The Aspinall Foundation protects forest elephants and endangered species conservation using sniffer dogs to assist wildlife law enforcement in the Republic of Congo

The rainforests of the Republic of Congo and Gabon encompass the last strongholds for forest elephants. However, while the new millenium ushered in econmic growth in China fuelling an increased demand for ivory–this single decade alone has seen an estimated 62% of forest elephants killed, mainly by poachers. This decline in Central Africa is even more pronounced than in other parts of the continent. Gabon and Congo form two conduits for the illegal ivory trade that flows into Cameroon and from there to the principal markets in China and other Southeast Asian countries. Those border zones are critical if law enforcement is to deter traffickers. Unfortunately, the corruption there only fuels the trade.

Furthermore, notoriously corrupt officials operate the roads between the Republic of Congo and Cameroon. Relegated to the furthest corners of the country, there is no injunctive process for corruption–indeed, it is the norm. The roads are in far better condition now than a decade ago. For instance whereas the drive from Ouesso, the main city in northern Congo, to the Cameroonian border at Ntam, used to take at least two days, the trip now takes only a matter of hours. However, one cannot help but consider that the combination of corrupt authorities combined and improving infrastructure cannot be good for the elephants.

In order to address this, The Aspinall Foundation, a British non-profit organization with over two decades of experience in both Congo and Gabon, started the Project for the Application of Law for Fauna (PALF) in 2008. The project did not aim to replace law enforcement–it aimed to make it happen.

In 2008, wildlife law enforcement was virtually non-existent in Congo outside of protected areas. Traffickers fuelling the poaching crisis were living in a world of impunity. Undercover investigations, collaboration with police forces to bring about sting operations, and anti-corruption activism in the court system all proved to be effective tactics. The beginnings of a deterrent were put in place.

This is not yet a complete success story. Corruption is a virulent monster, and the Congo consistently ranks close to the bottom of the world in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Trying to build up consistent law enforcement results, such as strong convictions that will deter traffickers, is a question of maintaining direct pressure. Every lapse of pressure, every instance of impunity, is a wound to the overall objective. The Republic of Congo has some of the strictest wildlife laws in Central Africa, but a maximum penalty of 5 years has never been fully served. Although these maximum penalties are sometimes handed down in court, jail time is a countdown to when a trafficker can bribe his way out.

PALF has changed the landscape here, providing new tactics and capacity to build the deterrent. In addition to specifically targeting arrests and prosecutions, dissuasion is amplified through concerted communications in local media. Radio, newspapers, television and Internet (including social media) readily publish information on the increased application of wildlife law, serving a wider audience with a reminder that breaking these laws carries consequences.

The repetition in delivering this message is necessary because the culture of impunity is deeply ingrained. One highlighted sentence is never enough. A wildlife trafficker may see a fellow criminal get punished, but believe the roots of his own network to be deeper and more resistant to change. Environmental crime is led by transnational criminal networks where the 'biggest fish' remain convinced of their 'untouchability' until proven wrong by Justice.

There are a number of approaches to catching these big fish from many angles. PALF has run hundreds of its own investigations, penetrating networks across the Congo. The small group of activists has also

teamed up with protected area authorities, cleaning the borders of parks of the criminal scourge. The team has a national mandate built up over the years and learned the strategic importance of being able to block key chokepoints coming out of the elephant's vast forested habitat, areas like the Massif de Chaillu in southern Congo, or the expansive carpet of northern Congolese lowland forest. PALF had worked on many busts in such chokepoints, but needed to do more.

In early 2014 the gap was filled by introducing the Republic of Congo's first canine unit dedicated to fighting wildlife crime. The Aspinall Foundation trained up both government and private handlers, and managed to get missions out to every corner of the country, including other types of chokepoints beyond Congo's road network, such as entry points at airports and river ports. Every product the dogs were trained to detect was seized, including ammunition, ivory, pangolin scales, bushmeat and leopard skin.

