

Report on Rhino Conservation in Zimbabwe (2014 to 31st July 2015)



**Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management
Authority**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has continued supporting the existence of black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) and white rhinos (*Ceratotherium simum*) in intensive protection zones that are situated in State protected areas as well as private conservancies where they are being conserved on custodianship basis. There has been a steady increase in rhino population over years, from 689 in 2010 to 811 as of 30th July 2015.

2.0 STATUS OF RHINOCEROS CONSERVATION IN ZIMBABWE

2.1 Rhino Areas and their Sizes in Zimbabwe as at 31st July 2015

A total area of 7 802 square kilometres (39% being state land and 61% being private land) supports black rhinos whilst about 9 489 square kilometres (55% being state land and 45% being private land) also supports white rhinos.

2.2 Rhino Population Status in Zimbabwe

As at 31st December 2014, Zimbabwe had a total rhino population of 825 rhinos comprising 498 black and 327 white rhinos (Table 1) with most animals occurring on private conservancies (Malilangwe, 29%; Bubi 37% and Save Valley 18%). As at 31st July 2015, the total rhino population had decreased by 14 rhinos to 811 comprising 325 white and 486 black rhinos. The population decline was mostly influenced by poaching which accounted for 21 individuals from January to July 2015 as compared to 10 that were poached in year 2014. Zimbabwe exported 8 black rhinos to Botswana in 2015. Rhino population trends from 2013 to 31 July 2015 in the state land and private lands are illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Rhino population status from 2013 to 31 July 2015 in the state and private lands

Species and Area	Total Dec 2013	Total Dec 2014	Total Jan to 31 st July 2015
White Rhino			
State Land	47	39	62
Private Land	410	459	265
Subtotal	457	498	327
Black Rhino			
State Land	56	63	39
Private Land	240	264	445
Subtotal	296	327	484
GRAND TOTAL	753	825	811

Figure 1 shows total rhino population and poaching trends for black and white rhino in Zimbabwe from year 2000 to 31st July 2015.

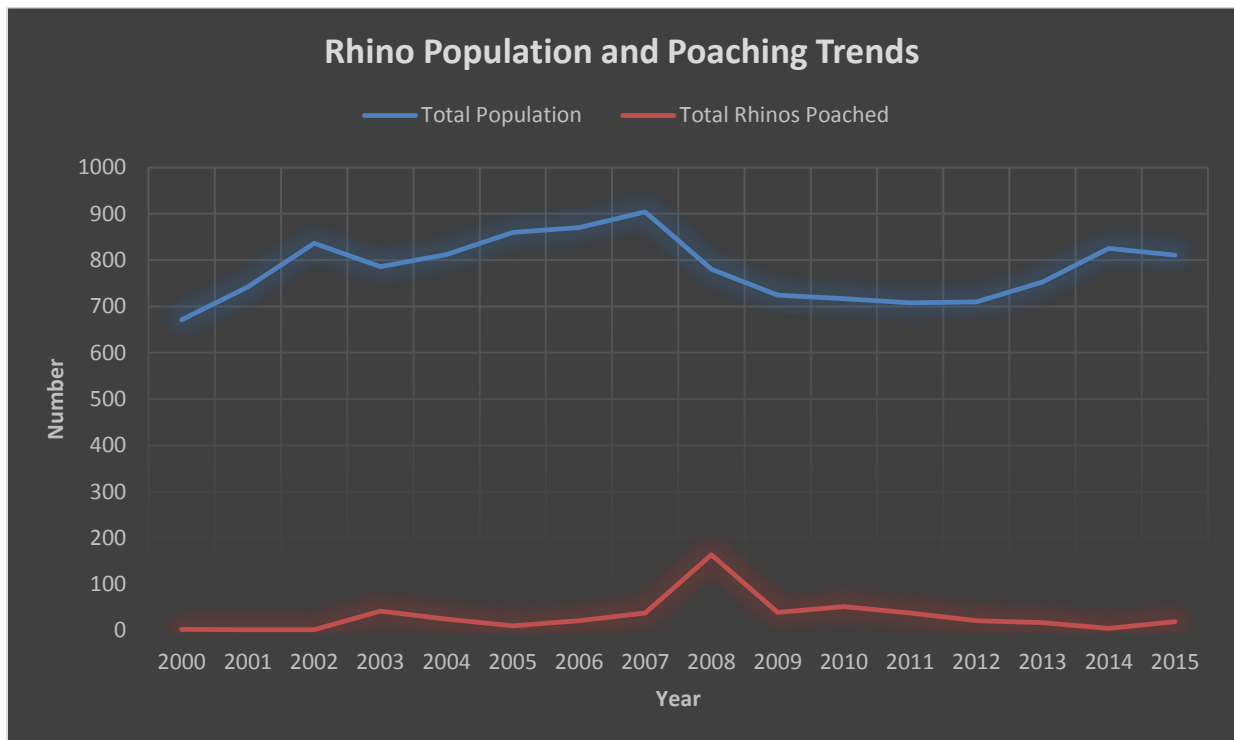


Figure 1: Population and poaching trends for black and white rhinos in Zimbabwe from 2000 to 31st July 2015

