



Peace & Changemaker Generation is a project for 100,000 children living in or around the *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area*, but of course all children are welcome to participate. Here we call the area *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*, which is one of the 18 Peace Parks that were established through cross-border cooperation in the countries of southern Africa.

The children who participate in the Peace & Changemaker Generation project go to school in or near the national parks *Gonarezhou* in Zimbabwe and *Limpopo* in Mozambique, both of which are in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.

Together with children who don't go to school, almost a thousand children are being trained in both countries as *Peace & Changemaker Generation Ambassadors* to work alongside their teachers to carry out the World's Children's Prize Program with Peace & Changemaker Generation at their schools. Teachers, parent representatives and local leaders are also being trained in children's rights, in particular equal rights for girls, the Global Goals and wildlife issues.

Gonarezhou and *Limpopo* national parks are beautiful areas, rich in animal life, which many of the people living here are proud of. But there are also lots of violations of children's rights here, particularly girls' rights, and unfortunately poaching occurs. Climate change may also cause major drought in the area. Some of the children talk about their lives here.

Animals in the P

Tallest in the world

Giraffes are the tallest animals on Earth. They can grow to a height of 4–6 metres and spend most of their lives standing up. Giraffes take quick naps for a couple of minutes during the day standing up. They even give birth while standing up.

Just like human fingerprints, no two giraffes have the same coat pattern.

Other species often stick close to giraffes, using them as early warning systems. Their tall necks and excellent vision allow them to spot predators such as lions and hyenas from far away. When giraffes start running away, other animals follow suit.

Poachers hunt them for their meat, hide, bones and hair. They are killed for their bone marrow and brain, which is believed in some African societies to be successful in treating AIDS. In other countries they are slain for their tails, considered a status symbol. This, combined with overharvesting by the trophy hunting industry; disease, war and civil unrest; as well as direct, indirect or perceived competition for resources with humans and their livestock, has meant the species is in serious trouble.

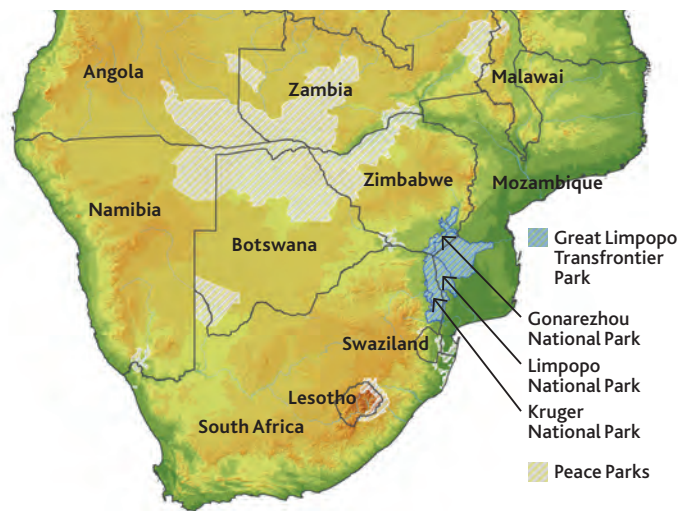
Taking action

Several organisations fight to ensure the survival of wild giraffes. These aim to:

- Educate communities about the importance of giraffes to ecotourism. Giraffes are much more valuable to communities alive than dead.
- Promote conservation agriculture that increases harvests, while ensuring giraffe habitat remains healthy.
- Counter the loss of giraffe habitat and food through reforestation projects.

Under threat

An estimated 111,000 giraffes remain in the wild on the African continent. Numbers have dropped by 30% in the last 15 years, and they have already disappeared from seven African countries. In the *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park* you will only find approximately 4,500 giraffes, 446 of them in the *Gonarezhou National Park* in Zimbabwe and about 25 in the *Limpopo Park* in Mozambique.



Peace & Changemaker Generation is a partnership between

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www.worldschildrensprize.org
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ace Park endangered



Poachers poison vultures

Of the 23 species of vultures, 14 are considered threatened or endangered. In The *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*, the critically endangered hooded vulture flying here is one of more than nine species of vultures.

Vultures are very important members of an ecosystem. They fly huge distances to pick rotting carcasses clean and thereby prevent the outbreak of disease. Vultures flocking to a carcass are the first sign that an animal has been poached. To avoid detection by rangers, poachers lace the poached carcass with agricultural pesticides, killing all animals that feed on the carcass, including vultures. This is resulting in the killing of many vultures.



One in nine lions left

A hundred years ago more than 200,000 lions roamed the African plains. Today less than 23,000, just one in nine lions, remain.

Lions can see six times better than humans at night, and hear prey from as far as 1.5 km away. As large predators who hunt small game as well as larger species such as zebras, giraffes and hippos, lions play an important role in their ecosystems. Without lions there is a risk for overpopulation of other large predators that can lead to the extinction of smaller species.

Lions are also a vital member of The Big Five, attracting thousands of tourists to Africa each year and bringing in employment opportunities to the continent.

Under threat

In the *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*, 1,600 lions roam in the *Kruger Park* in South Africa, 66 in the *Limpopo Park* in Mozambique, and in the *Gonarezhou Park* in Zimbabwe less than 33. The lions' shrinking habitat pushes them into closer quarters with

humans and depletes their food source, causing them to revert to hunting livestock. More often than not this results in the lions being killed in retaliation. Bushmeat poaching is decreasing their food source even more. In some instances, bait laced with highly toxic agricultural pesticides is used to attract and kill lions. Increasingly, lions are also being poached for body parts (bones, teeth, claws, paws and skins) largely traded in Asia, but also locally. Excessive trophy hunting adds even more pressure to the survival of the lion.

