



The Evolution of Legacy:
Kwandwe Private Game Reserve Impact Report



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Foreword From the Chouest Family

At Kwandwe Private Game Reserve, conservation is not just a commitment; it is the very essence of who we are. From the moment we first set foot on this extraordinary land in 2012, we knew that we had become custodians of something truly special. What was once a 52,000 acre (22,000 hectares) reserve has now expanded to an impressive 74,000 acres (30 000 hectares) of pristine wilderness, rich biodiversity, and a legacy that extends far beyond our time here.

Our journey with Kwandwe is deeply personal. It is a journey of restoration, of protecting and nurturing a diverse and evolving ecosystem so that future generations may experience the magic of this landscape just as we do today. We are privileged to play a role in this mission, working alongside a team of passionate conservationists, ecologists, and community members who share our unwavering belief in the importance of safeguarding Africa's wild places.

The conservation successes achieved at Kwandwe over the years are a testament to this collective dedication. Through pioneering initiatives in habitat restoration, species protection, and community engagement, we continue to demonstrate that responsible tourism and conservation can go hand in hand. From the reintroduction of iconic species to the ongoing efforts in counter-poaching, every step we take is guided by a deep respect for nature and an enduring commitment to sustainability.

But conservation is never static. It requires adaptability, resilience, and above all, collaboration. This report captures the ongoing efforts, the challenges, and the triumphs that define Kwandwe's conservation story. It is both a reflection on what we have achieved and a roadmap for the work that still lies ahead.

As you read through these pages, we invite you to share in our vision: a future where Kwandwe continues to thrive as a sanctuary for wildlife, a beacon of hope for conservation, and a place where local communities remain integral partners in protecting and preserving this remarkable landscape. Together, we can ensure that this landscape remains a place of wonder and inspiration for generations to come.

With gratitude and determination,

The Chouest Family

A Glimpse Into the Past

The landscape now known as Kwandwe Private Game Reserve was once a thriving wilderness. Elephant, Black Rhino, Cape Buffalo, Leopard, Cheetah, and Lion moved freely across this terrain, their presence recorded in the delicate San rock art still visible in the region. Early elephant hunters and frontier explorers, Barrow, Paterson, Baines, captured the richness of the land in their journals, noting its wildlife, terrain, and people with a mix of wonder and intent.

That abundance began to unravel in the 18th and 19th centuries, as European settlers arrived and altered the land through overuse and habitat destruction. Farming took hold. Heatherton Towers, established as an ostrich farm in 1836, welcomed guests like Lord Milner and Cecil Rhodes, but by then, much of the original ecosystem had faded.

In 1998, restoration began. What followed was an ambitious rewilding effort aimed at returning this degraded landscape to its natural state. Since then, Kwandwe's conservation work has brought back key species, including Black Rhino, Cheetah, and the endangered Blue Crane. The name "Kwandwe", "Place of the Blue Crane" in isiXhosa, echoes that connection between land, species, and culture.

In 2012, Kwandwe was acquired by the Edison Chouest Offshore group. Then covering 52,000 acres (22,000 hectares), the reserve has since expanded to 74,000 acres (30,000 hectares) under the stewardship of the Chouest family. Their investment in habitat restoration and community upliftment has deepened Kwandwe's role as a place of regeneration for wildlife and for the people who live alongside it.







Kwandwe Private Game Reserve

At its heart, Kwandwe is about conservation and community. Every visit helps protect endangered species and support local livelihoods, quietly ensuring that this corner of the world continues to thrive long after the game drive ends.

Set in the heart of South Africa's malaria-free Eastern Cape, the reserve spans 74,000 acres of wild, uninterrupted terrain. Here, nature moves to its own rhythm. Expert guides help guests tune into it, tracking the Big Five, discovering lesser-known species, or simply pausing to listen to the land breathe.

With just 26 rooms across two lodges and three exclusive-use villas, Kwandwe offers an intimate experience by design. There's space to

explore, and space to be still. Whether walking with a guide, heading out on a game drive, or sitting quietly on a veranda, each moment invites a deeper connection with the wild. The design is one of understated elegance, never competing with the landscape, always complementing it.



KWANDWE
PRIVATE GAME RESERVE

KWANDWE

PRIVATE GAME RESERVE



Kwandwe is more than a place to visit. It's a place to belong. A place where time slows, nature leads, and each stay contributes to something lasting.



Scan the QR code
to view our Wildlife Reel

Core Principals

Kwandwe Private Game Reserve is built on a deeply held commitment: to protect and restore the natural heritage of the Eastern Cape. This mission extends far beyond the preservation of wildlife - it reaches into the soil, the vegetation, and the communities that share this land.

By protecting endangered species, restoring habitats through sustainable land care, and building meaningful partnerships with local communities, Kwandwe tells a story of recovery and resolve. Every action taken is part of a longer journey to ensure that this landscape not only survives, but thrives.







Habitat Stewardship - A New Era at Kwandwe



Expansion and Conservation

On 1 September 2024, Kwandwe marked a significant milestone with the expansion of its boundaries: growing from 54,000 acres (22,000 hectares) to 74,000 acres (30,000 hectares). This addition strengthens the reserve's ability to protect species like Black Rhino and Cheetah and deepens its role in conserving the Eastern Cape's natural heritage.

The newly added area brings with it a rich diversity of vegetation types, including Albany and Ecca Bontveld. These habitats support endemic plant species found nowhere else, adding layers of ecological complexity to an already rich landscape.



Echoes of the Past

As the land is restored, it also gives up fragments of its human history. Ancient rock art has been uncovered, serving as reminders of the people who once lived in harmony with this wilderness, and of the cultural richness woven through the reserve's identity.



A New Frontier for Wildlife

The land, previously used for livestock farming, is now being restored to its natural state. Over 4 million spekboom saplings have been planted as of April 2025, reforesting the area and helping to bring balance back to the ecosystem. Fences and old farming infrastructure have been removed, creating open space where wildlife can once again roam freely.

For the first time in over 200 years, lions are moving through this land, a powerful symbols of a landscape slowly returning to equilibrium. Their presence is carefully tracked by Kwandwe's guiding and conservation teams using hands-on field techniques rooted in deep ecological knowledge.



A Commitment to Conservation

This expansion is not just a matter of scale. It reflects Kwandwe's long-term vision: to create a larger, more resilient habitat for wildlife and to protect the cultural and ecological heritage that defines this place. Conservation here is an active, daily practice, guided by experience, science, and a sense of responsibility to the generations that follow.



Fences Removed



First Crossing Recorded



New San Rock Art Discovered



A Moment of Reflection

Scan the
QR code
to view the
expansion





Sustainability, Day by Day

Sustainability at Kwandwe isn't a box to be ticked. It's a way of being - lived daily by people who know the land and care deeply for it. It's there in the quiet crackle of a fire at dusk, the hum of solar panels in the heat of the day, and the steady hands of those who call this place home.

At the heart of each lodge, a hearth glows. But this is no ordinary fire. Each log placed on the flames tells a story of renewal. Sourced from alien wattle trees, invaders from far-off Australia, the firewood helps clear the way for native flora to return. It's warmth with purpose, ambience that heals.

Solar panels soaking up the African sun power everything from electric fencing to refrigeration, field radios to family dinners. Even when the national grid falters, Kwandwe hums along, quietly independent. Clean energy flows seamlessly through the reserve, unseen, unfailing, essential.

And then there are the people. More than eighty percent of Kwandwe's team comes from surrounding communities. Many arrive with no formal training, only a willingness to learn. They leave with skills, confidence, and pride. Their stories, of growth, resilience, and contribution, are written into the soil here, just as deeply as those of the animals they help protect.

This is what it means to be truly regenerative. Restoring the land uplifts its people. Conserving the wild is an act of care - every day, in every detail.





Vegetation

The terrain at Kwandwe is shaped by contrast, rugged, vegetated mountains folding into open Karroid plains. This diversity supports a wide variety of plant species, including euphorbia forests, flowering aloes, and dense thicket vegetation.

Among the most important is *Portulacaria afra*, or spekboom. This indigenous succulent is prized not just for its resilience, but for its ecological value. It plays a critical role in carbon sequestration thanks to a unique form of photosynthesis (Crassulacean Acid Metabolism), which allows it to absorb carbon dioxide at night while conserving water during the day.

Spekboom's ability to lock away carbon is remarkable: roughly 1.7 tonnes per acre (4.2 tonnes per hectare) each year. To put this into context: 24.7 acres (10 hectares) of healthy spekboom thicket can absorb the equivalent emissions of 26 cars annually. It's earned the nickname "The Carbon Sponge" for good reason.

Beyond its carbon credentials, spekboom is a vital food source for wildlife. Black Rhinos, Elephants, and Kudus all rely on it for nutrition. Recognising this, Kwandwe has undertaken an ambitious restoration initiative. Since September 2022, over 4 million spekboom saplings have been planted by the Kwandwe Restoration Teams, with a target of 8 million by the end of 2027.