2.3 Rhino Mortalities

A total of 12 rhino mortalities (2 white and 10 black rhinos) were recorded from January to December 2014. The 12 mortalities comprised of 10 that were poached, 1 due to natural causes and the remaining 1 was due to unknown causes. A total of 23 mortalities were recorded from January to 31st July 2015 out of which 21 (16 black and 5 white) were poached. The remaining mortalities were due to unknown cause and due to euthanizing

2.4 Stocks of Specimens of Rhinoceroses and Stock Management

The current rhino horn stockpile is approximately 5000 kilograms. The horns are kept at Central stores in a vault and are guarded 24 hours in a day.

3.0 CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

3.1 Rhino Operations

A schedule of management operation are agreed upon for implementation during the National Rhino Management meeting that is held once in March every year. During the year 2014, 52 rhinos were dehorned, 96 were ear notched while 4 translocations were done within Zimbabwe.

From January to July 2015, 57 rhinos were dehorned, 114 were ear notched while 51 were fitted with implants. 5 translocations were done within Zimbabwe while 8 black rhinos were exported to Botswana.

3.2 Rhino Management Plan

The country continued implementing the Zimbabwe Rhino Policy and Management Framework that is valid from 2011 to 2016.

3.3 Communities Awareness Programmes and Activities

State and private land holders continued to work with communities surrounding all rhino range areas to enhance rhino conservation. Some of the activities being done are as follows;

- The country commemorates World Rhino Day every year in September as a way of enhancing awareness on the importance of rhino conservation.
- Several properties have been supporting educational and agricultural programs within surrounding rhino range areas and at least 2500 children and 141 primary schools are benefiting from educational incentive schemes.
- Livelihoods enhancement projects such as bee keeping, irrigation and employment are being supported within communities living adjacent to rhino range areas.
- Employment of local community personnel in part jobs such as road and fireguard maintenance as well as erection of fences.
- Drilling of boreholes, supporting clinics with medical equipment and vaccination of at least 700 dogs was done.
- Conducting rhino conservation awareness workshops that were particularly targeted to rural communities, the judiciary, the prosecutors and law-enforcement agencies. The workshops highlighted the extinction threats and their causes and advocated for the expeditious finalization of cases and improvement in convictions in rhino cases in courts.
- Increased collaboration with other law enforcement agencies on anti-poaching patrols and activities. This has resulted in notable improvement in reaction, arrests and convictions on rhino related crimes.
- Private conservancies will introduce a rhino conservation education and awareness mobile cinema unit in 2015 as a medium of sharing rhino conservation and protection information.

- A rhino conservation Centre will also be established in one of the communities in Zimbabwe to enable the people living in rhino range areas learn more about rhino conservation.
- Plans are underway to introduce rhino quiz competitions in all the participating school clusters starting from 2015

3.4 Training

Law enforcement personnel in rhino range areas were trained in anti - poaching, GIS, rhino monitoring and fire management techniques. The trainings are important in enhancing rhino monitoring and protection efforts.

3.5 Joint Operations

Joint operations, Intelligence gathering and exchange with other law enforcement agencies were carried out in risky areas. Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (ZPWMA) also made use of its specialised reaction units to enhance effectiveness of its patrols.

3.6 Research Programmes

Studies are being conducted on the influence of land use and management on the relative abundance and distribution of white rhino and other species around the Matobo National Park, Zimbabwe. The study will provide recommendations for ecological management within the protected area, in order to enhance the socio-economic environment in and around the national park through improved wildlife sightings for tourism and holistically beneficial land management practices

4.0 CHALLENGES

One major challenge in terms of biological management of rhino populations in Zimbabwe is the skewed sex ratios, where there are more males than females. Mobilisation of resources for wildlife conservation and the protection of key species such as the rhino has remained a key challenge as well. Other challenges currently being faced and the strategies being adopted to address the challenges are highlighted below.

- Continued incidents of rhino poaching. The country will continue engaging all law enforcement agencies, the judiciary as well as the public in general to fight against rhino poaching.
- Human encroachment in rhino areas. This has been particularly experienced in those areas where adjacent communities have not been benefiting from utilisation of wildlife

resources. Zimbabwe will promote rhino conservation strategies that enhance the generation of tangible benefits to communities living adjacent to such areas.

- Inadequate resources for rhino protection and sustenance of awareness campaigns. The private conservancies and NGOs have continued assisting in mobilization of limited human and financial resources
- Continued increase of the rhino stockpile at central stores. This presents financial, management and security challenges to the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The national rhino population has been increasing steadily over the past 5 years due to cooperation and collaboration among the rhino custodians and other stakeholders. The Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority will continue holding annual stakeholder consultative meetings to strategize and prepare annual operational work plans. Schools and the communities living adjacent to privately owned conservancies will continue to be engaged so that they become instrumental in promoting rhino conservation.