

Large Scale Community-based Rhino Conservation in North-West Namibia
Annual Progress Report – 2023



2023 was another exceptional year with its inception marking 40 years of SRT's pioneering efforts to protect Namibia's West Kunene rhino population. Overall, we hit all four targets for the year in rhino monitoring with another massive year in foot kilometers and, most notable, a dramatic jump in rhino sightings with only the second year in history with over 4,000 confirmed rhino sightings. We also were pleased to welcome **eleven new rhino calves** to our population and, once again, witness ZERO poaching with only 4 rhinos have been lost to poachers in the past 5.5 years. This result is even more remarkable when compared with the poaching escalation occurring around Namibia over the past year. Our two primary Rhino Pride Campaign initiatives, **Rhino Cup Youth Champions League** and **Reading with Rhinos** schools initiative both saw substantial expansion demonstrating not only that the work can be maintained but that the demand for extended support is growing. We were also grateful for the opportunity to launch two new rhino music videos to usher in an especially meaningful World Rhino Day. Lastly, but certainly not least, we created new or build upon existing international partnerships by hosting or conducting exchange visits to share our expertise and experience. This report summarizes our results for 2023 highlighting our main achievements.

Firstly, overall, our efforts to monitor and protection the world's last truly free-ranging population of black rhino was once again very successful with exceptional patrol effort, only 5 mortalities (all natural) and zero poaching cases.



RHINO MONITORING SUMMARY INFOGRAPHIC



2023-01-01 to 2024-01-01



TEAM FIELD DAYS

5,952



RANGER FIELD DAYS

12,005



FOOT KILOMETERS

51,335



RHINO SIGHTINGS

4,110



RHINO CARCASSES FOUND

5



RHINOS POACHED

0

More specifically, we met or exceeded all four of our key rhino monitoring performance indicators. This included a dramatic increase in the number of rhino sightings to achieve only the second year in history to observe over 4,000 confirmed rhino sightings (see above).

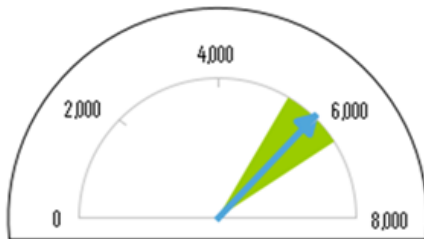


PROGRESS TOWARDS ANNUAL PERFORMANCE TARGETS

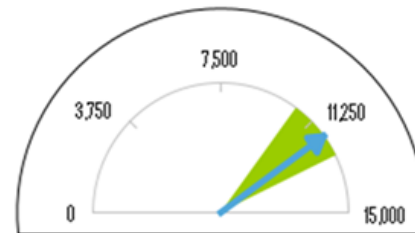


ANNUAL PERFORMANCE RELATIVE TO ANNUAL TARGETS (+/- 10% OF 2022 - GREEN REGION)

