

Youth urged to protect Namibia's rhino

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THE World Rhino Day was first celebrated by WWF South Africa in 2010. Since then the world has followed suit to spread awareness of the need to save the five species of rhino.

Namibia celebrated the day on 22 September at Khorixas with deputy environment minister Bernadette Jagger officiating.

The country is home to the largest population of free roaming black rhino in the world. The ministry has kept the exact number a secret as part of the strategy to combat wildlife crime.

Addressing a large gathering of youth groups, Jagger urged conservation NGOs, including Save the Rhino Trust, to continue helping to conserve the rhino, one of the world's most iconic species. She said: "Communities and traditional authorities have a big role to play to make sure that people are aware and help to combat wildlife crime."

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Namibia Nature Foundation were the main sponsors of the event, which was mainly organised to create awareness among communities and inspire them to understand that they play a vital role in the protection and survival of the country's rhino, which is under threat from poaching syndicates for its horn. The theme for this year, "Keep the Five Alive" refers to the five rhino species found in the world – the Greater one-horned rhino, Javan and Sumatran rhinos as well as southern Africa's pride, the white and black rhinos. These species are classified as vulnerable to endangered. Like the mammoths, the predecessors of the modern elephant, that once roamed the earth, the rhino may one day become extinct. Two thirds of the world's rhino species could be lost not only due to loss of habitat, but mainly also because of poaching by criminal syndicates supplying rhino

horn to Asia, where it is in high demand for its purported medicinal properties.

The Khorixas event was specifically targeted at youth through various activities. Pupils from two local schools engaged in a thought-provoking debate on the merits of burning confiscated rhino horns.

Other activities which took place, included cultural dances, music performances from local artists, and a soccer match to entertain the crowds and ensure this was a memorable day with good lessons to take away.

The survival of Namibia's black and white rhino population greatly depends on community vigilance, protection, and law enforcement.

In 2014 Save the Rhino and rhino rangers and the ministry of environment introduced stronger anti-poaching activities. The Namibian Police and the Namibian Defence Force have also been deployed to assist conservation NGOs and communities resulting in a huge drop in the number of rhinos killed by poachers.

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