



Image by Julia Gunther

BLACK MAMBA APU MAJORITY FEMALE ANTI-POACHING UNIT

"We must conserve nature, because nature conserves Us"
Siphiwe Sithole 2016

**Eco-Warrior Silver
Award 2017**

**Rhino
Conservation
Practitioner of the
Year 2015**

**UNEP Champion of
the Earth 2015**

**Bush Meat
Poaching reduced
by 89% since 2014**

**Rhino Poaching
reduced by 17%
since 2014**

BLACK MAMBA APU

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Introduction

The Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit is the first majority female anti-poaching unit in South Africa. Founded in 2013 by Transfrontier Africa NPC in its capacity as a host agent to the Extended public works Program, to protect the Olifants West Region of Balule Nature Reserve. Within the first year of operation the Black Mambas were invited to expand into other regions and now protect all boundaries of Balule Nature Reserve.

The teams operate within Balule Nature Reserve, part of the Greater Kruger National Park and work to the concept of the “Broken Window” philosophy, striving to make our area of influence the most undesirable, most difficult and least profitable place to poach any species. Our Black Mamba Rangers are deployed in five different regions with the 52,000ha Balule Nature Reserve that borders the Kruger National Park on both sides of the Olifants River.

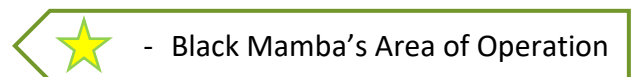
The objectives of the Black Mamba project are not only the protection of rhinos through boots on the ground but also through being a role model in their communities. These 32 young women and 2 men, with a passion for wildlife and rhino conservation, are the voice in the community through their conservation work. They want their communities to understand that the benefits are greater through rhino conservation rather than poaching, addressing the social and moral decay that is a product of the rhino poaching within their communities. They are concerned for their children’s sake as the false economy has brought loose morals and narcotics into their communities.

Where we Operate



Balule Nature Reserve is part of the Associated Private Nature Reserves (APNR) that forms a contractual component of the Greater Kruger National Park. Balule’s Western Region has been registered with the National and Provincial governments as a component of the national protected areas network. This is an open system of about 198,000ha, which further joins the 2,800,000ha of the Kruger National Park, totaling roughly three million hectares of unfenced African savannah! The Black Mambas thus supply protection to all the wild animals that roam freely throughout Balule Private Nature Reserve, and safe-guard the most western region of Kruger Park.

Balule are the proud custodians of Black and White Rhinoceros which interact freely as part of the Greater Kruger National Park’s meta-population of rhino.



Our Objectives

The Black Mamba APU is much more than just an anti-poaching unit. Whilst our main objective is the security of the reserve and the protection of wildlife, we also strive to create a strong bond and educate the communities that live on the boundaries of Balule and the Greater Kruger Park to install a proud, sympathetic and patriotic community with pro-environmental ethos. It is our belief that the 'war' on poaching will not be won with guns and bullets, but through social upliftment and the education of local communities surrounding the reserves. The Black Mambas are not only Anti-Poaching Rangers, they are role models who cherish life and do not want to live in a village of orphans and widows.

Anti-Poaching

Early detection and rapid response is all that stands between the poachers and our wildlife. The Black Mambas are the first line of defense providing boots on the ground and are responsible for the early detection of poaching insurgents through monitoring and surveillance during their daily patrols. This allows for our armed units to remain within the reserve with the 'assets'.



The Black Mambas anti-poaching strategy includes 'visual policing' through daily boundary patrols which are conducted on foot during first light and by vehicle at last light. Observation and listening posts are stationed in critical areas such as known entry and exit points or popular rhino waterholes for signs of poisoning. Disruptive patrols are performed within areas of high rhino density to thwart any attempts to poach rhino in our area. Road Blocks involve searching known and unknown vehicles for any illegal or suspicious items. Building sites and staff compounds within the reserve are searched regularly to gather intelligence and ensure all reserve rules are being adhered to and regular sweeps are conducted throughout the Reserve and neighbouring Tribal lands in search of snares.

Snares are wire or cable traps which are set by what we refer to as 'Bush meat poachers', with the intention to catch variety of antelope species for their meat which they can then sell. These traps are non-selective, catching anything that moves through them and causing a slow death, primarily due to dehydration. Larger animals can usually break the traps away from their 'anchor' points, but are then left with it still cutting into the body part that became entangled causing infections, amputations or in severe cases and if left untreated, death.

