



TIKKI HYWOOD FOUNDATION (2)

Right: **Fresh start.** When rescued, Impi was given the nourishment he needed by bottle
Above: **Free spirit.** Mbeu on her release day in Matusadona National Park



TRACKING THE WORLD'S MOST TRAFFICKED MAMMAL

Conservation organisation African Parks (AP) and non-profit Tikki Hywood Foundation (THF) are sharing their expertise and resources in a pioneering partnership to save critically endangered pangolins. Joanna Craig, AP's funding and reporting manager at Zimbabwe's Matusadona National Park, describes how they continue to monitor these elusive creatures once they are back in the wild.

After hiking up Matusadona's escarpment for close on two hours, we stopped under the shade of a tree, listening hard for the tell-tale tick-tick-tick from a telemetry device attached to the scales of a pangolin.

We were searching for Mbeu, the 298th pangolin to come under THF's care. Named after the Ndau word for the tiny tree seed she resembled on her rescue, Mbeu had been released into the park six months earlier, along with another pangolin Impi ('the warrior'), a much larger male around the same age. They

were the first rescued pangolins to be released and tracked by the Matusadona Pangolin Monitoring Programme in this 1470sq km protected area, enclosed by Kariba's lakeshore to the north and community-owned land to the south.

In Zimbabwe, when a pangolin is seized from the illegal wildlife trade — sometimes sick, often starved — it is taken into the custodianship of THF, who ensures it is nurtured back to good health and self-sufficiency before being rewilded.

Rescued in separate sting operations, Impi and Mbeu (both Temminck's ground

pangolins) had been held by the poachers for a week. Weak and traumatised, the pups — bare, pink and clinging to their mothers — initially needed intensive care, but two years later were able to forage for themselves on ants, ant eggs, pupae and termites. Then, ready for rewilding, they were flown to Matusadona.

Impi soon carved out a territory for himself high in the hills, giving the project monitors the arduous task of keeping up with him when checking his whereabouts every couple of days. Mbeu, however, hovers in the foothills.

With her position confirmed by telemetry, we began following a dry and rocky watercourse towards the plateau. Finally, after hours of searching in the scorching heat, a ranger called us quietly: "Here she is." Mbeu, true to her bashful form, lay fast asleep, concealed among boulders, hugging herself in a dark, protective nook in the natural habitat where she belongs.



Picket Chabwedzeka oversees a rhino dehorning

VICTORIA FALLS PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

How to dehorn a rhino

The theory is that if a rhino has no horn, there's no profit in killing it for the illegal wildlife trade. Picket Chabwedzeka, manager of Victoria Falls Private Game Reserve in Zimbabwe, explains what happens on a dehorning exercise.

A rhino's first dehorning occurs around the age of four. As the horns grow back, the procedure is repeated every three years. On D-day, the ranger team closely monitors the rhino's movements and sends GPS coordinates to the vet and helicopter pilot, who get airborne.

From the helicopter, the vet darts the rhino. The ground team are now on high alert because the rhino is running with the chopper hovering above as the

pilot attempts to guide it to a safe, open area. The rangers rush to the location. As the tranquilizer kicks in, they assist the collapsing rhino into a sitting position, folding its front legs inwards.

Then everyone jumps into action: one ranger sprays the rhino with water to keep it cool; another puts cotton wool into its ears; someone else blindfolds it and three more place a canvas sheet under its chin to collect the horn dust.

The vet measures the horns, calculating where to cut, regularly checking the rhino's oxygen levels and temperature. Moments later the chainsaw fires up — that growling sound sends shivers up your spine. Sitting on the animal's back, the vet starts sawing the rear horn, then the larger one in front.

Once done, the rhino's back is marked with orange water-paint, signifying that it's been dehorned. The vet implants a microchip between its shoulders and a transponder into the base of the stump for tracking purposes. Then they administer the antidote to wake the animal and everyone gets out of the way.

Rhinos are State animals, so police are present during these operations. They take the horns — and the collected dust — to the National Parks office to be weighed, before being transported to Harare where it is locked in the State vault.

For me, it's deeply personal. Dehorning at Victoria Falls signifies an 18-year legacy of zero poaching; I've been involved for eight years. The threat to rhinos and rangers is real. It saddens me that we must dehorn these creatures for their survival, but I'm immensely grateful to everyone who makes this project a success.

WORDS: CINDY-LOU DALE

A (WORKING) DOG'S LIFE...

This year, Conservation South Luangwa's (CSL's) K9 Unit celebrates its 10th anniversary. We explore a year in the life of Zambia's first canine law enforcement team

Last year proved to be highly successful for Earl, Tygee, Gene, Ody and Cassi, CSL's five dogs trained in the USA in the fight against wildlife crime. They were deployed in 154 operations, including:

- 15 random and quick checkpoints
- 98 half-or full-day roadblocks on known trafficking routes
- 14,365 vehicle searches
- 25 intelligence-led property searches

In the context of CSL's law enforcement activities as a whole, the K9 Unit is responsible for 24 per cent of all suspects arrested, 29 per cent of firearms confiscated and 59 per cent of bushmeat



EDWARD SELFE

The sniff test. Handler Mike Njobvu and Earl hit the road

seized. Yet the costs to run the team accounted for just 7 per cent of CSL's total expenditure.

In their downtime, the dogs enjoy nothing better than to play ball games, run and swim or simply snuggle up with their human counterparts. The love, loyalty and trust they share with their handlers are key to their success.

To sponsor a dog or buy original wildlife artwork with a percentage of the cost going towards the K9 Unit, go to www.cslzambia.org