet and extend the daily patrol from 10km on foot to 30km on horseback. Response time is much shorter, thereby improving the chances of a poacher's apprehension before a rhino becomes a statistic.

WP 3 (Education and Outreach)

3.1 [Rhino ART: Youth Conservation Education](#)

Initiated in partnership with the Kingsley Holgate Foundation in 2013, the *Rhino Art - 'Let our children's voices be heard'* platform uses the universal medium of ART (art, recreation and theatre) to increase conservation awareness amongst the youth and cultivate a next generation of wildlife 'ambassadors' who have a vested interest in the protection of rhino and other endangered species.

A typical Rhino ART intervention entails an interactive, vibrant teaching platform at a school, targeting on average 500 learners and their teachers. In addition to an expert-led session, youth are engaged through role playing theatre showcasing the value of the Wild Economy and the perils of poaching. The activation is repeated at schools either annually or every two years, with a focus being on schools within poaching hotspots. Soccer tournaments are also hosted, typically over a weekend when facilitators return to judge the artwork. The campaign has now reached over 600,000 young people and spread the message to 24 countries and five continents.

3.2 [Community Leadership Development](#)

Every year we host a series of community leadership workshops where leaders from the communities surrounding Game Reserves are able to gain valuable information on how the Reserve functions. A three-day programme covers a range of conservation issues, challenges and solutions. The workshops look to draw communities closer to the game reserve to ensure sustainability, overcome barriers to conservation and garner a greater understanding and appreciation of the role that protected areas play.

3.3 Youth Camps and Visits

Project Rhino partner reserves and NGO's regularly bring youth into reserves to experience nature and physically see the animals they are being taught about. The programme is varied, in many instances depending on funding requirements, and includes a variety of activities such as day visits in Minibus taxis, game drives, overnight 1 to 3-day in-depth educational camps, to wilderness trails and dehorning experiences.

3.4 [World Youth Wildlife Summit](#)

A cornerstone of Project Rhino is education and awareness, with a primary focus on youth. In 2014, Project Rhino facilitated and hosted the first World Youth Rhino Summit, followed by a Winter Summit and then a third World Youth Wildlife Summit in September 2019. The 2019 flagship event was attended by 165 youth, 20 chaperones (primarily teachers), 35 conservation experts and 5 keynotes – 225 delegates in all from Africa, Asia and the Global North convened over four days at South Africa's iconic Southern Africa Wildlife College. The summit incorporates lectures by conservation practitioners, problem solving games and activities, motivational workshops and opportunities to learn from peers around the world.

Work Package 4 (Community Upliftment)

4.1 [Empowering Wildlife Communities](#)

Northern KZN includes some of the poorest and most underdeveloped areas in South Africa. There are few employment opportunities, and the pay-offs from assisting illegal poaching syndicates can be equivalent to several years' basic wages. On top of this, the coronavirus has devastated Africa's tourism and hospitality sectors – leading to loss of jobs and incomes for some of our most vulnerable communities.

Project Rhino has been part of a multi-stakeholder initiative dubbed, "Feeding the Wildlife Communities," to relieve food insecurity by providing young children, rangers and wildlife communities with food parcels. An incredible 2 million meals have been delivered to impacted communities since May 2020. The focus of this programme is now geared toward the upliftment of vulnerable wildlife communities through the development of nutritional gardens, crèche upgrading, water pipelines, reservoirs and community tanks; leaving a more lasting legacy in terms of conservation collaboration.

Community involvement is a golden thread running through all Project Rhino activities. For example, there is high demand for Rhino ART in schools and in many areas, youth have come forward with information and direct identification of poachers within their communities, which was then corroborated and verified by law enforcement authorities. In our experience, educating primary and secondary school learners has a significant anti-poaching multiplier, alongside food gardening and similar interventions achieves a significant anti-poaching multiplier within households.



3. Project Rhino Partners

Project Rhino was formed in 2011 by 18 Founding Members to unite the Province's conservation community against rhino poaching threats. Founding Members include Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (the provincial government conservation agency), private and community-owned game reserves and prominent conservation NGO's. Project Rhino has been recognised by both the Mail & Guardian newspaper and the Rhino Conservation Awards as a leader in the fight against rhino poaching.

Now in its 10th year, Project Rhino continues to bring together organizations with a common vision and goal, identifying synergies through an integrated, common approach. As a representative body, it carries powerful leverage ability. Project Rhino has pioneered an ethos of collaboration and tackles macro-level issues that affect all KZN rhino stakeholders. Initiatives benefit all rhino, regardless of whether they are to be found in provincial, private or community-owned game reserves.

Below is the list of Project Rhino Members and a summary of the 32 wildlife reserves represented in the partnership:

Project Rhino Members:

1. & Beyond (Phinda Private Game Reserve)
2. African Conservation Trust (ACT)
3. Alpha Security
4. Babanango Game Reserve
5. Black Rhino Range Expansion Project (WWF)
6. Bonamanzi Game Reserve
7. Conservation Outcomes
8. Earth Organization
9. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW)
10. Ezemvelo Honorary Officers
11. Game Rangers Association of South Africa
12. HAWKS (Directorate for priority crime investigation)
13. Institute for Personal Close Protection (IFPCP)
14. KwaZulu Private Game Reserve
15. Magqubu Ntombela Foundation
16. Manyoni Private Game Reserve (Previously Zululand Rhino Reserve)
17. Midlands Wildlife Security Initiative
18. Mpeti Game Reserve
19. Nambiti Big 5 Game Reserve
20. Pongola Game Reserve
21. SATIB Insurance Brokers
22. Somkhanda Game Reserve
23. Space For Elephants Foundation
24. Thanda Foundation
25. Thanda Private Game Reserve
26. Thula-Thula Private Game Reserve
27. Trackbox (SA CAN)
28. Ven-Africa Private Game Reserve
29. WESSA
30. Wilderness Action Group
31. Wilderness Foundation
32. Wilderness Leadership School
33. WildTrust (Wildlands Conservation Trust)
34. Wildlife ACT Fund
35. Zulu Nyala Game Reserve
36. Zululand Wildlife Security Initiative