In the *Limpopo Park*, a special anti-poaching unit focuses on the protection of the 'King of the jungle'. They patrol areas that lions are known to inhabit, to deter poachers. Another focus is on reducing human-wildlife conflict, including proper predator-proof fencing, putting in place compensation for livestock losses, as well as the relocation of predators to areas where the human population density is lower.



Wild dogs under threat

African wild dogs are highly intelligent animals that live in packs. Of the large carnivores, wild dogs are the most efficient hunters, who work as a well-coordinated team flawlessly during a hunt.

Wild dogs display behaviors that support the health of the pack. This includes sharing a kill, even with members who weren't involved in the actual hunt, and non-breeding adults sacrificing their own nourishment to ensure the pups in the group get enough to eat and grow. When a dog becomes ill, injured or elderly, restricting them from hunting, the rest of the pack cares for and feeds them.

The wild dog is one of the world's most endangered mammals. Populations of African wild dogs were once estimated to be 500,000. Today they have decreased to just 3,000–5,000 adults. In the *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*, estimates place 450 wild dogs in *Kruger Park* in South Africa, 220 in *Gonarezhou* in Zimbabwe, and an unknown number in the *Limpopo Park* in Mozambique. The wild dogs' dramatic decline is largely due to human persecution, disease and shrinking hunting areas.



Fastest ...

Eats 70 million insects!

Four of the eight species of pangolins live in Africa. Pangolins mainly feast on ants and termites using an extraordinarily long, sticky tongue, which, when fully extended, is longer than the pangolin itself. Their insatiable appetite for insects gives them an important role in their eco-

system: pest control. One adult pangolin can consume more than 70 million insects annually.

The international trade in pangolins is banned, yet pangolins are the most trafficked mammal in the world. They are poached mainly for their meat and scales. Their scales are used



in traditional Asian medicine, their meat is considered a luxury food in many parts of Asia, and their skins and other parts are used for purposes such as

fashion. Much like rhino horn, the demand from Asia is increasing as their own pangolin species have declined.

Biggest of all

The African bush elephant is the largest terrestrial animal and can be more than 12 feet tall, weighing about 14,000 pounds. All African elephants, including females, have tusks. Led by a matriarch, elephants are organised into social structures of females and calves. A single calf is born to a female once every 4–5 years and after a gestation period of 22 months – the longest of any mammal.

An important role

Elephants are known as a keystone species – they have a significant impact on their environment and affect the biodiversity surrounding them. They can spend up to 12 hours a day on eating. As a result, these large mammals place great demands on the environment and often come into conflict with people.

Elephants play a vital role in balancing natural ecosystems. As they trample forests and dense grasslands, they make room for smaller species to co-exist. Elephants are also

water providers to other animals. They will use their feet, trunks and tusks to create a hole. These elephant-made watering holes are then available for all animals to drink from.

Elephants are a main attraction in the eco-tourism sector, which creates thousands of jobs. Losing elephants as one of the The Big Five will have a devastating impact on the benefits brought about by thriving nature-based industries.

Under threat

Elephant numbers have dropped by 62% over the last decade, with 350,000 remaining in Africa. Some 29,500 elephants roam through the *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*. *Gonarezhou* in Zimbabwe is home to 11,000 of them, whilst in the *Limpopo Park* in Mozambique, 1,500 elephants remain.

An estimated 100 African elephants are killed each day by poachers seeking ivory, meat and body parts. They are losing their lives so that the ivory can

be used to make carved ornaments and jewellery in Asia, mainly China. Elephants are also often slain for trophy hunting, or as a result of human-wildlife conflict.

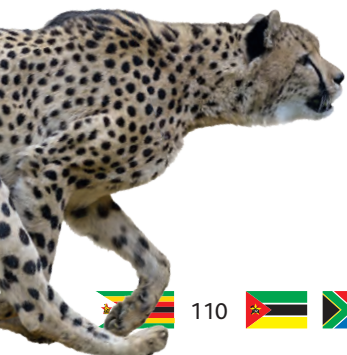
Taking action

In order to protect elephants across the world, there is a ban on the international trade in elephant tusks (ivory). Despite this, the poaching of elephants continues. Interventions to safeguard elephants include:

- Facilitating the establishment of large protected zones, such as *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*, that provide enough space for the free movement of elephants.
- Assisting communities with means of protecting themselves and their crops from wildlife.
- Working with communities who live alongside parks to develop economic alternatives to poaching.
- Spreading knowledge in countries that buy illegal ivory.

Fastest in the world!

The cheetah is not only the fastest animal in Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, it is also the fastest land mammal on Earth. The fastest ever recorded speed is 120 km an hour (75 mph).



Cycling towards my dream

“My dream is to work with nature and animal conservation, as a ranger or accountant at some organisation that fights to protect wild animals. And that dream could be a reality thanks to my bicycle,” says Amukelo, 15, from Batiti near Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe.

Ever since the Chilojo Club came to our school I’ve dreamed of working with nature and wild animals. In the club’s lessons we’ve learned about animal protection and about how everything in the natural environment around us is connected. We’ve also learned a lot about poaching. Poaching is so bad in many ways, but I think the five most important points are:

1. Poaching destroys our forests. Many poachers start fires to get to the animals more easily.
2. Poaching destroys our most important natural resource, the wild animals.

3. Without wild animals, we lose tourists and jobs in our villages and the whole country.
4. Many people die in conflicts between poachers and rangers.
5. Organised crime related to the illegal trade of ivory and animal skins means our country loses important foreign currency, and this makes Zimbabwe poorer.

School is important

My dream is to explain to the villages close to the park how we can live in peace together with the wild animals. I’d like to work as a ranger or



Safer together

Amukelo and her cousin Abigail cycle to Alpha Mpapa High School every day.