This work restores land degraded by past overgrazing and farming practices, and plays a vital part in securing a carbon-positive, functioning ecosystem.





Ecosystem Health

Each year, the Kwandwe Ecology Team compiles the Annual Ecological Audit, a detailed record of the reserve's ecological status. This comprehensive report draws together findings from vegetation surveys, species monitoring, disease control, game counts, and the ongoing progress of restoration efforts.

Grounded in both scientific data and the accumulated knowledge of the Conservation Management Team, the audit informs every ecological decision made on the reserve. It ensures that the soil remains healthy, the vegetation continues to recover, and the habitats support the species that depend on them.

Through this careful stewardship, Kwandwe nurtures its wildlife, landscapes, and a long-term vision of resilience, balance, and renewal.





Wildlife Guardianship - Expanding Wildlife Populations

Kwandwe Private Game Reserve builds on its role as a sanctuary to become a force for transformation. Here, conservation breaks free from fences, restoring balance to landscapes where wildlife once disappeared and breathing life back into Southern Africa's wild heart.

Over the years, Kwandwe has played a pivotal role in reintroducing and bolstering populations of some of the continent's most iconic species: Brown Hyena, Cheetah, Leopard, Lion, Rhino, and Elephant. These aren't isolated triumphs; they are part of a coordinated, far-reaching effort to restore ecosystems at scale.

At the core of this work lies collaboration. Strategic partnerships with leading conservation bodies - such as the Lion Management Forum, the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Cheetah Conservation Programme,

the Rhino Management Group, and the Private Association of Rhino Conservation Reserves - ensure every intervention is grounded in science, guided by expertise, and aligned for long-term impact.

There's an old African proverb that says, ***"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."*** Kwandwe's mission is one of distance and endurance, rooted in that spirit of collective guardianship.





Priority Species Dynamics

Lions

When Lions were reintroduced to Kwandwe in 2001, it was more than a symbolic return, it marked the start of a conservation success story. Since then, 52 litters of cubs have been born on Kwandwe soil, and the reserve has become a thriving stronghold for these apex predators.

But Kwandwe's lions don't stay home forever. To date, 75 lions born at Kwandwe have been translocated to reserves and national parks across South Africa and Malawi, strengthening pride dynamics, boosting genetic diversity, and helping to re-establish lions where they had vanished.

To ensure resilience, Kwandwe continues to introduce new males periodically, safeguarding the long-term health and vitality of its lion population.



Cheetah

The return of Cheetahs to the Great Fish River Valley in 2001 marked the first time they had set foot here in more than 130 years. Their reintroduction was a turning point, and the beginning of another conservation success story. Since then, 44 litters have been recorded on the reserve.

Kwandwe's Cheetahs have played an active role in regional recovery efforts, with 30 individuals translocated to reserves in South Africa and Malawi. These contributions are essential to the health of the broader metapopulation, and occasional introductions of new individuals ensure genetic robustness.

Today, Kwandwe supports one of the best-studied Cheetah populations in the region, making the reserve a cornerstone in scientific research and a lodestar for long-term conservation planning.



Leopard

Leopard never entirely vanished from the Great Fish River Valley. Shy and elusive, a few survived the widespread carnivore eradication that followed European settlement, sheltering deep in the valley's gorges. Yet by the time Kwandwe was founded, sightings were rare, mere glimpses, paw prints in the dust.

That changed in 2006, when three Leopards were introduced from the north. Unlike the few that remained, these animals had not endured generations of persecution and were more tolerant of human presence. Their arrival marked the start of a population revival.

Their legacy is visible today in individuals like the Melton male, Fort Dam, Nkwenkwezi, and the Nomaweni females, territory-defining cats who are shaping the next generation. Meanwhile, naturally occurring Leopards, once hunted to the edge, are re-emerging, and sightings of previously unknown individuals are now more common.

A biennial camera trap survey, conducted with partners including Panthera and the Cape Leopard Trust, helps track the population's growth. The most recent survey recorded 15 distinct individuals, with estimates placing the total at around 20, a powerful sign of recovery.

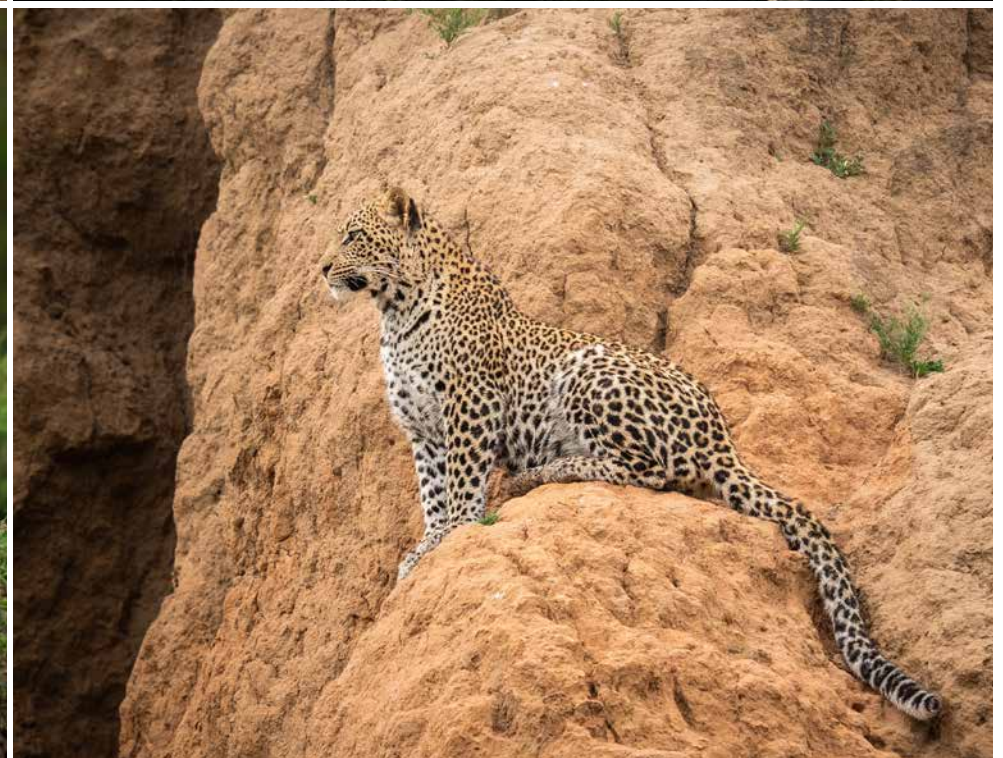


Shadows of the Cape: The Leopards of Kwandwe

Building on Kwandwe's long-term conservation work, Shadows of the Cape creates the first detailed visual record of how leopards live, adapt, and interact within the reserve. Elusive and seldom recorded, these cats have moved quietly through this landscape for generations, their stories largely absent from the conservation record.

The project follows a population rather than a single animal, mapping territories, observing social bonds, and bearing witness to the struggles and triumphs of survival. Already, the cameras have captured pivotal moments: the establishment of new ranges, the raising of litters, and the shifting balance of power between males. By documenting their lives, we gain a clearer understanding of how these predators anchor the health of the ecosystem they inhabit.





Rhino

In 2000, Kwandwe reintroduced both Black and White Rhinos to the land, a monumental moment that launched one of the most successful Rhino recovery initiatives in the region. Since then, the reserve has celebrated over 120 White Rhino and 80 Black Rhino births.

Many of these Rhinos have been translocated to bolster populations elsewhere, enhancing genetic diversity and strengthening the collective effort to secure the species' future across Southern Africa.

Today, Kwandwe stands as one of the region's most vital Rhino conservation strongholds, a role further strengthened by the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust, which leads efforts to protect and preserve these species for the generations to come.





KWANDWE RHINO
CONSERVATION TRUST

Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust

The Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust was established with a singular focus: to safeguard the future of rhinos in the Great Fish River Valley and beyond. Through a combination of direct action and strategic investment, the Trust supports full-time rhino monitoring, aerial patrols, and a specialised counter-poaching unit that not only protects Kwandwe's rhinos but also shields populations on neighbouring reserves.

Together, Kwandwe and the adjacent Great Fish River Reserve form a critical sanctuary for one of Africa's most important Black Rhino populations. The thicket biome here is ideal breeding habitat, dense, impenetrable, and rich with forage. Yet even in this stronghold, the threat of poaching looms large.

Driven by demand for their horns - once prized for traditional medicine, now also traded as status symbols - rhinos remain under constant pressure. Lions and elephants too are being drawn into this illegal trade, reinforcing the urgency of the Trust's work.

Kwandwe is home to both remaining rhino species in Southern Africa. The Southern White Rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*), once thought beyond saving, has staged an astonishing recovery, rising from fewer than 500 individuals in the 1960s to more

than 17,400 by the close of 2023. A recent 3.4% increase in their population suggests cautious optimism.

The Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*), however, remains critically endangered. From a historical high of 850,000 individuals, numbers plummeted to just 2,500 by 1995. Hard-won conservation efforts have since raised that figure to around 6,400, but in 2023, the population dipped by 1% due to intensified poaching in Namibia and South Africa's Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park.

The Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust continues to stand its ground, protecting rhinos, preserving habitats, and strengthening community ties that are critical to long-term survival.



Mission Of The Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust

The Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust is dedicated to the survival of rhinos in Southern Africa. Its efforts focus on four key areas: safeguarding rhinos through specialist monitoring and counter-poaching operations; rehabilitating injured or orphaned individuals; educating and empowering rural communities; and protecting habitat integrity for future generations.

Trustees of the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust



Triche Chouest

On Triche's first trip to the continent, the "Africa bug" bit hard and since then Triche has been passionate about the conservation of Africa's wild places and animals and the care of its people.

Together with her husband Dino, the owner of KwanDwe, Triche plays a pivotal role in conserving KwanDwe's rhino population and takes an active interest in conservation efforts throughout Africa. Triche's role as a Trustee of the KwanDwe Rhino Conservation Trust allows her to channel her great love for Africa's wildlife.



Angus Sholto-Douglas

Angus sees rhino conservation as fundamental to the protection of all life on Earth. "If we cannot find it within ourselves to save such an iconic species as the rhino, it is highly unlikely we will be able to save much else."

As a founder of KwanDwe Private Game Reserve in 1999, Angus led the reintroduction of both Black and White Rhinos to the land and has witnessed the growth of both the reserve and the surrounding eco-tourism landscape. He believes KwanDwe would not be what it is today without the presence of the rhino.



Tebogo Mogashoa

Tebogo Mogashoa was born in Katlehong and grew up in Orlando West, Soweto, South Africa. From humble beginnings as an engineering graduate, Tebogo set out to personally and financially support opportunities for new business ventures.

In 2015, Tebogo purchased the Babirwa Game Ranch in Limpopo Province. Deeply passionate about wildlife conservation, Tebogo has become actively involved in supporting the protection of rhino in Southern Africa. Demonstrating his commitment, he has made a significant investment in the conservation of the desert Black Rhino.



Norman Adami

Norman is well known as “Mr. Beer” in South Africa. He is widely acclaimed for his business acumen, which he displayed most notably in his turnaround of the Miller Brewing Company in the United States and then as Chairman of SA Breweries Ltd.

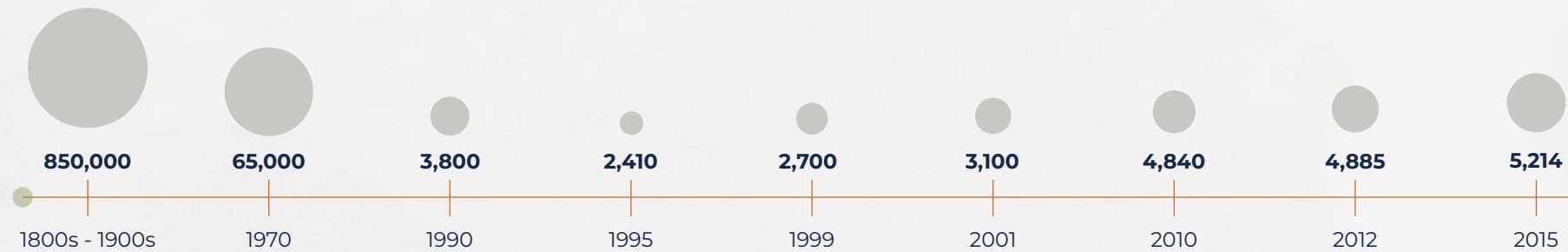
What is less known about Norman is his great passion for wildlife conservation. He established and developed Nyumbu Game, a 4,000-hectare ranch located near Brits, Gauteng, which is widely regarded as one of South Africa’s premier game breeding operations. Norman is particularly passionate about rhinos and has been actively involved in their conservation. Due to the escalating threat of poaching in the area, he made the difficult decision to relocate his rhinos to safer environments.

Rhino Population Statistics

Southern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*)

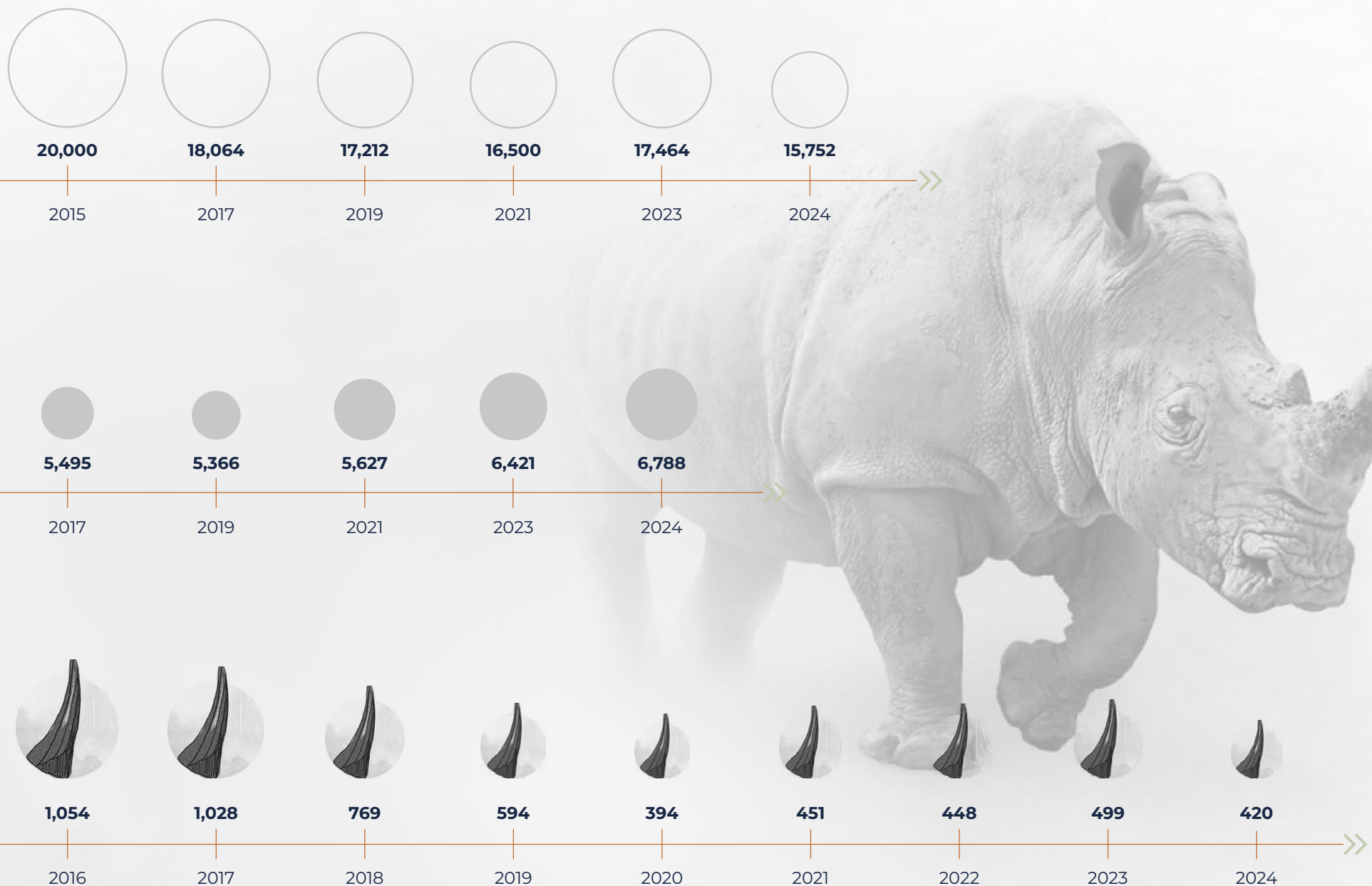


Black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*)



Poaching Statistics in South Africa







Evolution of a Crisis

A Relentless Battle: The Story Behind the Numbers

For decades, South Africa's rhinos have endured a fierce and unforgiving assault. Since 2008, nearly 11,000 rhinos have been lost to poaching, though this figure likely underestimates the true scale, as many killings occur deep in remote terrain, far from the eyes of those who track them. What began in 2007 with a modest tally of 13 illegal killings spiraled into a full-blown crisis, peaking in 2015, when nearly four rhinos were slaughtered each day.

By 2018 and 2019, the grim statistics seemed to ease, but not for reasons of victory. The rhino population had been so severely diminished that fewer animals remained vulnerable to poachers' guns. Then, in 2020, an unexpected pause came courtesy of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Border closures and disrupted trafficking networks caused poaching numbers to fall sharply, down to 394 rhinos killed, less than the 594 reported in 2019.