Project Rhino Reserves:

ZULULAND	MIDLANDS
<p>Private Game Reserves</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Mpeti Game Reserve2. Falaza Game Park3. H&H Ranch4. Hluhluwe Farms Conservancy5. Kube Yini6. KwaZulu Private Game Reserve7. Zimanga Game Reserve8. Manyoni Game Reserve9. Mduna Royal Reserve10. Phinda Private Reserve11. Pongola Game Reserve12. Somkhanda Community Game Reserve13. Thanda Private Game Reserve14. Thula Thula Game Reserve15. Ubizane Game Reserve16. uMfolozi Big 5 Game Reserve17. Zulu Nyala Private Game Reserve18. Babanango Game Reserve19. Ven Africa20. Bonamanzi Game Reserve	<ol style="list-style-type: none">28. Mawela Private Game Reserve29. Nambiti Private Game Reserve30. Tala Game Reserve31. Umphafa Game Reserve32. Tugela Private Game Reserve <p>Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Game Reserves</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">33. Spioenkop Nature Reserve34. Weenen Nature Reserve
<p>Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Game Reserves</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">21. Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park22. Ndumo Game Reserve23. Pongola Nature Reserve24. Ithala Game Reserve25. Tembe Elephant Park26. uMkhuze Game Reserve27. iSimangaliso Wetland Park	

4. Operational Budget

We finance our projects through a mix of grants, individual donations, campaigns, events and sponsorships. With shrinking conservation budgets and increasing security costs our Protected Areas need external support. Our priority is to maintain, at minimum, our K9, ZAP-Wing and Horse Patrol activities. K9 teams, for example, cannot be stopped and started due to the intrinsic trust relationship that is built between a K9 and his/her handler. Some activities, such as the Rhino Art campaign, may be scaled down if funding is not secured.

Zululand Anti-Poaching Wing: R91,000 per month

Costs include pilot salary (R25,000), insurance (R3,500) telecoms, airfield rental (R12,500), airfield staffer (R6,200 with R2,000 sponsored by Anew Hotels), water and electricity and incidental operations and maintenance costs. We service the airplane regularly and this is an extraordinary expense 3 times a year (in the region of R40,000 each) that we need to average out. The airplane needs re-skinning (R100,000) every 2nd or 3rd year. Fuel is currently being reimbursed by the INL and PeaceParks, representing a saving of about R10,000 per month.

Project Rhino K9-Unit: R88,000 per month

A direct and most needed cost to Project Rhino, and includes all costs of 4 handlers (R11,500 each), team leader (R17,500), fuel for two vehicles (R8,000), insurance, uniforms, indemnity, dog food, veterinary care and K9-base rental.

Coordination Unit: R42,600 per month

The Project Rhino Coordination Unit deploys resources where they are needed, mobilizes stakeholders to respond to poaching intelligence, and maintains communications channels within and between wildlife reserves.

Costs include staff salaries (R30,000), travel, insurance (R4,400), and operations costs, website and email hosting, bank charges and financial oversight.

Horse Anti-Poaching Unit: R10,000 per month

Costs include ongoing support for a groom (R4000) and the delivery of food and medication. If additional funding is secured this can be allocated to upgrading of riding tack, training for rangers, or infrastructure such as stables and fencing.

Dehorning Programme: Target of R50,000 per month

Dehorning is conducted by individual reserves and where possible with support from fundraising efforts by Project Rhino. Dehorning is also funding dependant, and can only be made available to reserves if funding is secured.

Ranger Training and Reserve Support: Target of R50,000 per month

Training and equipment for Rangers and support staff as identified by the reserves and facilitated by Project Rhino with partners. Additional security at bomas for rhino orphans is an additional priority. Funding dependant, and availed only if we have funds that are specifically allocated for this.

Rhino Art: Youth Conservation Education: R83,500 per month

Costs for team, travel, insurance and maintenance of dedicated Rhino Rig, as well as templates, and prizes. Costs calculated at an average USD 1 per participant and a flexible target of 70,000 youth for 2022 has been set.

Community Leadership Forums: R75,000 per annum

Bringing Community leadership together to discuss the Wildlife Economy, to share successes and knowledge and develop a collective strategy to resolving the poaching crisis. We try to host two to three events per year.



Empowering Wildlife Communities: TBC

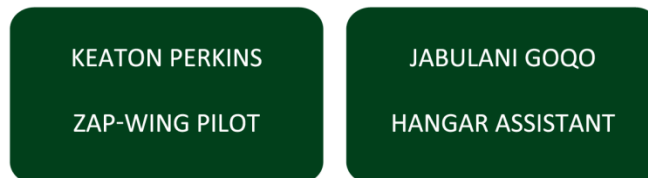
Funding via crowd-funding campaigns and other direct gifts, to be spent as received with no commitments to ongoing requirements. Funding is completely separate with no impact on daily operations above.

5. Project Rhino Organogram:

DIRECTORS



ZULULAND ANTI-POACHING WING (ZAP-WING)



K9-UNIT



RHINO ART & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT | EMPOWERMENT



PROJECT SUPPORT