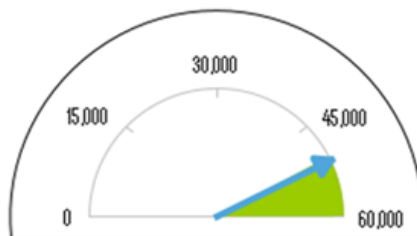
Team Field Days



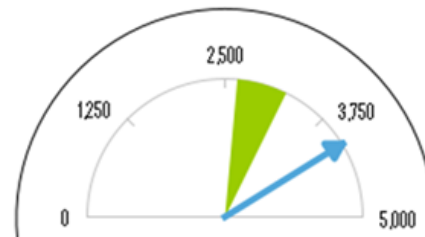
Ranger Field Days



Team Foot Kilometers



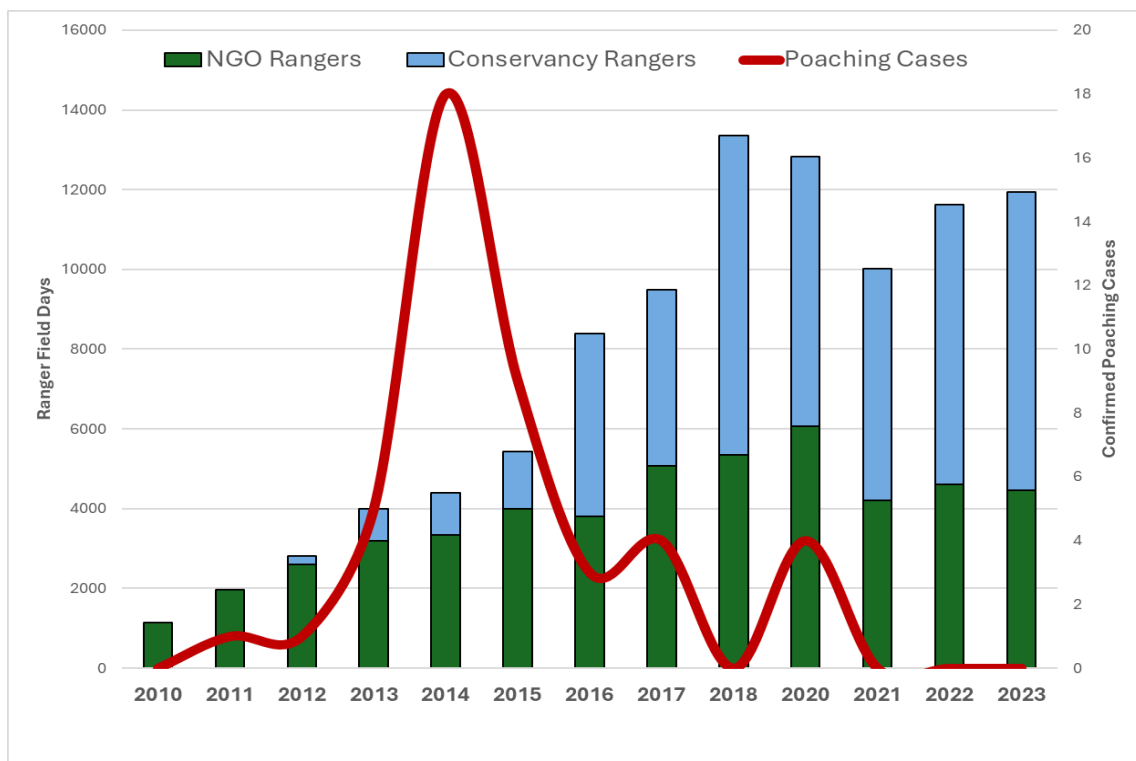
Cumulative Rhino Sightings



Below are a few additional noteworthy highlights from rhino monitoring in 2023

- We produced a 40th Anniversary highlight video telling, for the first time, the full story of SRT from the beginning years to the most recent innovations called *Rhinos Roam Here* and available for download on YouTube.

- We continued conducting joint patrols with **Conservancy Rhino Ranger team from Nyae Nyae Conservancy** in the north-west to help protect the new rhinos that were released in the Khaudum National Park in 2023.
- We continued to support freehold rhino custodians by conducting additional training in the use of SMART Conservation Software and data management.
- One of our Conservancy Rhino Rangers, **Meleskia Harases**, took home a **GOSCAR** award being the first female ranger to win the illustrious award.
- We deployed over **50 SOURCE hydropanels** (manufactured in the USA) across a number of our ranger satellite camps to not only improve the quality of drinking water for our rangers during patrols but also reduce costs of re-supply runs by vehicles.
- Conservancy Rhino Rangers again increased their relative contributions towards the overall rhino monitoring effort in Kunene by producing a record nearly 70% of the total effort on the ground (see below)
- We also added a record number of 24 (8 female) new Conservancy Rhino Rangers in 2023 bringing our present total of active Rhino Rangers to 98 (134 including NGO rangers) with 16% females.