Yet, that pause was brief. By early 2022, poaching surged again, with KwaZulu-Natal suffering heavy losses: over 100 rhinos lost in just four months. As the year unfolded, rates stabilised, and a 5.2% increase in Africa's rhino population rekindled a fragile hope. Conservation efforts were making a difference. Still, with 448 rhinos lost that year, the shadow of crisis remained.

In 2023, the battle yielded mixed results. Kruger National Park recorded a remarkable 37% decline in poaching incidents, a hard-won victory. Meanwhile, KwaZulu-Natal, especially Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, faced intensified losses, a stark reminder that this fight is ceaseless and constantly evolving.



Rhino Poaching Trends in South Africa

The story of rhino protection in South Africa is one of shifting terrain, marked by progress and setbacks. Recent data reflects an overall decline in poaching, yet certain regions remain tinderboxes of risk. The relentless adaptability of criminal syndicates demands vigilance and innovation from those who stand guard.

In 2024, 420 rhinos were poached nationwide, a decrease from 499 the previous year. State-owned reserves bore the brunt, losing 320 rhinos, while private properties were not spared, with 100 rhinos killed. The rise of poaching on private land signals a troubling trend, showing how syndicates adapt swiftly, probing new vulnerabilities.

Regional Dynamics

KwaZulu-Natal remains South Africa's most targeted province, yet the tide is turning. The Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Dehorning Programme, bolstered by support from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), has had a palpable impact. As the programme expanded, monthly rhino losses in KZN fell sharply, from roughly 35 early in 2024 to fewer than 10 in the later months.

In contrast, Kruger National Park has experienced a worrying resurgence in poaching. Reports indicate an upward trend, with a sharp spike over the summer months. This stark reality highlights persistent enforcement gaps and the urgent need to bolster counter-poaching operations.

The Road Ahead

Wildlife trafficking remains a vast and shifting global crisis. Syndicates evolve constantly, testing the limits of conservation strategies. The advances seen in KwaZulu-Natal offer proof that targeted interventions can work. But the rising pressure in places like Kruger National Park serves as a sober reminder: success is uneven, fragile, and demands relentless effort.

South Africa's conservation community is undeterred. Strategies are being refined, partnerships strengthened, and investments made toward long-term protection of rhinos and the broader ecosystems they inhabit. The journey ahead is arduous, but with sustained commitment, collaboration, and innovation, there is hope that rhinos will not just survive, but thrive.

Source: www.savetherhino.org





A Future Rooted in Conservation

At Kwandwe, the future is shaped by the vital role private reserves and philanthropy play in rhino conservation. The escalating costs of safeguarding these creatures underscore the urgency for decisive and innovative action.

The Trust understands that rhinos do not exist in isolation. The same threats that endanger them affect elephants, big cats, and countless other species. Securing and expanding habitat creates sanctuaries not just for rhinos, but for the entire mosaic of African wildlife.

At the core of Kwandwe's conservation philosophy lie three pillars:

- **Population Growth:**
Nurturing a thriving rhino population that serves as a critical reservoir for rewilding and restoration across Southern Africa.
- **Counter-Poaching Efforts:**
A highly skilled team, supported by advanced technology and canine units, works tirelessly to protect Kwandwe's rhinos.
- **Community Engagement:**
Education and training empower local communities, cultivating deep-rooted stewardship and active participation in conservation.

By weaving these focus areas together, the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust stands as a beacon of hope, not only for rhinos but for the ecosystems that depend on their survival.

Supporting Growth of Rhino Populations

Kwandwe fosters a stress-free environment where both Black and White Rhinos can flourish. This commitment extends beyond the reserve's borders, as collaboration with neighbouring reserves and conservation partners strengthens a vital network of safe havens. Since 2000, the reserve has welcomed over 120 White Rhino and 80 Black Rhino calves, a powerful testament to ongoing protection and successful rewilding efforts.

At the heart of this success is Kwandwe's dedicated security and canine unit, a frontline force that deters threats and responds swiftly to potential incursions, ensuring these majestic animals remain safe. Intensive monitoring of individual rhinos' health and wellbeing, combined with cutting-edge anti-poaching technology and ongoing ranger training, supports the reserve's robust conservation capabilities. Active participation in regional networks and community engagement initiatives further fortify local support for wildlife preservation.

Each rhino old enough to be safely immobilized undergoes DNA sampling, with all data feeding into the national database in line with the National Norms and Standards of Rhino Custodianship. This vital process ensures precise population tracking and enhances scientific understanding, strengthening conservation efforts across South Africa.

Relocation remains one of the most effective conservation tools, and Kwandwe's growing rhino population reflects the success of this approach. As a well-established sanctuary for Black Rhinos, the reserve plays a key role in establishing new populations and reinforcing species survival throughout the country. Prompt veterinary care for injuries, supported by modern techniques, ensures rhino wellbeing, reducing stress and maintaining population health.





Combating Rhino Poaching

The Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust stands firm against the relentless threat of rhino poaching, guided by a strategy that prioritizes prevention and vigilance. Every day, the Conservation Team moves quietly but purposefully through the reserve, combining keen observation with cutting-edge technology. Surveillance systems pulse silently across the landscape, while a highly trained counter-poaching unit remains ever ready, their presence a constant shield for the rhinos that roam the Great Fish River Valley.

Behind this frontline effort lies a sophisticated network of real-time communication. Data flows seamlessly between monitoring teams and management, ensuring that every sign of potential danger is met with swift, coordinated action. This integration transforms information into security, weaving a protective web that keeps the rhinos one step ahead of those who would do them harm.

Securing the resources to sustain this work is no small feat. The Trust's efforts are bolstered by generous support, notably from the Chouest Family, whose commitment fuels initiatives critical to the rhinos' survival. Their partnership underscores the powerful role that philanthropy plays in conservation, bridging vision and action.

Innovation is woven deeply into Kwandwe's approach. Long before solar panels and AI were commonplace, the reserve pioneered comprehensive anti-poaching strategies, deploying dedicated units to safeguard both Black and White Rhinos. Today, this legacy continues with the adoption of solar-powered Rouxcel Technology foot collars, sleek devices that track rhino movements in real time, powered by the sun and analysed by artificial intelligence.



These collars silently watch over the rhinos, alerting rangers to unusual behaviour and possible threats, all without disturbing the animals' natural rhythms.

This marriage of technology and tradition reshapes what's possible in conservation. It dispels the myth that nature and modern innovation exist in opposition, proving instead that, when thoughtfully combined, they become a formidable force.

At Kwandwe, this blend of vigilance, science, and heart is transforming the way rhinos are protected, offering hope that these magnificent creatures will endure, thriving in their wild homes for generations yet to come.



Education & Training in Local Communities

Conservation at Kwandwe goes beyond safeguarding wildlife and wilderness, it is deeply rooted in empowering the people who live alongside nature. The surrounding communities are woven into the fabric of conservation, their wellbeing closely tied to the health of the land. Aware of the challenges these communities face, Kwandwe is dedicated to supporting sustainable development and building resilience for the future.

Through education, training, and outreach, the reserve nurtures a genuine connection to wildlife while delivering real, lasting benefits. This approach encourages local people to take pride and responsibility in preserving the natural heritage that sustains them, forging a partnership between people and the wild that will endure.



For more information, please visit the official website for the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust:

www.kwandwerhinotrust.org.za





Community Partnership - The Ubunye Foundation: Community at the Heart of Conservation

True conservation reaches beyond protecting land and wildlife, it includes empowering the people whose lives are intertwined with the environment. The Ubunye Foundation, based at Kwandwe Private Game Reserve, plays a vital role in building sustainable futures for communities across South Africa's Eastern Cape. By blending community-led initiatives with conservation goals, Ubunye helps people adapt to environmental challenges while supporting livelihoods that respect the natural world.

Lelethu (It's Ours): A Vision of Community-Led Sustainability

Ubunye's approach centres on the belief that lasting change begins with communities owning their futures. From financial independence to education and health, the Foundation fosters resilience through targeted programs that respond to local needs.

Ubunye's Holistic Programs

Sinako – Working Together

This initiative supports environmentally conscious livelihoods, encouraging women's savings groups and sustainable "green" businesses. By providing practical technical assistance, Sinako strengthens financial management skills while promoting conservation-friendly practices.

Isisekelo – Education for Life

Isisekelo invests in early childhood development, offering resources for interactive, play-based learning. Children engage directly with nature, growing drought-resistant gardens and learning hands-on ways to live sustainably.



Ikamva Lolutsha – Growing Young Futures

Focused on youth empowerment, Ikamva Lolutsha guides young people through creating concrete life plans. Supported by mentorship, bursaries, and grants, this program equips especially young women with the tools to pursue their ambitions amid environmental and economic challenges.

Masiphile – Community Health and Wellness

In partnership with local health workers, Ubunye improves access to care and promotes wellness. Special focus is given to young women living with HIV, empowering them as advocates for better health services and greater social acceptance.