“It feels safer if it’s two of us, because it’s never really safe for us girls to be outside the home alone,” says Amukelo.

The Chilojo Club

The Chilojo Club is Gonarezhou Conservation Trust and partners’ programme for the schools in the villages near the park. The club’s tasks include:

- Teaching students about nature conservation and animal protection at schools in the villages.
- Taking students on day trips into the national park so they get to experience the wild animals for real.
- Taking students into the park on a four-day adventure with camping, where they learn even more about animals, the natural environment, poaching, tracking and animal protection work.
- Starting school libraries in the villages that are near the park.



Waking up early

“Before I got the bike I used to get up at three in the morning so I had time to do everything at home before I went to school,” says Amukelo.

GONAREZHOU
NATIONAL PARK
MABALAUTA



accountant at some organisation that fights to protect wild animals. Both jobs mean you have to have a good education, so school is really important to me.

I'm grateful that I'm able to go to school. Unfortunately, many girls here are forced to quit school at my age and never get the chance to join the professions I'm aiming for. Many are forced to quit because of poverty and prejudices. If a poor family has a son and a daughter, it's always the son who gets to go to school if they are forced to choose. The family thinks that if the son gets an education, he will get a good job and earn money that the family can share.



They think there's no point in letting the daughter go to school, as she will be married off and belong to another family. She will never contribute money to her own family, but to the family she marries into. It's not unusual for girls of my

age to become victims of child marriage and be forced to quit school.

Crime against girls

Many girls don't dare continue with their education when they start secondary school,

because it's dangerous to get to and from school. The schools are often far from the village, and then boys and men take the opportunity to harass and assault girls on their way to school. I think it's really terrible. Men and boys



Amukelo



Abigail





The Big Five

“The Chilojo Club has taught us a lot about The Big Five that live in this region: elephants, buffalo, rhinos, lions and leopards. But my favourite animal is the waterbuck. It’s fast and smart and it often gets away when predators attack,” says Amukelo.

The Big Five was the name used by big game hunters long ago for these five animals. Today the name is used by both those who live in the animals’ habitat and by tourists who visit Africa’s national parks.

who do this should be arrested and put in prison!

It hurts me to think about these things. Girls and boys should have the same opportunity to have a good education. Stopping a girl from going to school is a violation of her rights.

I’m lucky that I’m one of the students who has been able to

borrow a bicycle from the Chilojo Club so I can get to school safely. I used to walk to school for over two hours. I had to leave home at five in the morning to get there in time. Now it takes me 45 minutes to cycle to school! I have more energy to concentrate, and my results have improved. The bicycle also means I get home

quicker and I have time to help out at home and do my homework. Getting home before it gets dark is also much safer for us girls. It’s not good to walk home alone in the dark. If I finish secondary school, I get to keep the bicycle!”

Buffalo bikes

The bicycles are called Buffalo Bikes and they come from World Bicycle Relief, which works alongside the Chilojo Club and Gonarezhou Conservation Trust in Gonarezhou National Park.



Blessing afraid of being ma

“Dad used to go poaching in Gonarezhou National Park so he could pay my school fees. But now the rangers have increased security and he’s had to stop. It means I can’t go to school anymore, because we don’t have the money. Now I’m afraid that I’ll be married off and never achieve my dream of becoming a ranger,” says Blessing, 15.

“Dad hunted buffalo and impala and sold the meat. He and mum used the money to pay the school fees for me and my siblings. But now the rangers have increased their presence in the park to protect the wild animals. Many poachers are being arrested and put in prison. Last year, dad realised that it was just a matter of time before it would happen to him too, so he decided to stop. At the same time I had to quit school.

“I really miss school! My life was so different then. I met my friends and played netball during break. I learned so many important things at school. My favourite subject was Content which taught me a lot about the environment and society. I also liked languages, both English and Shangani. When I was going

to school, it was fun to be a child. I laughed a lot and felt free.”

Long working days

“Now all I do is work. I wake at four in the morning and clean the yard. Then I light the fire to heat water. While it’s heating I wash plates and saucepans from last night’s meal. I used to be putting on my school uniform at this time after getting washed, and then I would go to school. Once I’ve made breakfast for everyone I go to fetch wood and water instead, and I wash the family’s clothes. There are nine of us in the family, so I have to do the washing every day; otherwise it will be too much in one go. As evening approaches I start making dinner, which is ready at sunset, six o’clock. Sometimes we sit and talk and tell stories after dinner; other-

wise I go straight to bed because I’m so tired. It’s the job of the eldest daughter to look after the household here, and I do almost everything.”

Alone and isolated

“I’m not allowed to leave the home and meet my friends, because I’m a girl. I don’t really know why. Maybe because my parents are afraid I’ll get

Girls married off

“Many girls my age who don’t go to school are already married,” says Blessing.

Blessing’s father hunted impala.



ried off



Child marriage

“One of the reasons why parents are afraid that a daughter will be assaulted, get a boyfriend or fall pregnant is that it would ruin the family’s reputation. If a family gets a bad reputation, it will be hard to arrange a good marriage for the daughter. As it’s often such a long way to our secondary schools and we run the risk of being assaulted on the way there, many girls are forced to quit once they finish primary school. Very few end up going right through secondary school. Many girls get married

off at the age of around 14. The husband pays lobola to the girl’s family, such as cows or money, when they get married. That’s why some families choose to marry off their daughters at a young age. Sometimes the money is used to pay for the sons’ schooling. That’s so wrong. It’s oppression against us girls! Why don’t we get the education we are entitled to? We should get to learn and understand the same things that boys do. So we can live a good life together.”

