



The South African Rhino Renaissance

SANParks Leads the Rhino Renaissance

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1. INTRODUCTION

The conservation of the white rhino is one of Africa's most powerful environmental success stories. In the 1960s, South Africa helped pull the species back from extinction and became home to 87% of the global population. Yet, since 2012 this legacy is facing a serious threat as poaching has surged causing Kruger National Park's white rhino numbers to decline from 12,000 to just over 2 000.

2. A VISIONARY TURN

In 2025, the South African National Parks (SANParks) has taken a bold, strategic decision to reframe the conservation crisis not as a story of loss, but as a story of Renaissance. As custodians of South Africa's largest and most genetically valuable rhino population, SANParks launched the Rhino Renaissance Campaign a national initiative to rebuild rhino populations, strengthen security, empower communities, and reassert South Africa's leadership in rhino conservation in the world.

A visionary partnership between SANParks and the Tracker Academy, an affiliate of Peace Parks, marks the start of the Rhino Renaissance Campaign, combining SANParks' operational authority and ecological mandate with Tracker Academy's technical expertise and training infrastructure. Together, they are implementing one of the most ambitious rhino monitoring and protection programmes, centred in Kruger National Park—the core breeding ground of South Africa's white rhino population.

3. PROTECTING KRUGER: MONITORING AND SECURITY AT THE CORE

The first step in the SA Rhino Renaissance is a people-led Rhino Monitoring Programme, which places Tracker Academy graduates inside Kruger National Park to support the existing security forces, with tracking skills able to monitor rhino movements 24/7.

The Tracker Academy programme includes training of 90 existing Kruger security personnel over the next 3 years, to become accomplished guardians of South Africa's white rhino population. The programme is to be fully integrated into **SANParks'** operational systems, reinforcing its law enforcement within the conservation units with a highly skilled, locally rooted trained operatives.

3.1 Tracker Academy: Ancestral wisdom and tracking skills

The partnership which draws trainees from local villages neighbouring the Park will revive ancestral tracking skills, restore human dignity, and ensure the survival of an iconic species. This is not just conservation, it is a Rhino Renaissance, rooted in African heritage, pride, and

purpose, designed to restore harmony to Kruger's sacred landscapes and redefine conservation for Africans, by Africans.

Tracker Academy, South Africa's only formally accredited tracker training institution, together with **SANParks**, have launched this focused and scalable model into the Kruger National Park, the continent's wildlife stronghold. By using the **Rhino Monitors**, the project not only safeguards rhinos but also deters poaching, inspires local communities, and revives endangered indigenous knowledge.

3.2 Community as Custodians: The Role of GWF and Local Partnerships

SANParks is researching a closer relationship with the **Good Work Foundation (GWF)** to nurture conservation leadership and education in villages bordering Kruger. This engagement will include programmes such as:

- **Open Learning Academy (OLA):** Reaching 12,000 learners weekly with coding, robotics, and gamified conservation lessons.
- **Conservation Coaching:** Interactive programs like *Rhino Rap* and *Vulture Rap* that teach ecosystem dynamics through sport and storytelling.
- **Kids in Parks:** Field trips to Kruger where GWF learners experience conservation in action.
- **Conservation Academy:** Vocational training in field guiding, conservation technology, and digital storytelling.

These programmes align with **SANParks'** 2040 Vision to **transform adjacent communities from observers to co-guardians** of protected areas, linking conservation success with education, pride, and economic opportunity, closely linked to the Rhino Renaissance Campaign.

3.3. Green shoots of the Rhino Renaissance in South Africa

SANParks' leadership and strategic partnerships are catalysing broader conservation successes across South Africa:

- **African Parks** distribution of 2000 captive rhino to various haven in South Africa – up to 250 rhinos already distributed.
- As part of this rewilding initiative **Munyawana Conservancy** is a haven for receiving and distributing surplus rhino. To date approximately **250** surplus rhinos have been relocated to other protected areas.

- Other Renaissance initiatives include **Phinda**, **Kwandwe**, **Manyoni**, **Bonamanzi**, and **SanWild** all of which are experiencing rhino population increases

SANParks' vision for the Rhino Renaissance looks beyond South Africa, to similar rewilding projects include the Transfrontier initiative with Mozambique and other safe havens already identified in Rwanda, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Botswana.

4. ELEVATING THE VISION: G20 AND GLOBAL SUPPORT

The **SANParks leadership** have fully endorsed and support the objectives of the Rhino Renaissance Campaign, hoping that it may become a flagship conservation story for showcasing at the **G20 Summit in November 2025**, hosted in Johannesburg. This may include Head of States visits to Kruger to witness firsthand the progress being made.

The Campaign will address multi opportunities for highlighting the project, such as:

- Positioning South Africa as a custodian of the world's white rhino population.
- Showcasing **SANParks'** leadership in conservation innovation, monitoring, and community integration.
- Mobilising international donor support.
- Mobilising global attention towards the importance of safe haven landscapes to preserve river catchments, indigenous wildlife and biodiversity.

5. A NEW GENERATION OF CUSTODIANS: CAREERS, LEADERSHIP, AND THE FUTURE

The Rhino Renaissance is more than a conservation campaign it is a **career incubator** for the next generation of conservationists, rangers, scientists, and park managers. By creating clear pathways into **tourism and conservation careers** for youth from surrounding villages, **SANParks** is fostering a **new generation of local leaders** who are equipped to manage, protect, and even innovate within South Africa's protected areas.

Through partnerships like those with the Tracker Academy and GWF, **SANParks** is helping build a **pipeline of skilled professionals**, not just as trackers and guides, but as future **conservationists, ecologists, digital storytellers, and state park leaders and administrators**. This empowers individuals, strengthens families, and uplifts entire communities by linking conservation to real, meaningful livelihoods and with that contributing to the building of the regional economy.

THIS IS TRULY A SOUTH AFRICAN SOLUTION BY SOUTH AFRICANS FOR SOUTH AFRICA!

6. A CALL TO ACTION: REBUILDING KRUGER, RESTORING HOPE

The **goal is clear**: under **SANParks'** stewardship, to rebuild Kruger National Park's white rhino population from 2 000 to 12,000 by 2040, restoring balance to one of earth's most iconic ecosystems.

But this is more than a population target. It is a national mission, a commitment to equity, sustainability, and hope. It is **a SANParks-led movement**, grounded in science, powered by collaboration, and driven by a belief that South Africa's wild heritage can and must be protected and managed by those who live closest to it, for generations to come.