Searching for and destroying snares as well as poacher's camps and bush meat kitchens forces these poachers to leave the area as they gain no reward for their efforts. This is not only important for the obvious reasons, but also assists towards larger scale poaching (Rhino). If a person can sneak into a reserve to set snares or to collect their catch, they have the potential to evolve into a rhino poacher. They gain 'local knowledge' of the area making them valuable contacts for organized rhino poachers. Bush Meat poachers run the same risks as Rhino poachers by entering a protected area, the only difference is the reward is smaller.



Education

The Bush Babies Environmental Education Program

The Bushbaby (*Galago moholi*) symbolises and defines our Environmental Education Program, where learners are the 'Babies' of the community learning about the 'Bush'. With the support of local communities, tribal authorities and participating schools the Bush Babies Program is now at 10 schools within the communities bordering the western boundary of Kruger National Park. Currently, reaching 870 children aged between 12-15 years old, we aim to create an environmentally literate community.

The Bush Babies Program is interlinked into the curriculum of the local schools, bring knowledge to life whilst raising awareness about their surrounding environment, providing a better understanding of conservation and leading to sustainable use of resources and ultimately installing an ethical ethos in our future generations. The schools are visited on a weekly basis, by our Environmental Education Officer and a different aspect based on the theme of the day is discussed to familiarize the learners with their natural environment and emphasizing the importance of protecting it for future generations. Black Mamba Rangers make regular visits to the schools and teach the learners about poaching and how they are working to protect these species and how it affects them personally as well as the environment. The Black Mamba Rangers are also mothers, who know how to nurture a child to understand the basics of life and thus the importance of looking after our environment.



Rhino Conservation

Transfrontier Africa in conjunction with Balule Nature Reserve, has an active rhino research program which is designed to investigate the effectiveness of the "Rhino range expansion program" and all other aspects of rhino management and protection based on scientific investigation. This includes the daily monitoring of the rhino to design a real-time locality map of rhinos in the hot-spots and high-risk areas to aid in deploying the anti-poaching units effectively. The location of rhinos is deduced from rhino sightings or signs recorded by our anti-poaching patrols, as well as using technology such as camera traps, VHF and GPS transmitters. All this information is captured then collaborated at the Black Mamba Operations Room and is used by management to ensure all anti-poaching units are deployed in the correct areas to protect the rhino.

Recruitment and Training

Transfrontier Africa acts in its capacity as a host agent on behalf of the Extended Public Works Program (EPWP). The EPWP is a nationwide program that was launched in 2004. The program provides an important avenue for labour absorption and income transfers to poor households. It is also a deliberate attempt by the public-sector bodies to use expenditure on goods and services to create work opportunities for the unemployed. SANParks administers and accommodates the salaries of all our Black Mamba Rangers through the EPWP - Environmental Monitor Program. This accounts for 27% of our annual budget, without which Transfrontier Africa would not have been able to afford to implement the Black Mamba project. More information about the Extended Public Works Program can be found at www.epwp.gov.za

Every Black Mamba recruit is from local, previously disadvantaged communities, boarding our area of operation. When vacancies are available, the only requirements needed to apply is a good command of the English language, Inc. reading and writing. Grade 12 qualification and a passion for wildlife and conservation. Once selected all training is supplied before deployment. Every cadet goes through a vigorous 10-week training program which consists of 3 rounds, teaching them everything they need know.

They begin with round one, theoretical training. A 4-week course which covers; Radio protocol, Animal identification, Animal observation, Search and Seizures, Arrest Procedures, Road blocks and access control, Vehicle Maintenance, Trauma First aid level 2, Court room procedures and statement writing. At the end of the four weeks the cadets must complete a written and practical test, only if they pass both exams, they move on to the second round. The second round, practical training. A 2-week Para-military training course which focuses on fitness, discipline and bush skills, this includes fence and perimeter patrols, Sweeping formations, Weapons training, Hand to Hand combat training, Observation posts (nocturnal & diurnal) and Drills. The cadets must then once again pass a written and practical test to move onto the final round. The third round, work experience. For a minimum of four weeks our new cadets join our Black Mamba Rangers in the field to test, practice and hone their new skills under the guidance of our experienced Black Mamba Rangers.