Afraid of being married off

“It’s adult men who are marrying young girls. I think it’s strange. It’s wrong to marry a child. Children aren’t ready for marriage. My mum and dad have talked about marrying me off and it makes me frightened. I’ve told them I want to finish school first. But because we can’t afford the school fees anymore, they say it would be best if I got married now. It makes me scared about the future.

“When I went to school, the Chilojo Club came to teach us. We learned about nature, the

natural cycle and about wild animals and why they need to be protected. They also told us how important it is for us to look after our animals and our natural environment, because tourists want to come and



Buffalo meat paid for Blessing’s school fees.





No freedom

“When I was going to school, it was fun to be a child, but not now. I felt free then. Now all I do is work,” says Blessing.

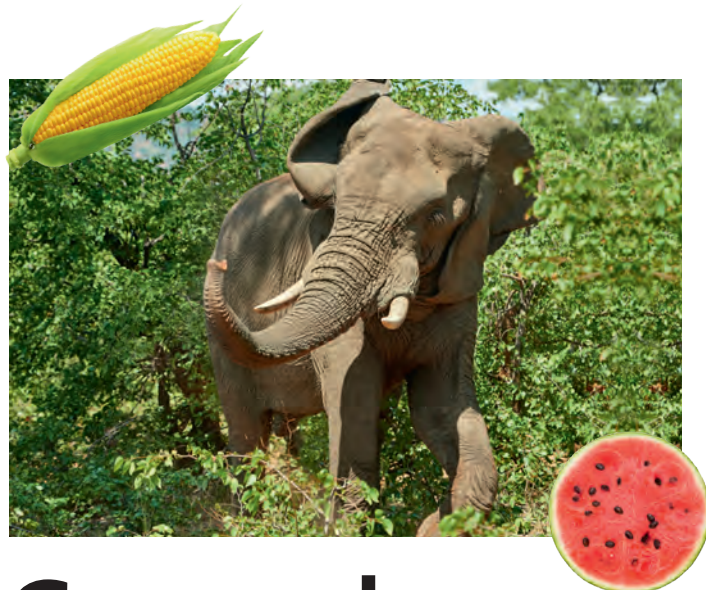
ably wouldn't allow their wives to work in the national park. Here, a wife's job is to take care of the house, her husband and children, not work outside the home.

“My dad poached out of necessity. When he had to stop because of the rangers increasing security, I couldn't go to school anymore. Meanwhile, I want to be a ranger...I know it's a contradiction! But I've learned in the Chilojo Club that our wild animals are worth more alive than dead. That they are part of our heritage and we must look after them for the future. I really believe that, even if it's caused me major problems.”

▶ experience everything in Gonarezhou. I've dreamed of being a ranger ever since. It's really important work, helping protect the animals that can give us both money and jobs, something that we really need here. And I love animals!”

Crushed dream?

“Now I'm afraid that I won't be able to be a ranger, because I've been forced to quit school. I probably won't have enough skills to cope with the training, if I even get accepted now that I haven't finished school. And if I'm married off, I can forget becoming a ranger. Then I'll be someone's wife instead. Most men here prob-



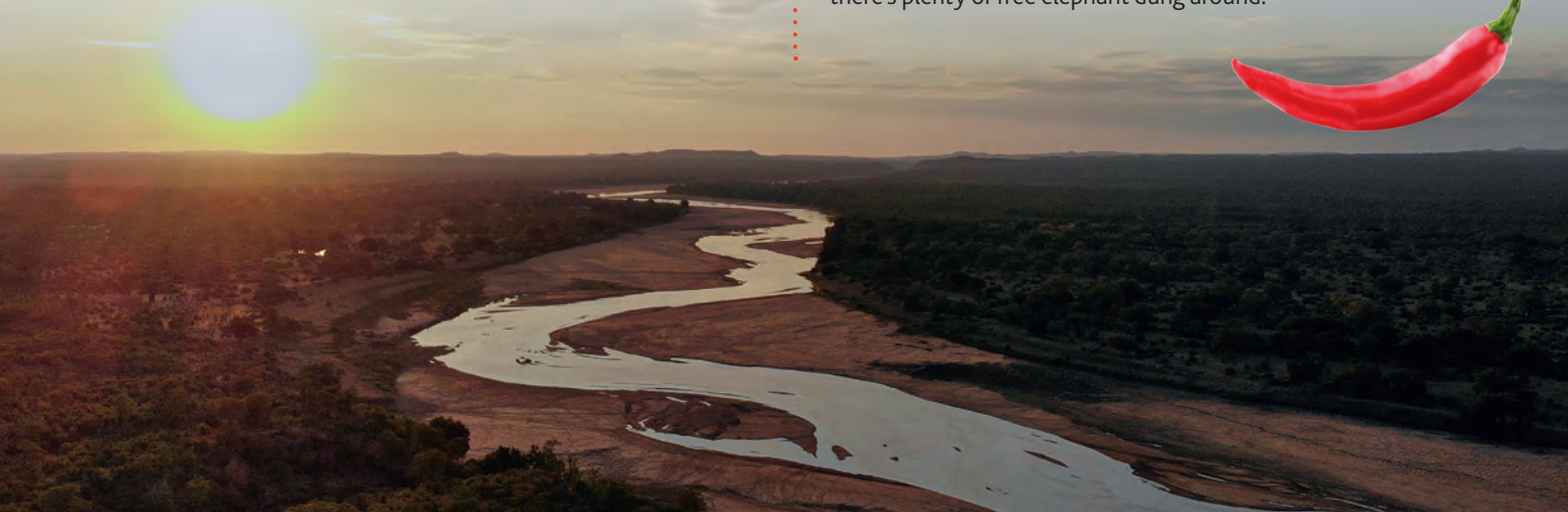
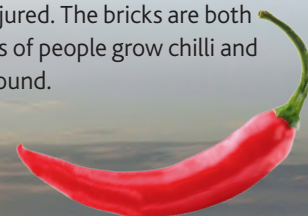
Gonarezhou – The Place of Elephants

