

Buffett Foundation helps to combat rhino poaching

The South African National Parks (SANParks) has received funding to the amount of R255m to combat rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park (KNP) and test anti-poaching tactics that can be applied in other regions of Africa, where poaching can be a source of funding for armed groups.



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This three-year initiative has been made possible by the Howard G. Buffett Foundation (HGBF), a private foundation in the United States, and the Nature Conservation Trust (NCT), a South African public benefit organisation.

The effort in the KNP will create an intensive protection zone (IPZ), using sophisticated detection and tracking equipment and infrastructure on the ground and in the air, elite canine units and highly-trained ranger teams, and improved intelligence gathering and observation and surveillance systems.

Criminal networks

The KNP is currently home to over 40% of the world's remaining 22,000 rhinos, the largest single population of rhinos in the world. Since January 2010, 1,383 rhinos have been poached from the KNP, part of a larger assault that resulted in 2,368 rhinos poached in South Africa over the past few years. In some areas of Africa entire populations of rhino have been eliminated.

KNP's poaching problem is fuelled mainly by illicit criminal networks in Mozambique, South Africa, and East Asia, but evidence suggests that armed groups elsewhere in Africa derive significant funding from poaching activities. KNP's IPZ will also serve as a testing ground to inform targeted efforts to combat poaching in these other African regions.

"SANParks, thanks to the leadership of David Mabunda, and the Kruger National Park, under the direction of General Johan Jooste, provide a unique opportunity to test new technology and new ideas within the best operating national parks system on the continent," said NCT chairman and HGBF CEO Howard G. Buffett. "This effort joins our foundation's historic support for conservation with our current focus on conflict mitigation in Africa, particularly in the Great Lakes region."

Illicit wildlife trade

"The scale, complexity, and strategic value of this initiative is truly unprecedented for SANParks, and we believe will be transformative in our ongoing efforts to address poaching and the decimation of the rhino population in Kruger National Park," said SANParks CEO David Mabunda. "More importantly, the lessons we hope to learn and share across SANParks and the continent will, we believe, develop new and more effective ways to combat illicit wildlife trade, particularly where it is financing armed groups."

The Leadership for Conservation in Africa (LCA), led by its South African-based CEO Chris Marais, will provide advisory and advocacy support for the collaboration. NCT and HGBF have a long history of support for conservation in Africa. NCT, with 100% of its funding provided by HGBF, created the Jubatus Cheetah Reserve in 2001 and the Ukulima Research Farm in 2007, both located in the Limpopo Province in South Africa.

Through its direct investments and support for NCT, HGBF has, prior to this announcement, committed over R485m in South Africa for a range of conservation and agriculture development activities including strengthening environmental governance, carnivore research in the Shashe/Limpopo Trans-Frontier Conservation region, preservation of natural resources, cheetah research and regional planning for cheetah conservation, development of agricultural strategies and production of improved seed for smallholder farmers. HGBF has committed an additional R1.9bn in support of its Africa Great Lakes Peace Initiative, which also includes funding for anti-poaching efforts designed to interrupt the capital flow to armed groups.

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