Education and Community Involvement

Hope for Primary Schools

At Fort Brown Primary School, Ubunye helps parents engage meaningfully in school governance, strengthening the quality of education and setting a solid foundation for children's futures.

Shared Governance through Siyakhanya

Ubunye fosters a participatory governance model where staff and community members collaborate closely. This ensures programs stay relevant, effective, and truly responsive to local priorities.

A Partnership for Sustainable Impact

What began in 2002 as a modest community initiative founded by Kwandwe has grown into the Ubunye Foundation, a standalone non-profit whose influence now extends well beyond the reserve's boundaries. Over two decades, Ubunye has blossomed from humble beginnings into a recognised force for sustainable development and conservation, earning international acclaim, including an invitation to Buckingham Palace in 2025 for its remarkable contribution to community-led environmental stewardship.

Ubunye's strength lies in its unwavering belief that conservation and community wellbeing are inseparable. By sharing knowledge, resources, and support, the Foundation empowers local people to thrive alongside the natural world they depend on.

Among its many achievements, the Book Project has transformed early childhood education by providing learning centres with much-needed books and materials, nurturing literacy in communities where access to reading is scarce. The Beautiful Toilet Project, too, has reshaped daily school life by building safe, hygienic sanitation facilities, giving children the confidence and dignity to attend school every day.

From its quiet beginnings to its place on the international stage, Ubunye's journey speaks to the enduring power of community-driven conservation. It remains a beacon of hope and resilience, inspiring future generations to protect their heritage while forging sustainable futures.

A Royal Invitation for Ubunye

“It’s a joy to share the exciting news that Ubunye has been invited to Buckingham Palace to meet Their Majesties The King and Queen on 20th February 2025. Three staff members and a community representative will be travelling to London for this momentous occasion! The Reception will honour the humanitarian work carried out by both national and international organisations and reflects Their Majesties’ enduring commitment to humanitarian causes.”

Ubunye’s visit to Buckingham Palace was a moment of recognition and a powerful affirmation of the transformative impact of their work. As a cornerstone of Kwandwe Private Game Reserve’s broader conservation and community initiatives, Ubunye has consistently dedicated itself to uplifting local communities, fostering sustainable development, and ensuring that future generations can benefit from the land and its resources.

The visit to Buckingham Palace marked a significant milestone for

Ubunye, showcasing the organisation’s dedication to improving lives and demonstrating the global recognition of their tireless efforts. In attending this prestigious event, Ubunye had the chance to amplify its mission on a global stage, encouraging greater donor support and opening doors to new partnerships that will help further their work.

This occasion was not only a well-deserved celebration of Ubunye’s impact but also an opportunity to raise awareness about the interconnectedness of conservation and community development. It is a reflection of how the power of unity, compassion, and shared purpose can create lasting change.

As Ubunye moves forward from this momentous recognition, we are reminded of the profound difference that dedicated organisations and individuals can make, both locally and globally.





How You Can Help

You can play a part in this vital work. By donating to the Book Project, you can help provide books and play materials to early learning centres, ensuring children have access to engaging and educational resources. A book package costs R3,000 (US\$167 / £128) and can make a lasting difference in a child's life.

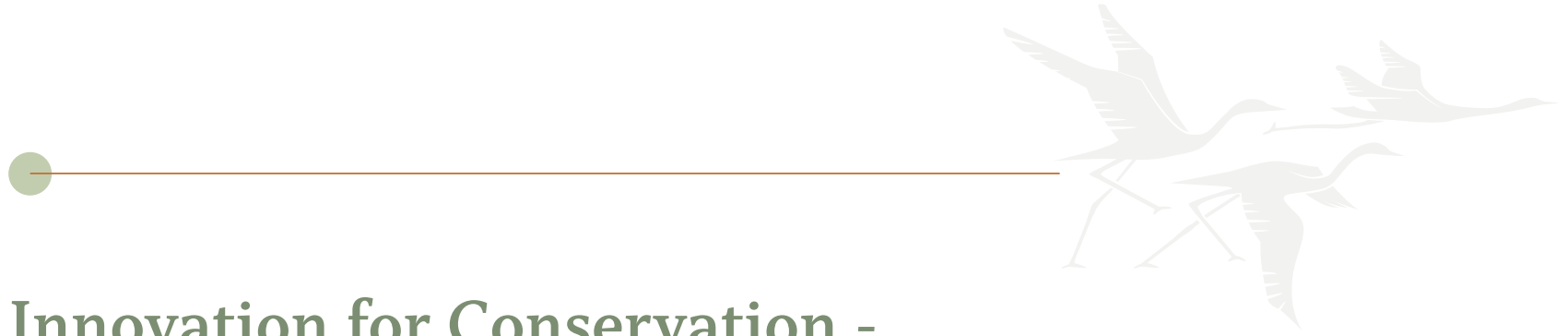
Supporting the Beautiful Toilet Project means contributing to the construction of safe, clean, and child-friendly sanitation facilities at early childhood development centres. A complete toilet unit, including a water harvesting system and handwashing stations, costs R190,000 (US\$10,687 / £8,120) and transforms the school environment for dozens of children.

Every contribution, no matter the size, makes a tangible impact. Whether you choose to sponsor a book package, donate towards improved sanitation, or simply spread the word, your support helps build stronger, healthier, and more resilient communities.

To learn more, get involved, or make a donation, visit www.ubunyefoundation.co.za or contact Dr Katy Pepper at katy@ubunyefoundation.co.za / +27 61 414 9142 (WhatsApp available).

Together with Kwandwe Private Game Reserve, Ubunye is building a future where sustainable living and conservation go hand in hand, ensuring a brighter, more resilient tomorrow for all.





Innovation for Conservation - Innovative Technology in Conservation Management

Kwandwe's Response to Eastern Cape Rhino Poaching Surge

When a sharp rise in rhino poaching shook the Eastern Cape, Kwandwe Private Game Reserve acted swiftly. Already known for its proactive approach to conservation, the team turned to technology to stay ahead of the threat. A collaboration with Dr SP Le Roux introduced them to the Rouxcel RhinoWatch System—an AI-powered solution that uses real-time data to track and protect rhinos.

At the heart of the system are RhinoWatches, solar-powered collars that detect changes in movement, and RhinoNet, a private communications network that enables seamless data transmission without relying on external infrastructure. Rugged, intelligent, and self-sustaining, the system marked a new chapter in conservation on the reserve.

Real-Time Monitoring and Rapid Response

Within days of receiving intelligence of an imminent threat, Kwandwe had deployed a full system: communication towers were raised, RhinoWatches fitted to high-risk individuals, and the software integrated with EarthRanger, a conservation management platform.

Now, rangers receive AI-generated alerts through EarthRanger and WhatsApp, each one colour-coded by urgency, from low concern to critical. These alerts have flagged everything from calving events and territorial clashes to rhinos trapped in mud, allowing early interventions and faster, more precise responses.

To further bolster the reserve's capabilities, thermal imaging drones were introduced. Programmed for automated flights to alert locations, these drones provide eyes in the sky, guiding ground teams safely and effectively through counter-poaching operations, day or night.



Expanding Conservation Horizons

This technology improved overall protection and unlocked enormous potential. In 2017, Kwandwe acquired an 8,000-hectare property bordering the reserve, with the intention of expanding critical habitat. But the area's inaccessibility and high poaching risk stalled plans.

That changed on 1 September 2024, when real-time surveillance made it possible to drop the fences. Today, rhinos and other species roam freely across a significantly larger and more connected landscape. Two Black Rhino bulls have already been introduced and are establishing territories, strengthening genetic diversity and ensuring long-term resilience.



Life-Saving Applications of AI

The impact of RhinoWatch extends beyond protection. In one instance, the system detected abnormal inactivity from a Black Rhino bull. Rangers responded quickly and discovered severe injuries from a territorial fight. Thanks to the early alert, the rhino was stabilised, treated, and—after months of recovery—successfully relocated to a new reserve.

Meanwhile, researchers are harnessing the data to deepen scientific understanding. A post-doctoral study is currently using RhinoWatch to investigate the social dynamics of Black Rhinos, while another explores White Rhino management in closed systems. These findings are contributing to broader conservation science, informing efforts across southern Africa.

Proven Results and Future Potential

To date, over 60 RhinoWatch collars have been deployed at Kwandwe. Fourteen have surpassed two years of uninterrupted use; ten still retain over 90% battery life, thanks to solar charging. These results speak not just to the system's reliability, but to its potential as a long-term conservation tool.

Yet even with such promising results, scaling remains a challenge. While smaller reserves with fewer rhinos can implement the technology affordably, the costs for larger properties remain a major hurdle. Support from partners such as LottoLand, Stop Rhino Poaching, and the International Rhino Foundation has been vital in keeping the programme alive, but dedicated funding will be essential for future sustainability.





