

R1.385m allocation to rhino conservation by MyPlanet Rhino Fund

The MyPlanet Rhino Fund recently allocated R1.385m in funding towards rhino conservation causes across the country that vary from rhino protection and monitoring to saving and raising rhino orphans.



Minister for Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa recently confirmed that up until 27 August, 749 rhinos have been poached in 2015, a small increase from 716 rhinos poached during the same period in 2014. "We're fighting heavily armed and highly organised crime syndicates. The poaching figures are not a cause for despondency. Were it not for the interventions they could be far worse," said Molewa at her recent rhino poaching media briefing.

Braam Malherbe, conservationist and official MyPlanet ambassador, initiated the fund in partnership with the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet fundraising programme to address the issues proactively and to help worthy rhino fundraising causes. "There are many well-run and credible organisations raising money for rhino conservation, but there are also a lot of scams preying on human emotions," Malherbe said. "We started the fund, represented by a broad range of interested and affected parties, to help ensure funding is going where it's needed most. Thanks to the overwhelming support of South African consumers and retail partners we have already raised over R4 million for the conservation of this iconic species."

All seven organisations receiving funding are focused on protecting our rhinos through different avenues, as follows:

1. The Southern African Wildlife College (SAWC) is a college that has become an acknowledged centre of specialisation in conservation education and wildlife management Training not only in southern Africa, but internationally. The project that will receive funding will have 137 people trained in 2015 and 120 people in 2016 on a full 12-month national certificate programme. This intensive year-long programme is indicative of the additional skills needed to address poaching and the shortage of qualified field rangers and guides in wildlife areas as well as creating valuable jobs;

2. Care for Wild Rhino Sanctuary is based in Mpumalanga and focusses on the rescuing and stabilisation of orphaned baby rhino, plus their rehabilitation. Once these rhino have recovered or reach sub-adult age, they are then released into a breeding project on an adjoining game reserve where they will be protected from poaching. Petronel Nieuwoud, owner of the sanctuary, is encouraged by the donation and invites others to "keep fighting the good fight";
3. Quemic provides integrated security solutions to the public and private sectors and is the preferred supplier of anti-poaching, field ranger, firearm and related training in Southern Africa Environmental Crime Response Unit (ECRU) in a number of our large reserves. This funding will cover a three-month contract for Quemic's Anti-Poaching Unit to be allocated to 'Hot Poaching Zones' to assist private reserve owners to protect their rhinos;
4. SANParks Addo Elephant National Park: Funding will be used to purchase 20 camera traps to monitor their rhino population, which is desperately needed at this stage. Addo Elephant National Park's conservation manager, John Adendorff, said: "The monitoring of rhino forms an integral component of any protection and biological management plan for the species. It is vital that we continue monitoring these animals, and that we have in-depth knowledge of how the populations are reacting to the different environmental circumstances and also their demographic profiles. With limited resources and Addo's thick vegetation, standard monitoring is more difficult. Camera trapping has proved to be an ideal, non-invasive form of monitoring rhino, providing ideal individual identification and condition monitoring capabilities.";
5. Save Valley Conservancy Special Species Protection Unit (SSPU) is in the northernmost part of the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area. The unit was formed specially to tackle the type of high-level poaching that is associated with certain species whose parts (horns, scales, bones, tusks) have a high demand in illegal wildlife trade markets. Currently the rhino top the list of animals threatened. Since the establishment of the unit the poaching mortality rate has decreased allowing the natural breeding rate of the population to increase rhino numbers within the conservancy. The unit has also had a positive effect on lesser poaching crimes and, thus, has contributed to the overall wellbeing of the conservancy as a whole;
6. The Limpopo Rhino Security Group has been established by a group of private rhino owners in the Limpopo area to provide proactive security for their rhino. This funding is going to assist them with basic specialist equipment, crisis reaction teams and, when required, aerial support; and
7. EWT's Wildlife in Trade Programme, (WIT) which incorporates the EWT Rhino Project, was one of the first organisations to recognise the potential that dogs have in the fight against rhino poaching, and has subsequently deployed tracker and sniffer dogs at a variety of parks and reserves. The effectiveness of tracker dogs as a tool in the fight against rhino poaching has been proven. In fact, one of the tracker dogs stationed in the Kruger National Park has already helped rangers to arrest more than 15 poachers in the first half of this year alone. Funding is going towards refresher training for these dogs and the training of two additional dogs and handlers for the Timbavati area and the Limpopo Rhino Security Group.

The MyPlanet Rhino Fund, launched in April 2011, is administered by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) and is an initiative by the MySchool My Village MyPlanet fundraising programme. To date it has raised over R4 million for rhino conservation.

"The beauty of our fundraising programme is that anyone can join us in making a difference to protect our rhino without it

costing them a cent. All they have to do is sign up for a card, choose the MyPlanet Rhino Fund as their beneficiary and then shop at our retail partners. Our retail partners will make a contribution to the fund on behalf of these customers. It is an easy and impactful way to get involved," said Helene Brand, MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet CSI manager.

Go to www.myschool.co.za to sign up for your MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet card, and raise funds every time you shop.

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