“Elephants are my favourite animal. They are so beautiful and wise, but they can also be dangerous and create a lot of problems for those of us who live near the park. They wander into our fields and trample and eat our crops, which we need to survive. Maize, millet, sorghum, watermelon...they eat everything! When the elephants come we try to scare them away by lighting fires, clapping our hands, shouting and cracking our cattle whips. It makes a whistling noise that the elephants don't like. But we've learned to be careful, because elephants can get really angry if you irritate them. They can go on the attack, and then you have to watch out. A man got trampled to death a few years ago in one of the neighbouring villages. If we don't manage to scare the elephants off ourselves, we've learned to contact the rangers for help. The rangers can fire warning shots in the air, and then they usually go away. Many people really don't like elephants, but I love them!” says Blessing.

There are 11,000 elephants living in Gonarezhou, and the park is also quite rightly known as *'The Place of Elephants'*.

Elephant poo + chilli = no elephants!

In the area where Blessing lives, the Chilojo Club has started making chilli bricks (elephant dung and chilli), together with the villagers to reduce conflicts with elephants. If the villagers place hot coals on the chilli bricks and put them around their fields in the evening, the chilli smoke disturbs the elephants so much that they stay away. The harvest is saved without a single elephant being shot or a single person getting injured. The bricks are both cheap and simple to make, because lots of people grow chilli and there's plenty of free elephant dung around.





Journey to our roots

Anxious and the other children walking towards the baobab tree in the national park, where they're going to learn more about rain-making ceremonies.

Our roots are the future

Mpfhuka – Journey

Mpfhuka means *journey* in Shangani, which is the language spoken in the Limpopo region. The Mpfhuka programme is about the shared “journey” that the national park and the people of the surrounding villages are on towards a future of respect, cooperation and peace.

Mpfhuka has:

- Worked with villagers to map all places of cultural significance in the national park that were lost when they were forced to move. It will now once again be possible for the villagers to visit their forefathers’ graves and other important places.

- Given young people the opportunity to learn more about their culture, traditions and history.

- Provided jobs for villagers in the park, including being responsible for running lodges where tourists can stay overnight, built by the villagers themselves in traditional *Shangaan* style.

“When the national park was created, the village was forced out of an area that had been our home for generations, really for as long as anyone could remember. We lost our families’ graves and other places that were important to us. It was good for nature and our wild animals, but it wasn’t at all good for the people and our culture. Many lost their purpose in life,” says Anxious, 15, from Malipati, seriously.

Now they’re trying to do something about the painful history of Zimbabwe’s Gonarezhou National Park.



Biology for the future

“I go to Jichidza High School and my favourite subject is biology. I think school is the most important thing there is. You learn things at school so you can do something important with your life,” says Anxious.

“**B**efore Zimbabwe was independent, the country was called Rhodesia. The white people, who made all the decisions back then, forced people to move against their will when their government decided to create Gonarezhou National Park. The Rhodesian government didn’t care about the people who lived in the area. The fact that the people had a culture and a way of life that was deeply linked to the land and the place was not important. The white government thought that their culture was superior to ours, and they were more interested in making decisions that were good for them, not for us.

Lost freedom

When you think about protecting our wild animals and the beautiful natural environment, it was good that people moved out of the park. But when you think about people’s lives and culture, it wasn’t at all good. They were forced to leave their families’ graves and other important cultural places, like the places where the villagers prayed for rain during times of drought. Visiting places that had been important for generations was now regarded as a crime. It was even illegal to hunt, which was the traditional way of life. People lost their freedom.

The places the villagers



were moved to were unfamiliar and had no meaning for them. Many felt lost and the older people stopped teaching us children important things about our history. People lost their roots and many lost their purpose in life.

Mpfhuka

I think it's important to be aware of your roots and your history. Many older people who knew about our origins and who would have been able to prepare us for the future have died. But the park has now started up a programme

called Mpfhuka, which tries to enable people to once again visit their places of cultural significance inside the national park.

Mpfhuka is also about teaching us young people more about our culture. Tomorrow I'm going to visit the park with a group and learn more about how our forefathers prayed for rain during times of drought. I think it's really important to have a better understanding of where you come from, and to know who you really are." 🌐

Wants to be an ecologist

"When I'm older I dream of becoming an ecologist and working with environmental issues in the national park. It's been my dream ever since I was little and visited a game park with my dad and uncle. It was fantastic to get to see giraffes, zebra and elephants. It's important that we preserve and protect our wild animals and our natural environment, so this unique place is here for future generations. It's both our cultural and natural heritage," explains Anxious.

Human-wildlife conflict

"I live near the park and all the wild animals, and sometimes we are affected. Baboons can kill our goats, and sometimes pythons and civet cats take our chickens. Elephants can walk through the village and eat our harvests. It's dangerous to be outdoors then, because you can be seriously injured. Lions sometimes come close to us, so then we stay indoors. It's important for the wild animals in the park and us humans in the villages to live together in harmony. Sometimes rangers come and help us with this," says Anxious.



TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTOS: JOHAN BJERKE



Rhodesia – Zimbabwe

Before Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, the country was called Rhodesia and was controlled by a white minority with roots in the UK, which colonised the country in the 19th century. In Rhodesia, the black population did not have the same rights as the white people. Forced displacement of people from the area that would become Gonarezhou National Park mainly took place during the years 1932–1975.



