

COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Success of KZN dehorning project

Staff Writer

AFTER being dehorned, a rhino’s horn regrowth should be trimmed about every 18 months to deter poachers, costing an average of R7 000-R8 000 per animal.

This week, conservation association Project Rhino, Love Africa Marketing, Wildlife ACT, Wildlands and Emvokweni Community Trust (ECT) hosted key national and international media on a three-day visit to Somkhanda Game Reserve in Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal, to give them an understanding of the poaching issues faced, as well as the effort that goes into protecting rhinos and other wildlife.

Officials said the intervention had achieved positive results over the past two years since it was initiated in many private reserves in KZN.

For five years since 2011, the rhinos poached on private reserves made up 24% of the total lost. Since dehorning started, this has dropped to an average of 4.5% over the past two years.

The media visited Zululand Anti-poaching Wing (ZapWing) base and Project Rhino K-9 Unit, which assists Zululand member reserves with an additional law enforcement tool.

At the Zap Wing base, they learnt of the importance of aerial surveillance in supporting the 25 member reserves. It is the crucial “eye in the sky” which assists the team on the ground with co-ordinating a quicker response time should an emergency arise.

Co-ordinator Chris Galliers said: “Project Rhino, now in its seventh year, is still facing the rhino poaching and wildlife crime challenges.

“The perception might be that the poaching problem has dissipated, but we have seen a continual escalation, with 2017 being the worst year the province has seen this century.”

Project Rhino brings together organisations with a common vision and goal, identifying synergies through an integrated, common approach and is collectively a representative body that carries powerful leverage ability, he said.

“We continue to work towards the ultimate goal of stopping wildlife crime.”

The media was taken on game vehicles around the 12 000 hectare reserve, where



EYE IN THE SKY: A rhino is darted from the air prior to being dehorned as a deterrent to poachers.

rhino were darted, dehorned and fitted with new trackers. During a dehorning activity, DNA samples are taken and the young are ear-notched. This process enables the monitoring team to uniquely recognise the individual.

The dehorning process is conducted by an experienced wildlife veterinarian and team of specialists. The rhino is sedated and the horn removed in a quick and painless procedure. The safety and well-being of the animal is a priority.

Rhino horn is made of keratin, the same protein that makes up hair and finger nails.

The conservation-in-action team visited the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park Horse Unit.

The rangers cover long distances on horseback as some of these areas are not easily traversed on foot and are at the coalface of conservation.

Wildlands executive director Dr Roelie Kloppers said Wildlands and the Emvokweni Community Trust was extremely fortunate to have partners such as Project



FAST AND PAINLESS: A dehorning is conducted by a wildlife veterinarian and a team of specialists. As soon as the rhino is sedated, the horn is removed and reshaped.

Pictures: Chris Galliers/Rhino Co-ordinator

Rhino and Wildlife ACT to help manage the population at Somkhanda.

“We are also very grateful to the Green Trust and the

Global Nature Fund who support our work in the neighbouring community, spreading the benefits of conservation to the owners of Somkhanda.

“All our partners immediately rallied to our cause when they learnt that we lost a rhino due to poaching last month, and assisted with the

safeguarding of the calf that was orphaned.

“Through this week’s operation they have also assisted us with ensuring all the rhino in the reserve are dehorned as a safety measure to discourage poaching,” Kloppers said.

Wildlife ACT has had a long association with Somkhanda since the first rhinos were introduced, and commended the Emvokweni Community Trust for proactively protecting their rhino population by dehorning every rhino on the property, said Wildlife ACT director Taryn Gilroy.

“Wildlife ACT assists with ongoing daily monitoring of both the white and black rhino populations, making use of state-of-the-art technology in the form of tracking foot collars that Wildlands and the ECT elect to fit to every single rhino.

“These measures, in conjunction with high field ranger densities, mean that the risk of poaching to this important population is greatly reduced.”