Pioneering a New Era in Conservation

Since adopting this cutting-edge conservation system in 2022, Kwandwe Private Game Reserve has emerged as a quiet leader in a growing movement, proof that when innovation is paired with deep ecological care, extraordinary things are possible. By weaving advanced technology into the fabric of traditional fieldwork, the reserve has forged a new path for wildlife protection, one that is already being followed beyond its borders.

Across the Indalo Protected Environment and into Addo Elephant National Park, other private reserves have begun to adopt similar systems, inspired by Kwandwe's success. And it hasn't happened in isolation. From the EarthRanger Conference in Kenya, to security meetings at Kruger National Park, to roundtable discussions with Ezemvelo in KwaZulu-Natal, Kwandwe's team has shared its knowledge generously. These exchanges have laid the groundwork for wider collaboration, uniting reserves across the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo in a shared, tech-enabled mission to safeguard Africa's wildlife.

But scaling innovation is rarely straightforward. For smaller reserves with limited populations of rhinos, these systems are relatively affordable. For larger landscapes with greater complexity, the costs can be prohibitive. Fortunately, support from partners such

as LottoLand, Stop Rhino Poaching, and the International Rhino Foundation has helped bridge the gap. Even so, sustaining this work long-term will depend on securing reliable funding streams that match the scale of the challenge.

Kwandwe's story is one of determination, trust, and belief in the value of collaboration. It shows that technology, when grounded in experience and guided by purpose, can do more than just protect. It can connect. It can transform. And it can inspire a new generation of conservationists to imagine what's possible.

As the reserve continues to lead by example, its model offers a quietly powerful message: that the future of conservation lies not only in tools or tactics, but in people working together to protect the wild - cleverly, carefully, and with conviction.



Opportunities for Future Conservation and Sustainable Development

Lessons in Conservation – Inspiring Tomorrow’s Environmental Stewards

In the rolling hills of the Eastern Cape, a quiet shift is taking root. Between July and December 2024, hundreds of young learners took their first steps into the world of environmental stewardship through Lessons in Conservation, a pilot education programme that is sowing seeds of curiosity, pride, and purpose.

Developed in partnership with local schools and the Lessons in Conservation organisation, the initiative was guided by a simple belief: that conservation does not begin in the bush, but in the classroom. And that if we are to protect the wild for generations to come, we must first inspire the ones who will inherit it.



A Vision for Conservation Education

At its heart, the programme is more than a curriculum, it is a conversation with the next generation. Through four interactive modules, learners were invited to see the natural world not as something distant or abstract, but as something personal and close to home.

- Introduction to Conservation opened their eyes to the creatures that share their landscape - mammals, birds, insects, snakes, and spiders - nurturing respect for life in all its forms.
- Jobs in Conservation cast light on futures they might not have imagined: roles in wildlife management, ecology, and field guiding - planting the idea that they, too, have a place in this story.
- Rivers and Pollution explored the lifeblood of ecosystems, connecting clean water to healthy communities and calling for everyday guardianship.
- The Big Five brought iconic species to life while grounding the conversation in real-world conservation challenges unfolding across Southern Africa.

The true strength of *Lessons in Conservation* was found in its storytelling rather than in facts or figures. Through dialogue, imagination, and shared experience, the programme created space for learners to reflect on their own role in shaping the future. It was in these moments, discussing pollution in their rivers, imagining a career in wildlife, or simply looking more closely at the birds outside their classroom windows, that change began.

Surpassing every expectation, the *Lessons in Conservation* programme became a heartfelt success, transforming into something far greater than a simple lesson plan, much more meaningful than anyone could have imagined. Children began taking pride in their local wildlife. They spoke to their families about protecting water sources. They asked questions, shared stories, and began to see themselves not just as students, but as custodians of the land.

And that is where hope lives: not only in the success of the programme, but in the sparks it lit, each one a small, bright flame in a generation that may one day carry the torch of conservation forward.

Empowering Communities: Schools Visited and Impact

The program directly engaged students from six schools across the region, combining classroom sessions with hands-on experiences.



Fort Brown Primary School

Dates: July 20-21, 2024

Participants: 21 learners



Impact: After the program, **98%** of students demonstrated a clear understanding of conservation, compared to only 10% beforehand. Highlights included a game drive to see the Big Five and initiating a community litter sweep.



DD Siwisa Primary School

Dates: August 12-19, 2024

Participants: 27 learners



Impact: Students explored outdoor learning at Kwandwe, culminating in a radio interview to share their conservation insights.



Grahamstown Amasango Career School

Dates: July 23 – August 1, 2024

Participants: 15 learners



Impact: Inspired **46%** of students to consider conservation careers. Activities included a recycling drive and a litter sweep, fostering environmental responsibility.



Holy Cross Primary School

Dates: August 22-26, 2024

Participants: 16 learners



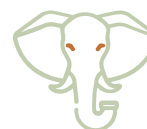
Impact: Conservation understanding doubled, with all students expressing an appreciation for protected areas.



Kat River Valley Montessori Primary School

Dates: October 21 – November 8, 2024

Participants: 21 learners



Impact: Students showcased their learning through presentations on the Big Five, emphasizing their dedication to conservation.



Carlisle Bridge Primary School

Dates: September 26 – October 4, 2024

Participants: 32 learners



Impact: Students gained an understanding of insects' ecological roles and experienced the excitement of a game drive.

Nurturing Environmental Leadership

Education is just the beginning, real change happens when young people take action. The Lessons in Conservation pilot (July–December 2024) went beyond knowledge-sharing, sparking environmental initiatives across Eastern Cape communities. Students, equipped with newfound understanding and a deeper connection to nature, initiated recycling projects, organised clean-up campaigns, and inspired conservation conversations at home and in their neighbourhoods.

Key Achievements from the Pilot:



Over 130 students engaged in hands-on, place-based conservation lessons.



Increased environmental awareness across participating schools.

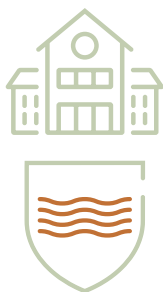


Active student-led community conservation initiatives.

Building on the success of the pilot, Kwandwe aims to expand the programme, reaching at least 200 students across 12 schools in 2025. The goal is to not only educate but also create a network of young conservation leaders who will continue driving change well beyond the classroom.



Building on Success: Lessons in Conservation 2025



Fort Brown Primary School

Dates: February 11, 2025 – March 10, 2025

After an enthusiastic start in 2025, Fort Brown Primary School's learners again demonstrated keen interest in the programme. A special focus was given to Rivers and Pollution, with students eagerly learning about the impact of pollution on the nearby Great Fish River. They were also empowered to take leadership roles within their class, helping fellow students engage in conservation activities. The programme concluded with a game drive where students actively participated, asking insightful questions and reinforcing their learning.



Holy Cross Primary School

Dates: March 24 – April 11, 2025

At Holy Cross Primary School, 40% of students already had knowledge of conservation, which helped them engage deeply in the curriculum. Highlights included a Dung Beetle Challenge, where learners explored the important ecological role of dung beetles in waste management. On March 11, 2025, a game drive allowed students to observe the Big Five, enhancing their understanding of wildlife conservation. Each student promised to take action to care for the planet, demonstrating the lasting impact of the programme.



Kat River Valley Montessori Primary School

Dates: March 26 – April 2, 2025

The program at Kat River Valley Montessori Primary School inspired learners to deepen their understanding of conservation and ecology. One highlight was a presentation on the Big Five, with students showing impressive acting and public speaking skills. During the concluding game drive, the students' active participation and eagerness to learn about plants further demonstrated their commitment to conservation. A moving moment occurred when a student expressed their intent to frame their certificate as a reminder of their journey toward environmental stewardship.

What's Next: Expanding the Reach

Building on the successes of 2024 and 2025, Kwandwe plans to expand the Lessons in Conservation programme even further:



Engage 200+ learners,
including high school
students for the first
time.



**Launch conservation
clubs** in schools for
hands-on environmental
activities.



**Develop a structured
curriculum** for students
passionate about
sustainability and
conservation.

This expansion will continue to nurture a network of young conservation leaders across Eastern Cape schools, creating a lasting impact on the next generation of environmental stewards.

Collaboration and Community Impact

The success of *Lessons in Conservation* has not been achieved in isolation. It has grown from the soil of shared effort - teachers, conservationists, rangers, and field technicians working side by side to bring the wild into the classroom and the classroom into the wild.

At Kwandwe, knowledge is never kept to itself; it is shared, handed down, and generously offered. Rangers have shared stories from the field; technicians have explained the tools used to protect rhinos; conservationists have opened windows into careers that once seemed far away. Together, they've shown students that protecting nature is not the job of a few, it is the work of many.

By weaving conservation into the fabric of education, the programme is proving something powerful: that safeguarding ecosystems and uplifting communities are not parallel goals, but deeply connected ones. The health of the land and the well-being of the people who live alongside it are inextricably linked.

The pilot is already bearing fruit. Pride is growing in classrooms. Conversations about wildlife are echoing in homes. And as word spreads, so too does ambition. By the end of 2025, the programme aims to reach even more students across the Eastern Cape, broadening its impact, deepening its roots, and reaffirming Kwandwe's place at the forefront of conservation and sustainability in South Africa.