Albert was a poacher



“I quit school when I was 14 and became a poacher. Now I know that it was wrong. I killed our country’s priceless natural resources and our heritage for future generations. It makes me sad to think about it. But now I’m trying to do the right thing and make up for it by protecting our wild animals and our natural environment,” says Albert Chari, who is now a ranger in Zimbabwe’s Gonarezhou National Park.

I grew up in the little village of Pahlala, where I went to school for seven years. My dad was a ranger here in Gonarezhou and I admired him and his smart uniforms. I wanted to be a ranger too when I grew up.

“When dad was growing up, he looked after his younger brothers and made sure they had food and could go to school. As a thank-you, our uncles helped us when dad couldn’t afford to pay for secondary school for all his 14 children. But the uncle who was supposed to pay my

school fees went abroad to work, which meant that I couldn’t start school. Dad was out in the field for several months at that time, and he didn’t know about this, so he couldn’t help me. I was 14 years old then.”

Boy becomes man

“I started looking after dad’s cattle with my friend Isac. We tended the cattle in the national park, where there was plenty of grazing, but also lots of wild animals. Isac bred dogs and they were always with us. The first time his

dogs hunted and killed a bush-buck, it felt strange. We sorted out the kill and I dared to go home with the meat because I knew that dad was away.

“Mum was delighted! When a son comes home with a kill for the family, it means that he’s no longer a little boy, he’s a man. I felt proud and happy.

“When dad came home and realised I hadn’t started school, he paid my school fee straight away. But he couldn’t afford books and a school uniform, so I still couldn’t start.

The family was too big and we couldn’t have as good a life as we wished, particularly not

my mum. So although it went against my dream of becoming a ranger, I started hunting again as soon as dad had gone out into the wilderness on a new assignment.”

Hunting with dogs

“I started breeding dogs, just like Isac. We always had at least four dogs with us in the park. But because all the dogs in the neighbourhood knew me and came when I whistled, we often had 20 dogs with us on the hunt! I used a spear and bow.

“We got up early, left the cattle to graze and went further into the park to hunt. We brought home the kill, which our mums started cooking while we went back to fetch the cattle. We hunted four to five times a week, and I really enjoyed that life. It provided food for our families and everyone who let their dogs come with us.

“We became the big hunters of the village, and I felt very proud! Sometimes I sold meat and I remember buying my very first pair of shoes with the money I’d earned from hunting. Before that I’d gone barefoot my whole life.

“I knew that what we were doing was illegal and that we could get into trouble. But I was a really fast runner, so I was convinced that the rangers would never be able to catch me. Although they had weapons, we learned that they only ever fired warning shots



Up close with a lion

"I'll never forget my first encounter with a lion. We were out hunting and we suddenly came across a lion's den where a lioness was feeding her cubs. She got up on her hind legs and roared at us. We stood still and started roaring back, but the lioness didn't give up. Then we started slowly walking backwards while shouting. We walked backwards for over a kilometre with the lioness roughly two metres away from us the whole way! I had to learn a lot about animals and nature to be a successful hunter. I now use a lot of that knowledge today as a ranger," explains Albert.



in the air, never at us. We also learned to whistle in a special way, which meant the dogs ran in front of us and we followed closely behind the pack. That way the rangers never dared shoot our dogs because then they risked shooting us."

Dad furious

"I hid my hunting from dad and we never hunted when he

was home. But in the end the rumours about me and Isaac reached dad.

"I'll never forget that night. Dad was furious and hauled me out of bed. He hit me harder than I thought possible. Then he dragged me round to Isaac's house, where he locked us in and carried on hitting us until we finally admitted that

the rumours he'd heard were true. We were poachers.

"Dad was incredibly disappointed and gave us our first lesson in wildlife and conservation. He said that animals were our natural heritage and that they belonged to everyone. And that if we didn't protect the animals, future generations would only be able to

experience them by looking at pictures in books. He also explained that it was the salary from his job protecting animals that provided the family with money for food and everything else that we needed. If the animals disappeared, he would lose his job and our lives would be harder."



"When I'm home in the village, I always talk about the importance of protecting animals and the natural environment, and that poaching is against the law. In the future I'd like to visit schools and talk to them about my work and about wildlife conservation," says Albert.



Ranger training includes:

- Knowledge of animals and the natural environment.
- Weapons training.
- Tracking and reconnaissance.
- Ambushing and other military techniques.



Elephants killed

"We've lost one elephant in the park so far in 2019, but the number of elephants that are being killed is steadily falling. In 2016, around 40 elephants were killed. The figure for 2017 was roughly 20, and for 2018 it was 10. The poachers know that we have much better security in the park now, with over 150 rangers working here," explains Albert.

Carried on hunting

"I felt put out at having been so knocked about by dad. I thought, why should I listen to him after that? We defied dad and carried on hunting. We were able to because dad was moved to Hwange National Park.

"When my uncle came home and I got the chance to start

school again, I still chose hunting. I felt like I didn't need school anymore.

"I got married, and after a few years, my wife thought that I really should stop poaching. She said that hunting would never be able to build a future for our family; that we could no longer live off something that was illegal and

should instead be doing something that was right. It went so far that she threw the meat down the latrine, she was that angry."