Canine detection is an important tool. Many doubted its utility at first, suggesting that detection was not the issue, but rather the application of wildlife law. While this was a valid argument, it ignores the management approach, which understands detection as part of a wider strategy to enforce the law. PALF retains full control of the Detection Dog Program, deciding the schedule, strategy, training and management presence during all activities. Of course physical detection is improved–a dog's nose goes deeper than a human's

eyes in the relevant environments–but the search process is also accelerated, which has proved critical for the social process of habituating people to new norms. Throughout it all, anti-corruption specialists are there, on the ground, ready to connect the detection of contraband to law enforcement results and, just as with PALF's undercover investigations, results are measured in busts. Follow-up investigation leads us to strongly believe that the deterrent is working. The first arrest the dogs ever brought about was of a Chinese man smuggling ivory and pangolin scales. Soon afterwards, another similar arrest was made on the same highway. There has been a marked drop in busts of Chinese traffickers—and dogs' noses don't lie.

One more tool for the toolbox. Saving elephants in the Congo boils down to management solutions that address governance in a context of corruption and instability: looking for ways to deter poachers and traffickers, despite governance that inadequately reprimands criminal activity in general. It is a complex dance, and PALF, through its urban investigations, and its detection dogs, is continually testing new tools in an increasingly creative toolbox. It is a race for innovation, a process of weeding out ineffective tools and adopting potent ones. While the pace of the challenges may seem daunting at times in Central Africa, we have no choice but to fight on if we are to win the war against poaching and the illegal wildlife trade.

Embracing new technology to enhance rhino and elephant monitoring in the Mara Landscape, Kenya

With the unprecedented increase in wildlife crime witnessed across the world, conservation agencies around the globe are embracing a different approach that aims to incorporate new technologies to combat relentless poaching. One such innovative technology being steered in Kenya by WWF-Kenya is the Spatial Monitoring and Reporting Tool (SMART) a site-based approach to monitor, evaluate and improve the effectiveness of conservation management that includes frontline law enforcement.

SMART focuses on support for ranger patrols, and utilizes data from wildlife encounters, poaching encounters and threats to biodiversity, collected by the rangers as part of their daily work routine. To enhance wildlife and law enforcement monitoring in the Maasai Mara Landscape in Kenya, training on

SMART was conducted in the Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR) during December 2015. This landscape is home for two WWF flagship species, the black rhino and the African elephant. With this innovative technology, wildlife managers are able to receive updates daily and based on quantified data know which areas have been patrolled, are under threat and thus (re)-deploy rangers accordingly, and increase efficiency with better implementation of ranger activities.

The aim of the training was to create capacity on SMART functionalities with rangers and community scouts. The outcome of the training was remarkable, as 22 participants are now equipped with skills to collect information in a systematic way using handheld devices (smartphones) and process it using SMART

Above left. Field data collection using cyber trackers installed in smart phones

Above right. Field data down loading from Smart phone into SMART

to provide accurate information on the status of key wildlife species; provide their respective protected area managers with timely and accurate information on where, how and by whom, threats are occurring; track progress of law enforcement efforts in addressing these threats; and also train other scouts on the basics of data collection using SMART. This technology has assisted the rangers' work by simplifying the process and reducing the paper work involved, as well as limiting errors during transfer of data from field note books to computer.

SMART is currently being piloted in MMNR and Oloisukut Community Conservancy, one of the Conservancies in the Mara Landscape. The reports emanating from SMART will be reviewed on a monthly basis, not only to assist in planning of the patrols, but also improve on the SMART technology itself and make it more usable by front-line enforcement staff. Funding for this training, equipping the Maasai Mara and Oloisukut observers as well as setting up SMART in these two areas was provided through the WWF Sweden rhino and WWF US Wildlife Crime Technology grants.

Participants at the training were drawn from Kenya Wildlife Service (3), WWF Greater Mekong (1-Trainer), WWF Kenya (8), WWF Cameroon (3), Maasai Mara National Reserve (2), Mara Triangle Conservancy (2), Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancy Association (Scouts 2), and Oloisukut (2).