Conclusion: Serving to Save

By astute planning and careful implementation, *Lessons in Conservation* is becoming a quiet revolution in shaping the way we think about the future and passing knowledge to those who will hold the torch.

It begins with a story, a footprint in the sand, a question asked by a child. And from there, it grows: into understanding, into responsibility, into a shared sense of care. One lesson at a time, Kwandwe is helping to shape a world where people and nature don't merely coexist—they thrive together.

This is what it means to serve something greater. To teach in a way that echoes forward, reaching far beyond the present moment. With every student reached, with every spark of curiosity lit, Kwandwe edges closer to a world where conservation is no longer an obligation - it is a way of life.

Impact Stories

Voices from the Land: Stories of Kwandwe's Rangers and Trackers

Kwandwe's landscapes are vast. Its wildlife, abundant. But its true strength lies in its people: the rangers, trackers, and team members who have shaped this land not just with their hands, but with their hearts. These are their stories. Stories of quiet resilience, of purpose found under open skies, of lives built not just alongside nature, but in deep relationship with it. Their stories offer a glimpse into life on the reserve, the challenges they've faced, and the deep connection they share with Kwandwe.





Andy Ndyawe – A Life Rooted in the Reserve

Andy Ndyawe didn't arrive at Kwandwe—he grew up with it.

“This land raised me,” he says. ***“I’ve been here from the start, since 2001 when the reserve was founded. But even before that, this has always been home.”*** His first role was in security, but the bush soon pulled him onto a different path: tracking. Over two decades later, he's still drawn to the wild with the same quiet awe.

“Every day, I learn something new out there,” he says, smiling. ***“That’s the beauty of it—you never stop learning.”*** His family lives and works here too. For Andy, conservation runs deep. It's a way of life, handed down and lived together.



Dennis Yoli – Following the Call of the Wild

Dennis Yoli began his journey at Kwandwe sweeping leaves and serving drinks. He was born on a nearby farm and joined the team in 2002 as a gardener, then a butler.

“But I knew my heart wasn’t in it,” he says with a grin. ***“I needed to be in the bush.”*** When he found his footing as a tracker, something clicked. ***“I love this place. It feels like family. Here we look after each other, and we look out for our brothers and sisters. We protect each other.”***

Today, Dennis serves as Assistant Head Tracker—a role shaped by years of quiet determination and love for the land. ***“Tracking teaches you respect—for animals, for people, for yourself.”***



Doc Ndyawe – Generations of Guardians

Few know Kwandwe as intimately as Doc. Born in the northern part of the reserve, he has spent nearly his entire life here. With a contagious chuckle, he recalls flying downhill on a bicycle with no brakes to visit a friend, along paths now long reclaimed by the wild - never knowing if the gate around the bend would be open. ***“That gate,”*** he laughs, ***“had a bent frame—it was always fifty-fifty whether I’d come to a quick stop or just fly right through.”***

“My grandparents and great-grandparents are buried in the Fish River Valley,” he says, underscoring his deep-rooted connection to the land. His career began at the Rooidrift Gate as a guard before he transitioned to tracking, later becoming head tracker and trainer. In 2008, he stepped into the world of guiding, seeking a greater challenge.

“I love how Kwandwe supports not just its employees but the surrounding communities—building schools, uplifting villages. That’s what makes it special.”



Ryan Hillier – A New Path, A New Purpose

When Ryan arrived at Kwandwe, he had no background in conservation, only a deep desire to learn.

“I was a dive instructor,” he says, laughing. ***“Completely out of my depth here.”***

Today, he’s a senior ranger that’s helped him grow in ways he hadn’t imagined.

“Learning when to make the hard calls. When to stand up for your team. That’s been my biggest growth.”

Still, it’s the small moments that leave the deepest mark.

“Watching a new guide spot their first lion. Seeing a guest fall silent in awe. That’s what stays with you.”



Sibo & Vuyani Msila – Brothers of the Bush

Sibo Msila remembers life before the reserve.

“I was born in Brandeston,” he says. ***“This land raised me long before the fences came.”***

He began as a gardener, then moved into security and eventually tracking.



“Nature teaches you every day. You never reach the end of learning.”

His brother Vuyani joined in 2002. After working in security and landscaping, he, too, found his calling in tracking.

“Kwandwe looks after people. That’s always meant something to me.”

Together, their stories reflect a deeper truth: conservation thrives when people feel a sense of belonging.



Zuko Mensile – Community at the Core

Zuko was raised on the reserve, spending his early years in Boschgift and Waterplant before settling in Brandeston.

“I’ve been part of Kwandwe since the beginning,” he says with quiet pride.

He started in security and later moved into logistics, where he found his strength in operations. Now, he’s responsible for the stores and supplies that keep the reserve running.

“It’s the people that make it special. We support each other, that’s what community really means.”

Resilience Through Challenges

While Kwandwe is a place of opportunity and growth, it has not been without challenges.

“The toughest time for us was COVID-19,” shares Andy. ***“Without guests, things were difficult, not just for us, but for the company too.”*** For Siboniso, the pandemic was a time of uncertainty, as colleagues faced job losses. ***“It was tough seeing people leave. But those of us who stayed pulled through together.”***

For Doc, the hardest part has been balancing family life with the demands of guiding. ***“I can’t always be with my kids because of the hours I work, but they understand that it’s my job. They support me, and that means everything.”***

A Shared Love for the Wild

Despite their different backgrounds, one thing unites Kwandwe’s rangers and trackers: an unshakable reverence for nature.

“Tracking teaches you patience and respect for nature,” says Dennis. ***“Every day, you learn something new.”***

For Ryan, the reward is in teaching and sharing. ***“Seeing someone experience a moment of awe for the first time, that’s what makes it all worth it.”***

And for Doc, guiding is more than a job—it’s who he is. ***“I can’t stay indoors. I just want to be out there, in the wild, where I belong.”***





Rooted in the Land, Rising with Purpose: Bongi Tsotsa's Journey at Kwandwe

Bongi Tsotsa's story begins where the earth holds memory: at Lemoenkraal, now Northern Bank - where her childhood unfolded amid the vastness of the land. Her grandfather's presence shaped those early days, and her grandmother's grave remains a quiet testament to a heritage that still shapes her. Though she moved to Grahamstown at seventeen, Kwandwe's soil has never released its hold on her.

Her entry into Kwandwe was both humble and bold. In 2003, still a student juggling exams, Bongi heard of a butler vacancy through family connections. With a hopeful heart and little experience, she stepped forward.

The door opened.

At Great Fish River Lodge, she discovered the unspoken art of hospitality: how to listen closely, anticipate quietly, and craft moments that stay long after the sun dips below the horizon. As Ecca Lodge prepared to open, Bongi moved to Uplands Homestead, where she became a Safari Host. This was more than guiding guests through the wild; it was the beginning of her own journey, one that steadily rose through roles demanding both heart and skill.

By December 2008, she had become Lodge Manager. Years later, she took on the wider role of Operations Manager, and by 2018, she stood firmly within Kwandwe's Senior Management Team.

The path wasn't without its challenges. As the first black woman to lead at Kwandwe, Bongi carried the responsibility of bridging cultures. Her Xhosa upbringing taught her to honour elders by listening before speaking - a quiet strength that sometimes clashed with the need for swift decisions. **"Learning when to act first, even when your culture calls for patience, that was the real lesson,"** she says.

Yet from this grew resilience. Kwandwe became her school and her proving ground. **"I arrived knowing nothing about hospitality. Everything I know now, I learned here - in the bush, the lodge, and every encounter."**

At the heart of her leadership is a simple truth: people matter. She spends her days nurturing colleagues, guests, and the wild that surrounds them all. She builds a space where warmth meets professionalism, where teamwork thrives, and where every person feels valued.

Bongi's journey is more than a career; it's a legacy, rooted deeply in the land, shaped by opportunity, and carried forward by passion. Her story reflects the spirit of Kwandwe: a place where roots grow strong and every step forward honours those who came before.



More Than Just a Workplace

Kwandwe holds a heartbeat that belongs to the people who live within its wild embrace. Some were born alongside this land, their roots weaving into its very soil. Others, discovered their purpose here, drawn by something only this place can offer.

Each step they take along the trails, every imprint left in the sand, and every guest they guide carries a story of belonging and stewardship. Together, they go beyond preserving the reserve to shape Kwandwe's conservation future, crafting a legacy that will last through generations.



How You Can Contribute

Stay with Purpose: Supporting Conservation and Community Development

Every guest who steps into Kwandwe becomes part of a story bigger than themselves, a story of wild places protected and communities strengthened. Staying here is more than a choice; it's a commitment to safeguarding this land and the people who call it home.

