



## Private reserves stop poachers but it takes R200 000 per rhino, per year

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**The Balule Nature Reserve has recorded huge success in fighting poaching - no rhinos have been killed in the past two years.**

Bruce Whitfield interviews Vince Ryan, chairperson of the Balule Nature Reserve in the Greater Kruger Park.

**- Collaboration and a host of other measures have succeeded in preventing rhino poaching in private reserves in the Greater Kruger Park.**

**- "We had to take a hard look at ourselves; many people had simple solutions but there is no simple solution" says Balule Nature Reserve's Vince Ryan.**

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A white rhino and her calf at Kruger National Park, South Africa.  
(pixabay.com)

An initiative to stop rhino poaching in the sprawling Greater Kruger Protected Area Network has proved astonishingly successful.

The [Balule Nature Reserve](#) (BNR) reports that it has recorded not a single rhino killing in the past two years.

The reserve is situated on the Olifants River, between Hoedspruit and Phalaborwa.

It shares an unfenced border with the Greater Kruger, and forms part of the Associated Private Nature Reserves bordering the Park.

Bruce Whitfield interviews BNR Chairperson Vince Ryan to find out about their winning strategy.

[Dismantling international crime syndicates can reduce rhino poaching](#)

Ryan says their worst period was between 2014 and 2018 when they lost 37 rhino in total to poaching.

In 2017 alone, 17 animals were killed.

He says the demand for rhino horn was driven by the prices on the black market.

*We had to take a hard look at ourselves and the problem we were facing. Many people had simple solutions - but there is no simple solution.*

*Vince Ryan, Chair - Balule Nature Reserve*

They realised collaboration was key in putting an end to the killing of rhino in the area, he says.

Ryan, together with then-chair Sharon Haussmann and head warden Ian Nowak, decided to make some "radical" changes.

*It's a very emotional and traumatic experience, so all the wardens were trying to protect their own backyard and we understood that.*

*Vince Ryan, Chair - Balule Nature Reserve*

They assembled the wardens and got them to work as one cohesive unit for the entire Balule Reserve (around 40 000 hectares).

This then led to their led to neighbours joining them and around 120 000 hectares being worked as a cohesive unit, Ryan says.

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Other measures included dehorning the rhino, virtually militarising their rangers, and implementing integrity testing.

"It was hard, we did 400 polygraph tests."

The last time BNR lost a rhino to poaching was in 2019, and the culprits are currently on trial.

The poachers were arrested thanks to the technology they now have and the cohesive working relationship between all the wardens, Ryan says.

2021 and 2022 so far have been incident-free.

*One of the bigger things we did was to remove third party service providers from the whole landscape and we kept control of our own backyard... and we built very strong relationships with the SAPS and wildlife crime units.*

*So it's not just us, it's everybody who bought into the changes that we had the courage to implement*

*Vince Ryan, Chair - Balule Nature Reserve*

costing about R200 000 per rhino per year to do this strategy? any sign pressure is easing?

*I think as long as the price of the product is maintained at the levels it is on the black market, this war is not going away.*

*Vince Ryan, Chair - Balule Nature Reserve*

**For more from Ryan, scroll to the top for the interview audio**