



SABI SAND WILDTUIN RHINO PROTECTION



Sabi Sand Wildtuin security anti-poaching helicopter

SSW Rhino Protection Programme:

Rhino poaching has severely impacted almost all of the reserves within South Africa, and as a result the Sabi Sand Wildtuin has committed itself to providing a safe haven for rhino. In 2013, after significant rhino losses in the area and across the country the Sabi Sand undertook the implementation of a major rhino protection project aimed at creating a sanctuary for our rhino. SSW developed a multi-layered security intervention, and invested heavily in Hi-Tec perimeter

fencing, boots on the ground, vehicles, K9, security equipment, intelligence and a rigorous community engagement campaign.

The SSW is to be a refuge for both black and white rhinoceros, an area from which other reserves can be restocked should either species be pushed to the brink of extinction. Moreover, as these animals play a key role in the genetic diversity of the Greater Kruger National Park, the reserve would act to conserve these important genes should the African population be drastically depleted.

As almost all poaching incidents occur after dark, “owning the night” and rapid response is fundamental for success. Given the large area to be covered and the rugged nature of the terrain, a critical tool that was identified was a helicopter with night vision capabilities.

After extensive investigation, a Bell Long Ranger was identified as a suitable model. The helicopter allows us to respond to a breach or incursion within 15 minutes. We have experience of incidents during which poachers have entered and exited the reserve within this 15 minute time slot. The helicopter has been proven to improve the anti-poaching team effectiveness far beyond what could ever be achieved with manpower and vehicles alone.

Review of helicopter impact

- Demand and concomitant poaching pressure has increased as evidenced by 122% increase in the number of poaching entries to the reserve for the 9 months since the helicopter has been deployed versus the 9 months prior.
- Improving reaction capability and response time impacts poacher success. Despite 122% increase in poaching entries the kill rate was contained and remained flat at 15%.
- The helicopter has worked to prevent further rhino fatalities. This was most noticeable in incidents where poaching groups were identified and detained using the helicopter before they could enter the reserve.
- The deployment of the helicopter has been extremely effective in establishing a visible security presence in and around the reserve. This has been evidenced by community forum awareness and feedback indicating:

“it is easy for the security to react now”

“the Sabi Sand is a difficult area to get rhino because poachers can be easily trapped and caught”

- An additional factor that has been identified is the impact of the helicopter on ranger morale:
 - The helicopter has enabled rapid emergency medical support in the case of a ranger being seriously injured.
 - The rangers are more confident entering contact situations knowing that the helicopter can bring back-up quickly when needed – this has decreased reaction time by up to 1 hour.
 - The additional investment in the helicopter to support the ground forces and the investment in ranger skills relating to the helicopter has considerably increased ranger morale.

Donor Funding

The Sabi Sand Nature Conservation Trust is a registered Public Benefit Organisation. Donations will be paid directly into and managed by the Sabi Sand Nature Conservation Trust. No administration fee will be charged meaning 100% of donated funds go directly to project costs where it is needed most.

Contact details:

For more information or to get involved please contact the Sabi Sand Wildtuin Warden, David Powrie on Tel. 079 946 7433 or email at warden@sabisand.co.za.