

KZN game reserve masters the art of rhino conservation

Somkhanda Game Reserve, based in the Zululand District, carried out a successful three-day rhino dehorning project last month.



Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife veterinarian, Dr Rowan Leeming, dehorn a rhino at Somkhanda Reserve. PHOTO: MEGAN WHITTINGTON / WILDLIFE ACT

Somkhanda Game Reserve has embraced the latest tracking technology in their fight against rhino poaching within the reserve.

The game reserve, based in the Zululand District in KwaZulu-Natal, carried out a successful three-day rhino dehorning project last month, during which they also implemented tracking technology to key individuals in the herds.

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These devices have become significant in monitoring rhino populations.

The devices, donated by Wildlife ACT, and fitted during the dehorning process, will assist in tracking a rhino's movement patterns and allowing teams to respond quickly to irregularities as well as monitor the territories, condition of individuals, demographics and more.

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Somkhanda managing director Meiring Prinsloo said:

Due to the increased rhino poaching pressure experienced in KZN during the past few months, we had to drastically intensify our overall counter-poaching measures. This obviously comes at increased, and mostly unplanned, additional costs.

Prinsloo said, thanks to the additional support of Rhino Recovery Fund and Wildlife ACT in providing these technologies, the reserve has been able to continue its mission to safeguard both its rhinos and other wildlife.

These devices are connected to the Rhino Recovery Fund's solar-powered low power wide area networking system known as LoRaWAN, which allow teams to monitor remotely.

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The system has coverage of a majority of Somkhanda and is primarily focused on high rhino density areas.

Wildlife ACT conservation co-ordinator Chris du Toit said:

Intensive, on-the-ground monitoring, along with the use of technology such as tracking devices, helps to gather this vital information more effectively, which is then used to make informed management decisions to better protect these vulnerable animals.

These technologies will work hand-in-hand with the ground teams that monitor on foot and report on the population numbers, feeding habits, breeding behaviour and condition of individuals.