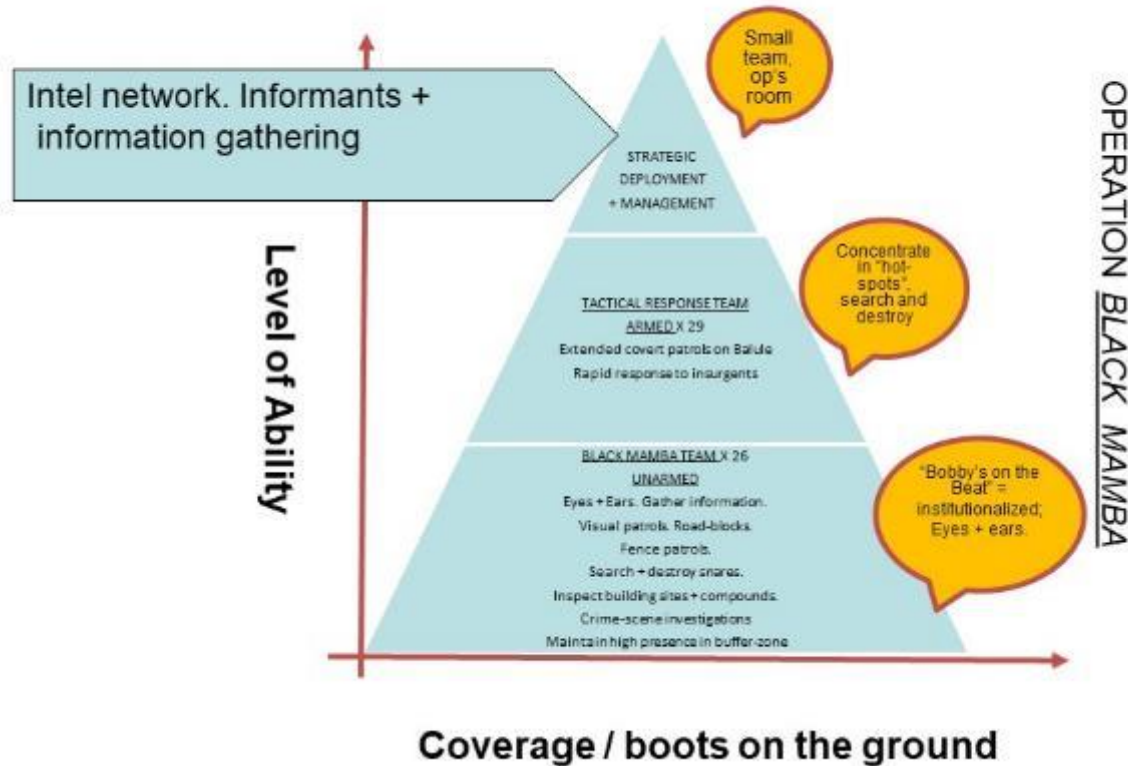
The training doesn't end there! We are constantly looking for innovative ways to improve our Black Mambas skills, we hold regular refresher courses and update our Rangers on the latest technologies and tricks being developed to combat poaching. We are not only assisting our Rangers with anti-poaching skills, but also useful life skills such as driving and first aid.



The Bigger Picture

Black Mamba APU concept is but one of three critical components of the Transfrontier Africa anti-poaching strategy. Boots on the ground, education and research and the adaptation of technology to fight wildlife crime. Our anti-poaching initiative operates on three levels which includes the unarmed unit, armed unit and senior management.

APU Operational Structure



Level 1 - Unarmed Unit, The Black Mambas: Routine procedures such as foot-patrols, observations, vehicle checks and road blocks allow this team to fulfill the visual policing component making them the, "Bobby's on the beat" gaining institutionalized information.

Level 2 - Armed Unit: A team of armed guards that protect the borders of Balule and operate off-reserve as a counter-insurgency measure. They also lend support to private rhino owners close to the borders of the Greater Kruger National Park and patrol the "buffer-zone" between these fences. In addition, we have the on-reserve team of well-trained and experienced armed rangers that are deployed in the high-risk areas. This team is split into smaller well-equipped foot patrols and ambush stations that move between strategically positioned picket stations.

