



RHINO ORPHAN RESPONSE PROJECT PROVIDING RELIEF TO RHINO POACHING CASUALTIES

Start

The Rhino Orphan Response Project, launched by the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) in partnership with rhino rehabilitation specialist, Karen Trendler, has had a busy but successful time working with the casualties of the rhino poaching crisis.

The Rhino Orphan Response Project was established to address the need for expert care for the orphans, and often the injured survivors of rhino poaching incidences. Key objectives of the project are to address the limited expertise available for applying emergency care to injured or orphaned rhino; the lack of available, expert, rapid response personnel; and the lack of coordinated referral and support networks for rhino calves. In addition the project aims to reduce unnecessary deaths, prolonged suffering and further traumatising of poaching casualties. The Rhino Orphan Response Project provides a legitimate and expert alternative to the proliferation of so-called 'calf rescue' projects, which often result in the exploitation of the calves as marketing and fundraising tools. When captive animals become tame and familiar with human beings, this sentences them to a lifetime in captivity as they cannot be reintroduced to the wild or become part of a free-ranging rhino herd again.

According to Trendler, "When we launched the Project it was with a primary focus on the rhino orphans. Through working in the field with the poaching casualties we have realised however, that there are also adult rhinos that survive attacks but are left with multiple wounds and severe facial mutilation in desperate need of our help. As a result our work has extended to include these victims of the poaching crisis."

One of the aims of the Rhino Orphan Response Project is to build capacity to develop a national network of skilled individuals to form a response team. To achieve this, training courses, as well as operational plans, have been developed, and the first in a series of national workshops for conservationists was held in March 2012 at the Johannesburg Zoo. Three further training workshops are planned for KZN, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape within the next three months.

"The past month has been exceptionally busy and productive for the Rhino Orphan Response Project. We are proud to report that we have been able to provide invaluable assistance to rhino in need through training, supplying information and providing advice and

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The Endangered Wildlife Trust is a non-profit, public benefit organisation dedicated to conserving species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

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support, as well as *in situ* field responses. In addition we have provided telephonic and email advice on search and rescue activities, diets and treatments, calf capture and handling that have helped to keep calves in the wild,” commented Kirsty Brebner, Rhino Project Manager at the EWT.

Recently support was provided to an eight month old orphaned rhino calf in KwaZulu-Natal. The Rhino Orphan Response Project was able to monitor the calf and its condition, and advise the rhino owner on the best course of action for the calf. Fortunately, soon thereafter the calf was adopted by a wild female despite the fact that she already had a three month old calf. This unusual behaviour was wonderful to see as the female is now very protective of her adopted calf and all three rhinos are doing well.

The project is currently assisting with a critically ill black rhino calf, which suffered a prolapsed rectum. The appropriate veterinary care was sourced and facilities modified to provide better care, nursing and husbandry of the calf. The Rhino Orphan Response Project has assisted and supported in directing search and rescue attempts for a number of calves, and is investigating a variety of methods to aid in the search for calves such as the use of tracking dogs when calves become lost following poaching incidents. Information received through the Rhino Orphan Response Project has also, in one case, led to the arrest of a poaching gang.

Trendler concluded: “The successes of the last month have not been without their challenges. Security of the calves is a concern, as is the difficulty of accessing the calves. In some instances, distrust of the authorities by owners leads to a reticence to report poaching. The Rhino Orphan Response Project also has to contend with commercial “play and pay” facilities, as well as the black market that is emerging for rhino calves. We would like to thank all the project sponsors for their support so far. Without their constant and generous support we would not be able to help this highly threatened species.”

For further information about the workshops and the Rhino Orphan Response Strategy please contact Karen Trendler at karojay@global.co.za or 072 969 4499 and Kirsty Brebner at kirstyb@ewt.org.za. This project is sponsored by Sting Music, EMI Music, My Planet Rhino Card, Rhino Force, the Schneiner Foundation, the Johannesburg Zoo, Heron Bridge College, the Scorona Foundation and the Pittsburg Zoo, as well as individuals including Albert van der Merwe and family and Walter Hirzebruch.

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