At the heart of this commitment is the Conservation, Community, and Reserve (CC&R) Levy. It ensures that each visit directly supports vital work across three pillars:

A key component of this commitment is the CC&R Levy, which ensures that every stay directly contributes to critical conservation and community projects. The levy is allocated across three core areas:



Conservation Efforts (25%)

A quarter of the levy funds the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust, a non-profit organisation dedicated to safeguarding black and white rhinos. This trust is instrumental in protecting rhinos at Kwandwe and the Great Fish River Reserve, ensuring their survival for generations.



Community Development (25%)

Another quarter supports the Ubunye Foundation, a beacon of hope for local communities since 2002. Through education, healthcare, and sustainable projects, Ubunye strengthens the fabric of life here—offering opportunities and support that ripple through families and futures.



Reserve Management (50%)

Half of the levy nurtures the wild itself: caring for 30,000 hectares of wilderness with hands-on work in biodiversity preservation, invasive plant control, road and water management, and wildlife monitoring. This is the daily stewardship that keeps Kwandwe thriving.

When you stay at Kwandwe, your presence becomes a force for good. It echoes across the land and into the communities, leaving a mark that endures long after your journey ends.



Rhino Conservation Experiences: Get Involved

At Kwandwe, rhino conservation is driven by a dedicated team of passionate experts, the people who protect, nurture, and safeguard these magnificent creatures every day. As a Big Five reserve deeply committed to the survival of Black and White Rhinos, Kwandwe offers guests a rare opportunity to move beyond observation and join the very heart of conservation work.

Rhino Monitoring Drive

Set out with a rhino expert, tracker, and guide to follow these magnificent creatures in real time. Using radio telemetry, drones, and AI-driven software, you'll track rhino movements, uncover their habits, and witness the challenges they face. Each moment on this drive adds vital knowledge that fuels Kwandwe's protection efforts.

Rhino Conservation Participation

Join the frontline of rhino care by working side by side with wildlife veterinarians and conservation managers. From treating injuries to ear-notching and fitting solar-powered collars, your hands-on involvement supports essential monitoring and care. You'll also help collect DNA samples and assist with administering medication—an intimate glimpse into the effort required to secure their future.

Backstage Kwandwe: An Exclusive Four-Day Experience

Dive deep into conservation during an intensive four-day experience. Work with the team setting up camera traps, observe the K9 anti-poaching unit in action, and assist with wildlife monitoring. Participate in sustainability projects like planting spekboom to offset carbon emissions, and take part in rhino darting and collaring. Guided by Kwandwe's Managing and Environmental Directors, this experience opens a window into the heart of conservation.





Supporting Conservation: How You Can Donate

Your donations play a crucial role in supporting Kwandwe's conservation and community development efforts. Whether you choose to support the Ubunye Foundation or the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust, your contribution helps safeguard the future of both wildlife and local communities.





Donate to the Ubunye Foundation

The Ubunye Foundation empowers local communities through:

- Education initiatives and scholarships
- Healthcare and early childhood development
- Sustainable development programs

Your donation supports long-term community resilience and ensures future generations have the tools to thrive.

Donate here: www.ubunyefoundation.co.za



Scan the
QR code
to donate





KWANDWE RHINO
CONSERVATION TRUST

Donate to the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust

As a registered NPO, the Kwandwe Rhino Conservation Trust welcomes donations to support critical anti-poaching and rhino protection efforts.

Your donation can help fund:

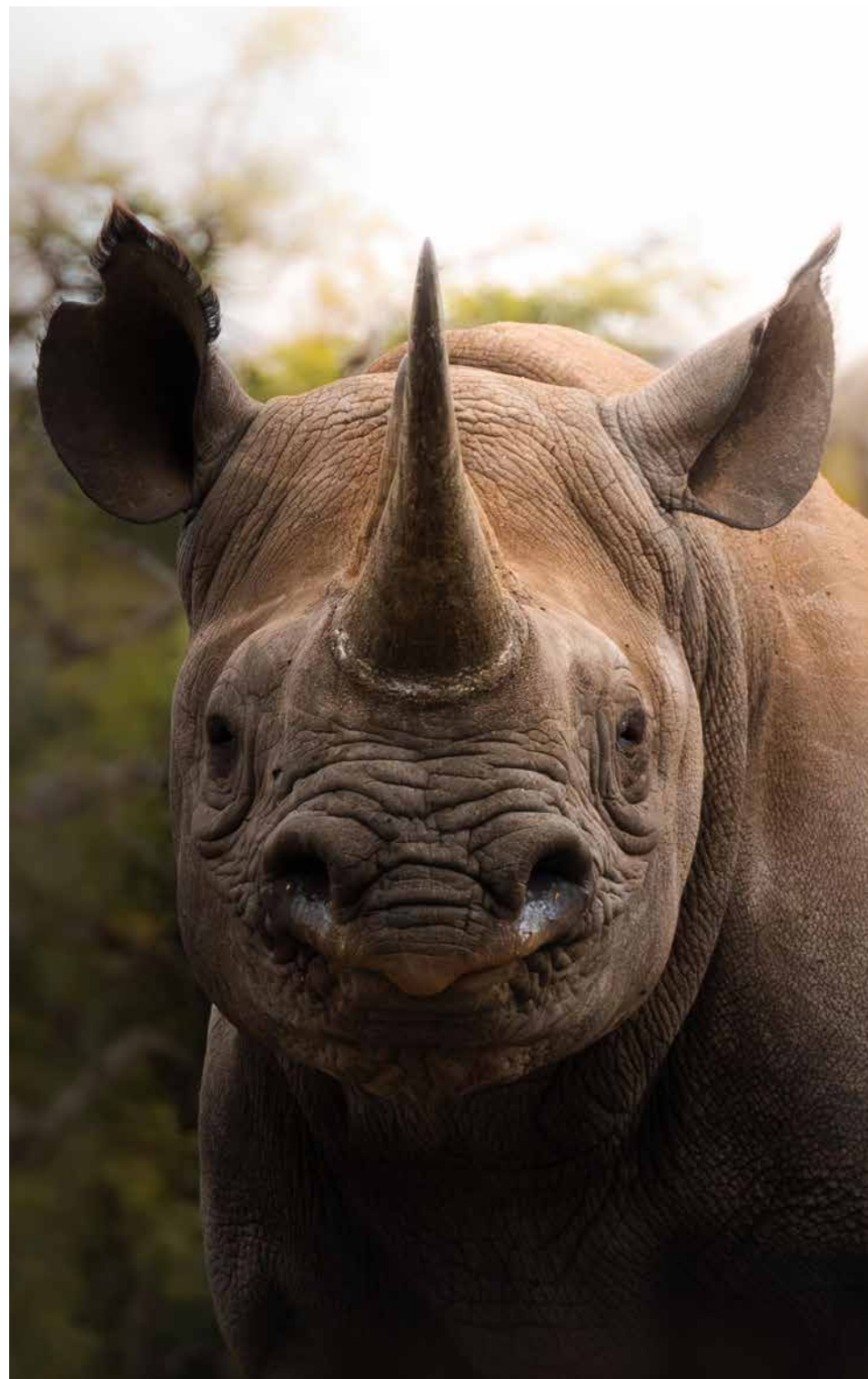
- Tracking collars for rhinos
- Anti-poaching K9 units and trained security dogs
- Night vision equipment and aerial surveillance
- Veterinary care and medical procedures for injured rhinos
- Bulletproof vests, radios, and patrol vehicles for anti-poaching teams

Each donation makes a lasting impact, ensuring these iconic animals survive and thrive.

Donate here: www.kwandwerhinotrust.org.za



Scan the
QR code
to donate







A Legacy Worth Protecting

Kwandwe Private Game Reserve is one of South Africa's largest and most treasured privately owned wilderness sanctuaries. It is not simply a place to visit but a destination defined by a profound commitment: to conservation, to community, and to the land itself.

Renowned for its remarkable diversity of ecosystems, Kwandwe offers an unrivaled safari experience, one that combines the rich wildlife spectacle of the Kruger with the vast, untamed spirit of the Kalahari. This unique blend creates a flexible journey where every guest can tailor their adventure and, crucially, choose to make a real conservation impact.

Kwandwe transcends the role of a safari destination to become a committed conservation and tourism partnership that sustains the environment, protects South Africa's rich biodiversity, and uplifts its local communities.

Every visit, every donation, every effort made here becomes part of a larger story: one of resilience, stewardship, and hope. Together, we are shaping a future where wildlife thrives, communities flourish, and the legacy of this remarkable land endures.

*Step into Kwandwe.
Be part of a legacy worth protecting.*

Find out more: www.kwandwe.com

Photo Credits to:

Carmen Outram, Doc Ndyawe, Jarrod Oflaherty, Luke Raubenheimer, Matt Derry, Ryan Hillier

Special thanks to the talented rangers and trackers of Kwandwe, whose keen eyes and skill behind the lens have helped capture the stunning images featured in this guide. Their deep connection to the land and wildlife makes each photograph a true reflection of the reserve.