Level 3 - Senior Management: Responsible for deployment strategies and networking. To better manage communications and information that is passed between all armed and unarmed teams via the Operations Room.

Aerial support, specialist dogs, early detection and rapid response is all that stands between the poachers and our wildlife. The success of this 3-tiered strategy has seen the following benefits; Constant visual policing on all servitude roads and boundaries, Low level of internal corruption, High success rate with counter-insurgency measures (off-reserve).

Poaching

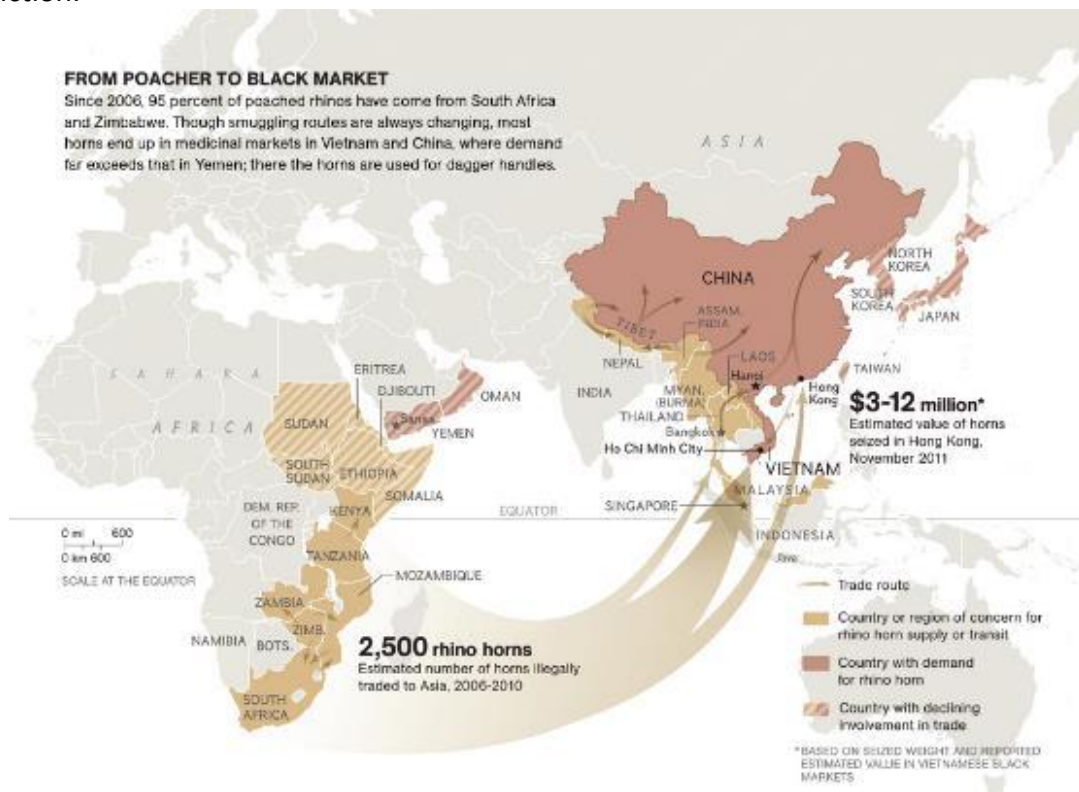


How many more this year?

Over **6 100** known rhinos have been poached in South Africa in the last 9 years.
There are only some 17 396 - 19 369 White and 1822 - 2014 Black rhinos left in South Africa,
which is home to 74% of Africa's remaining rhino population.



Commercial poaching has become big business, thanks to the boom in populations and the “new wealth” in Asia. Consumption of products derived from endangered species is flourishing be it for ‘Medicinal’ purposes, trinkets and status symbols or just simply, to be on the menu. Subsequently rhino poaching has escalated dramatically since 2008 and is being driven by the demand for rhino horn in Asian countries, particularly Vietnam, Yemen and China, due to its use as a status symbol to display someone’s success and wealth and in Traditional Chinese Medicine. Although there is no scientific proof of its medicinal value, rhino horn is still highly prized in traditional Asian medicine. It is ground into a fine powder or manufactured into tablets as a treatment for a variety of illnesses such as nosebleeds, strokes, convulsions, and fevers. Despite intensive conservation efforts, poaching of this iconic species is still increasing across South Africa and pushing the remaining rhinos closer and closer towards extinction.