Rhino Pride CAMPAIGN

The Rhino Pride Campaign continued to march ahead in 2023 with focus on expansion. After 2 years of delays and postponements, we were able to begin expanding our efforts in 2023. Below are a few specific highlights:

- **We dramatically expanded Reading with Rhinos programme!** After successfully launching the programme in 2022 with 3 schools, by popular demand we expanded across the country to the Nyae Nyae Conservancy in northeastern Namibia as well as add a number of Grade 3 classes more than tripling the total number of learners participating in the programme from 200 to over 700 learners. This included training 12 new teachers (see below).



- We also designed and distributed a new **Teacher's Lesson Planning Guide** for teachers to assist with delivering the programme.



- We launched two new Rhino Music Videos from our partners Piri Guri and Bullet Ya Kaoko. After successfully releasing 3 rhino music videos in the past, 2023 marked an exceptional year with 2 simultaneously released music videos on World Rhino Day.



- We ran a successful Season 2 of the **Rhino Cup Champions League including a new Girls League**. The 16 team men's league grew to 20 teams and we added a brand new 6 team Girl's League with each participating six Conservancies sending a team of girls aged 14-18 to play in the league. This helped extend our reach from 400 players to now over 650 players.



- We built upon existing partnerships in Nepal by helping launch a new Snow Leopard Scout Programme and supporting the first Snow Leopard and Yak Soccer Festival



- We hosted a number of African organizations who sought to visit SRT and learn from our experience and expertise.



How We Got Started

In 2011, in the face of an escalating poaching threat, local community leaders and game guards saw the need to improve their capacity to protect the rhino on their lands and better fulfill their obligations as 'Rhino Custodians'. A small group of dedicated field conservationists together with support from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism formed an informal working group that sought to provide targeted support to these Communal Rhino Custodians. Our first initiative was to design and implement a programme to strengthen and expand the capacity for Communal Rhino Custodians to monitor the rhino on their lands. We called this the Rhino Ranger Incentive Programme. This program utilizes specialists from dedicated field-based organizations, namely Save the Rhino Trust, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation and Minnesota Zoo, to train a new generation of "rhino rangers" - highly talented groups of



A Rhino Ranger in action

local people, chosen by and accountable to their communities to conduct rhino monitoring. The program provides an enhanced training curriculum, state-of-the-art rhino monitoring and field patrol equipment, and performance-based cash bonuses that enable and incentivize rhino ranger teams to complete quality patrols. Once rhino ranger teams acquire the basic skills needed to effectively monitor the rhino on their land and pending necessary approvals, training in rhino tourism will help guide the development of community-led rhino tourism activities that would improve rhino security by generating the critical finances needed to sustain rhino monitoring and enhancing the value that people place on keeping rhino alive.

After about 5 successful years of growing the Conservancy Rhino Ranger Programme, we realized that if we wanted to achieve lasting widespread impact, we needed to extend our engagement beyond the rangers and into the broader community. Thus in 2017, together with local partners, we launched the Rhino Pride Campaign to creatively harness and strengthen key emotional connections to rhinos including pride, gratitude and compassion through strategic outreach activities that local people value. At the heart of this approach is the belief that a future for Africa's wild rhino will only be secured when poaching is simply not tolerated by the local people, when rhino become more valuable alive than dead, and where innovative solutions – grown from the grassroots – are supported through authentic partnerships between government, NGOs and private sector.

We deeply thank our main donors & partners:

(who's gifts directly support the Conservancy Rhino Rangers / Rhino Pride Campaign)

USAID, Tusk Trust, B2Gold, Houston Zoo, Great Plains Zoo, Minnesota Zoo Foundation, Dietrich American Foundation, SwissAfrican Foundation, Wild & Free Foundation, Conservation Travel Foundation, Cymot, and NAMDEB

Field Partners: Thirteen Communal Conservancies (Puros, Otjikondavirongo, Sesfontein, Anabeb, Omatendeka, Ehirovipuka, /Khoadi #Hoas, Torra, Doro !Nawas, Sorris Sorris, //Huab, Uibasen/Twefelfontein, Tsiseb), Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Save the Rhino Trust, Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation, Namibia Nature Foundation, Conservancy Safaris Namibia, Camelthorn Safaris, Journey's Namibia, Ultimate Safaris, Wilderness Safaris Namibia and the Minnesota Zoo