

Rhino Poaching War: Combatants Presented With Awards Winners Announced

In a recent News24 report, Environmental Affairs Minister, Edna Molewa, announced that 363 rhinos were poached in South Africa between January and April 2016. Molewa extended condolences to the family of Kruger National Park ranger, Enos Mabila, who was killed recently. She also paid tribute to SANParks ranger, Killers Ubisi, who was wounded while carrying out his duties. "It is always sad to hear of such incidents. They are a stark reminder of the severity of the threat we are facing."

To recognise those that put their lives, and that of their families, on the line to eradicate rhino poaching, Dr Larry Hansen and Miss Xiaoyang Yu founded the Rhino Conservation Awards in 2012, and His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco has served as the Patron of the Awards since their inception. "Celebrating the significant role players involved in rhino conservation is an essential element to maintaining morale and momentum," confirms Dr Hansen.

This year, nominations were received in six categories, from across the African continent. Winners and nominees were honoured at a gala dinner event held at Montecasino's Ballroom, in Fourways, and were joined by: The Deputy Minister of Tourism, Tokozile Xasa (on behalf of Minister Molewa); delegates from the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA); members of the media; the founders; Gail Giordani and representatives from the event sponsor ZEISS; Chris Galliers, Andrew Campbell, and other delegates of the Game Rangers Association of Africa. The Awards were presented to beaming rhino conservation heroes, and the ceremony was well enjoyed by attendees.

In the **Best Field Ranger** category, first place went to Anton Mzimba, who has worked as a Field Ranger for the past 17 years, leading his dedicated field ranger team from the front in its anti-poaching efforts. Second place went to Jeoffrey Kubayi, a Lance Corporal Field Ranger whose daily duties include law enforcement, area integrity management and anti-poaching activities, using his excellent tracking skills. Third place went to Martin Ndlovu, who started as a Field Ranger in 1992, climbing the ladder to become a Sergeant Field Ranger.

Voted as the **Best Conservation Practitioner**, Mark McGill, is the Anti-Poaching Unit Manager of Ntomeni Ranger Services, operating in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve since the beginning of 2014, resulting in a massive reduction of rhino losses in the area. Second is General Johan Jooste, with vast experience in military intelligence, border and area protection and

contemporary knowledge of technology use. He has positively contributed to conservation and anti-poaching efforts in the Kruger National Park. The SANParks Environmental Crime Investigators (ECI) took third place, and are responsible for wildlife crime investigations affecting SANParks reserves, on a national level.

In the category; **Best Political and Judicial Support**, Advocate Ansie Venter, was awarded first place. She is Mpumalanga Province's first Specialist State Prosecutor, situated in the offices of the Police's organised crime unit and is responsible for prosecuting high-profile court cases related to poaching. Hilke Janse van Rensburg, who took second place, has been a designated Environmental Crime Prosecutor in the Limpopo Province for the past 10 years.

Dr Dave Cooper scooped first place in the **Best Science Research and Technology** category. A qualified veterinarian since 1981, he finally realised his ambition to work exclusively with wildlife in 1993, when he joined Natal Parks Board – now known as Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. Second is the CSIR CMORE Project Team. The CSIR and its collaborators established a facility that serves as a nerve centre, where surveillance reports and data about poaching events, country-wide border crossings and other operations information is collated, shared and analysed. Otch Otto took third place, and is the Mission Area Manager at SANParks, responsible for co-ordinating SANParks regional and Section Rangers for the past three years.

In the **Best Awareness, Education or Funding** category, Sheelagh Antrobus won the top award, as KwaZulu-Natal's unsung hero in rhino conservation, heading up Project Rhino KZN – one of the most successful conservation associations in Africa. Second place went to the Community of Expert Practitioners, who have devoted their personal time over a period of more than 30 months to create a new Ranger Qualification; the first of its kind in the world. Sylvester Kampamba, vote third, is an Education Officer for the North Luangwa Conservation Project.

The **Special Youth category** honours young people from across Africa that dedicate their time to saving the rhino. The youths honoured at this year's Awards include: Monique Theron, Noelle du Plessis, Rachel and Morgan Ross, Valeska Pawlowicz, Byeronie Epstein, the WITS Wildlife/Rhino Club, Dodo Nyoka and Brian Baragwanath.

"Congratulations to the Award winners!" beams Dr Hansen. "It may be but a small token of our appreciation, but know that your actions do not go unnoticed, your support *is* making a difference, and we are with you in this war, every step of the way."

For more information, visit www.rhinoconservationawards.org.

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