The Black Mamba Initiative

Species of focus: Rhinoceros, Elephant

Country/Countries: South Africa

Site(s): Balule Private Nature Reserve, Greater Kruger Conservation Area.

GPS coordinates: No data

Project web site: http://www.blackmambas.org

Summary description:

The Balule Rhino Conservation Model has three main components:

1. The Joint Operation Centre - a two person team that coordinates all anti-poaching operations.
2. ProTracked Armed Response - a team of 23 armed rangers.
3. Environmental Monitors - a team of 26 unarmed intelligence gatherers.

The Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit (APU) act as Environmental Monitors. The APU is primarily made up of women that undertake foot-patrols, observations, vehicle checks, road blocks and intelligence gathering from their communities, as well as educating their peers on wildlife conservation. The unarmed Black Mambas that operate in Balule support the ProTracked Armed Response team by providing intelligence concerning poaching and incursion.

The main objective of the Black Mamba Initiative is to protect wildlife through creating strong bonds with local communities. All Black Mamba recruits are from local, previously disadvantaged communities and go through a 6 week training programme prior to deployment with an existing unit to further their training through work experience. The initiative is described as a social upliftment program that aims to address unemployment...
and assist with skills development in South Africa.

In addition, the Black Mambas are dispatched to around 10 local schools as part of an awareness and educational programme called the Bushbabies programme. The intention is to provide a better understanding of wildlife conservation to the next generation.

**Land management type:**

Private (individually held) managed land

**Product(s) in trade:**

- Horn, Ivory

**Product value at site level:**

Approximate ZAR 90,000 per rhino horn (USD 6,550 at current exchange rate).

**Types of poachers:**

Individuals from local community
Gangs from local community
Individuals from outside

**Details of 'other' poacher type:**

No data

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**Project implementation**

**Is the project implemented by an external party?**

Yes

**Implementing organisation:**

Transfrontier Africa and Rhino Mercy.

**Name of funding organisation(s):**

Rhino Mercy, ‘Rettet das Nashorn’

**Community organisation(s) involved:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Was the project established specifically to engage communities in combatting IWT?</strong></th>
<th>Yes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year the IWT project or component started:</strong></td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project status is currently:</strong></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case study information is up to date as of:</strong></td>
<td>2016</td>
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### Community engagement

**Approach taken to community engagement and its rationale:**

Community members are employed as game guards

**Details of 'other' community involvement approach type:**

No data

**Financial:**

Salaries are provided for those employed in anti-poaching efforts.

**Non-financial:**

Anti-poaching forces receive rations during onsite rotations as well as uniform and personal care items. Members of the anti-poaching teams additionally benefit from training and certification, and visibility in media and publications.

**The community engagement project is**

Stand alone initiative

**Details of wider response:**
Do community guards carry firearms? No

Do community guards conduct joint patrols with formal guards? Yes

Are community guards unarmed, without armed backup? No

Do community guards have rights of arrest? Yes

Do community guards have specialist training Yes

Are community guards covered by military law in the case of someone being killed or wounded? No

The community has traditional authority to sanction poachers from within their community? Not known

What “rules of engagement” for working with communities does the case study address?

Strengthen the voice of local people in conservation/IWT debate and dialogue
Include local people in wildlife monitoring and enforcement networks

Other key principles for engaging communities emerging from this case study:
What has been the impact on poaching/IWT?
Poaching levels have decreased

What has been the impact on wildlife populations?
Wildlife populations have increased

Further detail about the impact on poaching:
The Black Mambas have identified and destroyed over 12 poachers’ camps and 3 bush meat kitchens within the “buffer-zone” as well as reduced snaring and poisoning activities by 76% within the area of operation since their deployment in 2013.

What worked and why?; What didn’t work and why?

What worked about the community engagement approach and why?
Through this initiative the Black Mambas have gained access to a field of work and means of income that they formerly had no access to. The benefit of this is that their experience and knowledge transects into their families because they are mothers, sisters, cousins, aunties, etc. and as such they can multiply the environmental awareness of the communities around them. The Black Mambas are the eyes and ears of the reserve, they find signs of intrusion, as well as detect snares, poacher camps and illegal harvesting of resources. Their observations are crucial to the armed response team who follow up on their reports.

The Black Mambas initiative is a multi-stakeholder initiative led by Transfrontier Africa and Rhino Mercy in collaboration with governmental entities (i.e. Kruger2Canyons, Ministry of Tourism and Environment), tourism entities (lodge owners and management), private owners, Anti-Poaching Units (APUs) and Armed Response, as well as ProTrack APU, and the Joint Operation Centre. The inclusion of all these stakeholder has been vital to its success.

What did not work and why?
Not specified.

Further comments or additional information about community engagement:
It is foreseen to expand the initiative to other conservation areas (i.e. Timbavati Nature Reserve) but the spatial conditions will have to be thoroughly assessed, as this initiative is not a “one-fit-all” solution to poaching threats. While the focus is on the Black Mambas, the initiative has been multi-stakeholder and no single player can successfully run this program - any efforts elsewhere will require multi-stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, this initiative is heavily reliant on donor funding and this is a constant constraint to what measures can be afforded.

The Black Mambas have been internationally recognized and received the UNEP Champion of the Earth Award 2015 and the South African Best Rhino Conservation Practitioner Award 2015, and have represented the program at international events such as the CITES COP17 in Johannesburg.
### Additional source(s) of information:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year of publication</th>
<th>Journal/Book/Series details</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Download/Access URL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Black Mambas: Saving the Rhino</td>
<td>Evan Williams (Journalist) and Laura Warner (Director)</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Dispatches</td>
<td>Channel 4 Documentaries</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The all-female patrol stopping South Africa's rhino poachers</td>
<td>Jessica Aldred</td>
<td>2016</td>
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