

Kenya uses drones to catch poachers

NAIROBI, KENYA: One of Kenya's best known private game reserves announced on Friday (7 December) a plan to fly unmanned surveillance drones to monitor and protect critically endangered rhinos from rampant poaching.

Oi Pejeta, a 90,000-acre non-profit private wildlife conservancy in central Kenya's Laikipia District, holds four of the world's last remaining seven northern white rhinos.

"We are looking to fund our first drone," the conservancy said in a public appeal to raise the US\$35,000 for the drone, which will be fixed with a live-streaming camera to track rhinos chipped with radio frequency tags.

"There is currently a poaching epidemic with countless rhino being slaughtered for their horns," it added.

"In a country with an average wage of just a dollar a day, a rhino horn can bring in US\$12,000," the equivalent a night's work for 30 year's income.

Kenya, which has the world's third largest rhino population, around 600 black and 300 white rhinos, is constantly battling poachers.

The illegal trade is driven by the voracious Asian and Middle Eastern demand for the animals' horns for use in traditional medicines for fevers, convulsions and as an aphrodisiac.

"The teams urgently need aerial support so that they can ensure they are covering the areas most at risk," it said, adding that the drone would be able to cover up to 80km and fly for an hour and a half on a single charge.

"Eventually it will also allow people all over the world, from homes to offices to schools and colleges, to take a virtual safari to an African wildlife conservancy," it added.

"The good news is that protecting wildlife means protecting tourism and tourism means more money for people in the local community, not just for a few poachers," the conservancy's spokesman said.

Source: *AFP* via I-Net Bridge