Our Successes

Our success is due to two very important factors, our 3-tiered strategy and the passion of these young women! The two main types of poaching that we deal with on a daily basis is Bush meat poaching through the use of Snares and Rhino poaching, involving poachers breaking into the reserve to shot and de-horn rhinos. Since their deployment throughout Balule Nature Reserve in May 2014, Snaring has dropped by 99% within the boundaries of the reserve and 89% including all areas of operation (Protected areas and tribal lands known as the Buffer Zones).

With the Black Mambas constant visual policing, any signs of poachers entering the reserve to poach rhino has been picked up quickly, allowing for the poachers to be tracked and caught before having the chance to locate and poach rhino. Following their deployment Balule Nature Reserve enjoyed the first 11 months rhino poaching free. The Black Mambas have assisted in 6 arrests, identified and destroyed 29 poachers' camps and 7 bush meat kitchens.

(Note: Figures are correct at the time of printing (June 2017) please contact us for the current figures)

AWARDS



Eco-Warrior Silver Award – Eco-Logic Awards 2017

Leaders, celebrities, sponsors and top business executives, government and municipal representatives, previous winners and finalists gather to celebrate the work that so many South Africans are doing to create a more sustainable environment. The Black Mambas were awarded the Silver Eco-Warrior award which recognises those whose actions have defended protected or prevented damage to the Earth's life forms, eco-systems, or natural resources.



Best Conservation Practitioner of the Year – Rhino Conservation Awards 2015

This category includes any person who is working full-time in the conservation field and fighting rhino poaching through protected area management, intelligence gathering and strategic anti-poaching operation management.

A huge thank you goes out to Hi-Tec Sports who without, we would have been unable to send any representatives from the Black Mamba APU to the event on account of their nomination. Hi-Tec Sports generously covered all costs for the flights, accommodation and transport for two of our ladies to attend the event last night.

Nkateko and NoCry, our two Black Mamba Representatives were extremely excited as they left base for the event as neither of them have ever travelled on an airplane before nor had the pleasure to enjoy a luxury 3* Hotel for the night, not to mention the event itself and meeting all the local celebrities.



Champion of the Earth Award – United Nations Environment Program

For outstanding courage in fighting the illegal wildlife trade at community level

The Champions of the Earth award is the United Nations highest environmental honour recognizing visionary people and organisations all over the world that exemplify leadership and advocate action on sustainable development, climate change and a life of dignity for all.

The Black Mamba Anti-Poaching Unit was announced as one of the winners of the United Nation's top environmental accolade. With this award, in the Inspiration and Action category, UNEP is recognizing the rapid and impressive impact the Black Mamba unit has made in combatting poaching and the courage required to accomplish it. UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said, "Community-led initiatives are crucial to combatting the illegal wildlife trade and the Black Mambas highlight the importance and effectiveness of local knowledge and commitment. Their many successes are a result of their impressive courage and determination to make a difference in their community. The Black Mambas are an inspiration not only locally, but across the world to all those working to eliminate the scourge of the illegal wildlife trade. While their work contributes mostly towards ecosystem preservation and halting biodiversity loss, Goal 15 of the Sustainable Development Goals, also exemplifies the action-driven solutions needed to achieve all of the SDGs. With every rhino saved the Black Mambas demonstrate that action on a local level is critical to achieving global sustainability and equity

Press Release - <http://web.unep.org/champions/laureates/2015/black-mamba-apu>

How to help

Finances are our biggest struggle. We would love to be able to employ more women and expand into new areas, but we struggle daily to fund the operations we have running now. Thankfully, the Black Mambas basic salaries are paid for through the Extended Public Works Program, but we are responsible for all other costs such as training, uniforms, equipment, Food, Vehicles, fuel and other daily operational costs. We rely heavily on funding to cover these expenses.

Donations can be made either directly to our South African account or via PayPal by following the link to our website below.

Account Name: Transfrontier Africa NPC

Bank: First National Bank (FNB)

ACCOUNT No. 626 068 595 46

ACCOUNT: Cheque Account

Branch Code: 270652

Swift Code: FIRNZAJJXXX

Beneficiary Reference: Black Mamba APU

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