

# THE ZAMBEZI SOCIETY'S HISTORICAL SERIES. EPISODE 4: THE RHINO SURVIVAL CAMPAIGN

**OCTOBER 2021**

*In 2022, The Zambezi Society (Zamsoc) celebrates 40 years of conserving the precious wilderness and wildlife resources of the Zambezi River.*

*As a lead-up to this important milestone in our history, our series of historical features highlights significant events and conservation achievements that we're proud of, spanning the four decades since the Society's formation in 1982. We are sharing these on our Social Media Instagram and Facebook platforms, with videos on You Tube, on our website and in a special Historical Series of Bulletin mailouts.*

## **EPISODE 4: THE RHINO SURVIVAL CAMPAIGN**



*One of the last remaining black rhinoceroses in Mana Pools National Park - photographed by Zambezi Society founder, Dick Pitman, in 1982*

In the early 1980s a rampant spate of poaching for rhinoceros horn hit areas north of the Zambezi River, finally arriving in Zimbabwe in 1984, when 20 black rhino were killed in the Middle Zambezi Valley and their horns cut out.



*Archive photograph of Zimbabwe National Park rangers with a poached rhino which has had its horn cut out - around 1984*

Despite initial reluctance on the part of the relevant authorities to accept the reality of an escalating situation, The Zambezi Society prepared and implemented an emergency fund-raising response – the **Rhino Survival Campaign**. The Society, together with others, raised funds locally, and created international awareness by organising some highly successful visits by famous celebrities including the author Gerald Durrell and his wife Lee.



The Rhino Survival Campaign, managed entirely by volunteers, handed over thousands of dollars' worth of essential anti-poaching equipment to the Parks Department.

The Society subsequently lobbied for the creation, in 1992, of four **Rhino Intensive Protection Zones** in Zimbabwe. One of these was the Matusadona National Park.

The Zambezi Society, as a member of the National Rhino Steering Committee played an active role in helping Zimbabwe's National Park Authority to protect black rhino in this Park for more than two decades. Our activities included:-

- raising funds for and assisting with rhino translocation and de-horning
- providing equipment, supplies and other assistance to Matusadona National Park stations and staff for anti-poaching work

- establishing and supporting a Black Rhino Breeding and Reintroduction Facility at Tashinga headquarters in Matusadona (about a dozen black rhino were reared and released into the wild through this programme)
- establishing and supporting an intensive rhino protection and monitoring programme funded by Save the Rhino International, in the face of a poaching onslaught
- supporting emergency de-horning and ear-notching of a small number of remaining rhinos

However, from 2000 onwards, Zimbabwe's political and economic situation deteriorated, and international support was withdrawn. Tragically, this resulted in a lack of funding to match the challenge and a loss of collective will. The black rhino population in Matusadona dwindled, and the battle to protect them from poaching in the Zambezi Valley was lost.

The good news is that nearly two decades later, with renewed private/public sector collaboration in the Zimbabwe's wildlife conservation arena, a black rhinoceros re-introduction programme has begun in the Gonarezhou National Park in south-eastern Zimbabwe. Plans are also afoot to re-introduce the species into the Zambezi Valley.

**IF YOU ARE ENJOYING READING OUR ZAMBEZI SOCIETY HISTORICAL SERIES, AND WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO HELP US ACHIEVE MORE IN OUR NEXT 40 YEARS, PLEASE MAKE A DONATION VIA THIS LINK:-**

**[HELP US DO MORE - MAKE A DONATION HERE](#)**