A ranger at last

"My wife got me thinking about what dad had told us about wildlife conservation. When Gonarezhou was



Poachers in Gonarezhou

"Poachers can be divided into two groups. One group consists of villagers from this area who hunt for the food and to sell the meat. They hunt buffalo, zebra, impala and waterbucks, and mainly use dogs and snares for hunting, just like I did. Poachers in the other group mostly come here over the border from Mozambique with heavy weapons and hunt

elephants for their tusks. We get this kind of hunters here at least once a month. We track and pursue the poachers and put them in prison. We never shoot to kill, but sometimes we do unfortunately have to shoot to wound these criminals to defend ourselves and to be able to arrest them. It happened just last month," says Albert.



looking for new rangers, I decided to apply. There were 379 of us who applied for the training. I won the initial ten-kilometre run. But it wasn't until after the big interview, with questions about animals and nature that I was accepted onto the course. I knew it all. When they asked how I knew so much, I was honest and told them that I had been a poacher and been among wild animals for over ten years. I thought they would refuse to let me start the course, but they wanted to have someone who understood how poachers think and where they go. They wanted me, and I was so proud and happy! After all, this had been my dream since I was a boy and saw dad's smart uniform."

Back to school!

"It feels great to be able to tell my two daughters that I'm a

ranger protecting wild animals and the natural environment, not a criminal killing and destroying things. I feel really great now, but just imagine if I'd stayed at school, what a difference it would have made! I would have been able to understand English better and it would have made it easier to get through the training to be a ranger. Both for understanding the course books and the instructions. I really regret quitting school. To all boys who have quit school and are now poaching, I've just got one thing to say: You have to go back to school! Get an education so that you can look after yourselves and your families in a way to be proud of when you're older." 🌍



New heroes

"My old hunting friend Isac and four of my younger brothers are also rangers now. They were probably inspired by me, and that makes me really happy and proud. Boys in the village aged 10–12 also want to be like us. They see how respected we are. Actually I think it's us who are the heroes today, not the poachers. Young boys even report wildlife crimes to us, so they are already involved in this important work!" says Albert.

This is Albert with his brothers, who have also chosen to be rangers. From left to right: Shepard, 25, Albert, 33, Tapiwa, 24 and Mike, 31.



Ana's rights violated

"I fell pregnant at the age of 14 and was forced to quit school and get married. Now my life is like a prison. But luckily, my husband picks oranges on a farm in South Africa instead of poaching. Many girls here have lost their husbands who were rhino poachers, and their lives are even harder than mine," says Ana, 16, from a village near Limpopo National Park in Mozambique."

"I loved school! My favourite subjects were maths, English and Portuguese. Of course I helped out at home, but I also had time to be with my friends. We often did our homework together.

"My life changed completely when I was 14. I got pregnant and had to quit school.

According to our tradition, I was regarded as the wife of the man who got me pregnant. I belonged to his family and they didn't want me to continue with school. I cried, but there was nothing I could say. My role became looking after the baby, my husband and the household.

"My husband is only 20, and no-one forced me into the relationship at the start. But I was disappointed that he

turned out to be the type of husband who makes all the decisions about me. He forced me to quit school and he refuses to let me start again. I know, because I asked recently. I was sad and angry, but the husband decides here, and I have to obey."

Like a prison

"I clean the yard, fetch wood, work in the field, grind maize and take care of my daughter. My husband buys clothes for her, otherwise I'm the one who looks after our daughter. I wash my husband's clothes, make sure there's always water so he can wash, and I cook his food. He forbids me from seeing my friends and it leaves me feeling lonely and excluded. I watch them going to school and it makes me sad. I live where I cannot do what I

Girls don't count

"Boys and girls here don't have equal rights. Life is harder for girls, who clean, cook and do all the household chores. Boys do nothing. But their voices and opinions count more than girls', in the family, at school and in the village. I really don't like that. It's not right, things need to change.



Lonely and excluded

"When I watch my friends going to school while I'm stuck here, it makes me sad," says Ana.

want or meet who I want. It's like a prison."

Husbands disappear

"There are no jobs here, so my husband picks oranges on a farm in South Africa. He's only at home a couple of times a year. It's not easy, but at least it's better than if he had been a rhino poacher.

"One of my relatives was shot and killed in South Africa while poaching, and many poachers from this village are in prison. It's really hard for the families to cope when the

husbands disappear. When there's no money, it's hard to buy food and pay for the children's schooling. At least I don't have that worry. But I think about school every day. It feels like I lost the chance of a good life the day I had to leave school." 🌐



Paulo the poacher has had

“I quit school at the age of 13 and started hunting full-time. It felt pointless carrying on at school, because there aren’t any jobs here anyway. But I’ve had enough now. Lots of poachers and rangers are getting killed. Poaching has to stop,” says Paulo, 16, who lives in a village near Limpopo National Park in Mozambique.



“We usually hunt early in the morning, but sometimes in the evening using strong torches. The animals are drawn to the light, they get blinded and paralysed, and then we send in the dogs for the kill. If it’s a small animal, the dogs kill it straight away, but if it’s bigger like an impala, we kill what the dogs have caught using a machete and panga,” says Paulo.

“People have always hunted here to survive. It’s a way of life, we are hunters. I think that’s why many continue to hunt even though it’s a crime. That’s how it is for me. Both my dad and my grandfather are hunters. I’m just doing what they do.

“I started hunting with my dogs in Limpopo National Park at the age of 10. Hunting with dogs is the traditional way to hunt here. I get up early, get my eleven dogs together – seven large and four small ones – and head out hunting with three of my friends. We hunt impala and other small animals. We have to keep an eye out all the time, so the rangers don’t discover us.

“I’ll never forget one early morning when I was 14. We’d been tracking an impala and I sent the dogs after it. I was

lying hidden in a thicket when I suddenly saw that the dogs were surrounded by rangers. They shot and killed three of my dogs to protect the impala. I ran as fast as I could and managed to get away. Several of my other dogs were injured and had rubber bullets in their bodies. But it’s far from the only time the rangers’ rubber bullets have scared us out of the park. And one of my friends, who is also 16, was arrested and ended up in prison for ten months.”