The training took a modular based approach, consisting of 10 modules that were delivered in five days with the first 2 days dedicated to theory of SMART (above left) the preceding 2 days for field data collection using smartphones installed with cyber tracker; (above right) downloading the same into SMART and generating reports. The final day was dedicated to aspects of SMART in relation to Law Enforcement Monitoring (LEM); Protected Area Threat Analysis (PATA); Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT); Protected Areas Enforcement Minimum Standards (PA-EMS); Conservation Oriented Patrol Standards (COPS); Law Enforcement Strategy (PA-LES) and Patrol Law Enforcement Assessment (PLEA).

Nelson Keshi, the Narok County Government County Executive Committee member or Tourism and Wildlife together with Willy Loigero Chief Officer, Tourism and Wildlife, presided over the training. They were both encouraged that WWF was bringing new technology in the Mara that will enhance the monitoring of wildlife and security patrols.

Save the Rhino International: Recent initiatives

Introduction

Save the Rhino International's vision is for all five rhino species to thrive in the wild for future generations.

We began fundraising for *in situ* rhino conservation programmes in 1992 and were formally registered as a charity (number 1035072) in 1994. We are governed by the Charity Commission for England and Wales, and our accounts are externally audited each year. We have a team of seven staff, based in central London, and a Board of eight Trustees

Review of 2015-16

During the past year, we have carried out a range of activities under each of our five strategies for conserving viable populations of rhinos in the wild, e.g.:

1. Raising funds to protect and increase rhino numbers and population distribution in African and Asian range states
- Our accounts for 2015-16 have not yet been audited, but we expect to have raised over £1.6 million
- We gave out £1,064,047 in grants, of which 71% was for rhino population monitoring, protection and range expansion

2. Facilitating the exchange of technical support and information between rhino conservation stakeholders
- Organised the logistics for the 2016 IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group meeting, held in February 2016 in Kruger National Park. This involved booking flights, transfers, accommodation and conference facilities for 70 participants from 16 countries; work to edit the meeting proceedings is ongoing
- Supported the post of Administrator for the Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries in Kenya, who is working alongside the Kenyan National Rhino Coordinator to deliver the *Conservation and Management Strategy for the Black Rhino in Kenya 2012-16*
- Acted as coordinator for some 20 European zoos who provide financial / technical support for in situ rhino conservation efforts

3. Ensuring that local communities in key rhino areas benefit from employment, capacity building, education, outreach and the sustainable use of natural resources
- Worked with Chester Zoo and the Zoological Society of London to support and mentor field staff working on environmental education programmes: Rafiki wa Faru in Mkomazi National Park in Tanzania; and Lolesha Luangwa in North Luangwa National Park in Zambia
- Successfully applied to the UK government's Darwin Initiative for a three-year grant entitled "Harmonising land use in Save Valley Conservancy in south-eastern Zimbabwe", which will see

the formation of a Joint Venture partnership between Senuko Ranching Pvt Ltd and the Gudo Community Development Trust

4. Developing and delivering behaviour-change campaigns to reduce the demand for rhino horn in consumer countries
- Continued our support for the behaviour-change campaigns being run by Education for Nature Vietnam and TRAFFIC-Vietnam, and to share lessons learned from them with other NGOs. Approximately 14% of our grants went on these demand-reduction efforts
- Complied preliminary date documenting the involvement of Chinese nationals' involvement in the illegal wildlife trade in rhino horn

5. Raising awareness throughout the world of the need for urgent global action on rhino conservation
- Organised/participated in a series of events to highlight the work being done in the field, including the annual Rhino Mayday (held in June 2015 in conjunction with Chester Zoo and the International Rhino Keepers' Association); the EAZA Rhino Taxon Advisory Group meeting in Wroclaw, and a number of London-based events for our supporters, at which field programme staff gave presentations
- Developed "Thorny issues" discussion articles for our website, which examined issues including the development of synthetic rhino horn and the role of transportation industries in the illegal wildlife trade

Internally, our main innovation during 2015-16 was to move onto a new customer-relationship-management database, Salesforce, which went live on 1 April 2015. A year later, we are seeing considerable returns on our investment of time and money. As 2016 progresses, we aim to be ever-more efficient and effective, so that we can best support field programmes in their efforts to tackle the poaching crisis and build their rhino populations.

Cathy Dean
Director
Save the Rhino International
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cathy@savetherhino.org
www.savetherhino.org