Rhino hunting

“Hunting isn’t just about tradition. Many poach for the money, because there aren’t any jobs here. Dad and his friends go poaching in the park, but also for rhino. They cross the border into South Africa, because the rhinos

here have been hunted almost to extinction. It’s the rhino horn they’re after, which is very valuable. They either sell the horn in the nearest big town, or in the capital Maputo.

“A team of hunters is often made up of four people, and each hunter in the team can get 800,000 meticaís (USD 13,000) for a single horn! Everyone here who has a nice house and car has it because of poaching rhino. Everyone. That’s how it is for my family too. Our two houses, TVs, sat-

ellite dishes, mobile phones, CD players and pickup truck were all bought with money from rhino poaching. People start companies, such as taxi businesses and fishing, using money from poaching.

“Poaching has become a way of life for almost everyone here. Parents tell their children that it’s the only way if they want to avoid living in poverty. And we do what our parents tell us.”

Loves his dogs

“When my dogs were shot by rangers, I was angry and sad. I had to try and get the rubber bullets out of the bodies of the ones that survived, and it was terrible. But now I understand that the rangers were just doing their job, and they were doing it well too. They wanted to protect the impala and get me to stop poaching,” says Paulo.



enough



"A team of hunters is often made up of four people, and each hunter in the team can get 800,000 meticaís (USD 13,000) for a single horn!"



Paulo has hunted for both impala and waterbuck.



TEXT: ANDREAS LÖNN PHOTOS: JOHAN BERKE

Like a war

"The plan was that I would practice hunting small animals here in the park, and then start hunting rhino in South Africa with my dad. But I've changed my mind now. Dad has too, because he's afraid I'll be killed or end up in prison. Because it's really dangerous.

"The rangers in both Mozambique and South Africa have increased security and many people from this village have been killed. One of my neighbours was shot dead recently. But it's not just poachers who are getting killed. Many rangers are also being shot dead. It's like a war. It doesn't feel good; poaching is a crime and it's wrong. It needs to end.

"At school I learned that we must protect our wild animals, because otherwise they will become extinct. Like the rhinos here. The rangers have an important job protecting animals and the natural environment, and they are paid to do it. People who do the right thing are cool. I want to be like that, not a criminal who poaches.

"But I probably can't get a job as a ranger as I left school so early. My greatest wish is to get to continue my education and do something sensible with my life." 🌐



Villages with new houses are built outside of Limpopo National Park.



“Many of the boys my age in our village don’t go to school. They poach instead. By killing animals, they are committing crimes that will make Mozambique poorer. But these boys’ rights are also being violated when their parents encourage them to poach instead of going to school. It is every child’s right to be able to go to school,” says Luis, who lives near Limpopo National Park in Mozambique.



Loves animals, hates po

My siblings and I go to school, both my brothers and sisters. We’re not rich by any means, but mum and dad work hard so we can go to school and



Girls married off

It’s the weekend, and Luis is helping his little sister Rijay with her homework.

“Not all girls get to go to school here, but in my family, both the girls and the boys go to school. My favourite subject is Portuguese, and when I’m older I want to be a teacher,” says Rijay, 10.

“It’s hardest for girls to stay on at school, because many girls my age are married off. It’s wrong that someone who is just a child themselves has to be a parent and know how to look after a child. All children should go to school,” says Luis.

have a good life. They do it because they love us. Mum and dad grow maize, sweet potato and cassava. Both of them work in the fields, and on the weekends my siblings and I help out.

“Boys my age who don’t go to school almost always start poaching in the park, and they are often encouraged by their own parents. It’s crazy, because they can get shot or end up in prison. There are many here in the village who are poachers, and I think it’s mainly because they haven’t had enough schooling. They don’t understand how important it is to protect animals and the natural environment. That everything in nature is priceless and connected as part of a natural cycle. They don’t understand that these animals are endangered; that one day there won’t be any rhinos anymore, and then they won’t be able to earn any more money.”

You have to work hard

“Some say that they poach because there are no jobs here. But I don’t think there’s a single good reason that makes poaching ok. If you want a job and to survive, you can always find something. You can be a fisherman or a farmer like my dad. Then you get both food to eat and crops, or a catch to sell and you can earn money. They are not easy jobs, you have to work hard to survive. And dad says it’s getting harder to grow maize and sweet potato; that

the rains don’t come when they should and that it’s because of climate change. But those of us who live here can actually also work as rangers and protect animals instead of killing them. Then we’re looking after the natural environment and helping the climate too.

“I’ve learned about nature, the environment and wild animals at school, but my love for animals and desire to protect them instead of killing them comes from my parents.”



School most important

“If I have to sell the tin roof of our house to afford to give my children a good education, then so be it! Nothing is more important than education. Then you can get a good job and not start poaching and be tricked into believing it’s a good life. Because it isn’t,” says Luis’ dad Isaac.

Helping out

"On the weekends, my siblings and I help mum and dad in the fields," says Luis.



Mozambique is affected

Luis says the boys who quit school and start poaching are making Mozambique poorer in three ways:

1. If you don't go to school and learn important things, it will be hard to be part of helping to develop Mozambique.
2. If elephants, rhinos, impalas and other amazing animals die out, Mozambique will lose both its natural and cultural wealth. The country will be poorer and everyone will lose out.
3. If poaching continues, the country and the villages will lose money and jobs that are created when tourists want to come and experience the wild animals. Villagers can start working at hotels and restaurants, and as guides and rangers, but if there are no wild animals, then no tourists will come and there will be no jobs left.

aching

Knowledge is vital

"Knowledge is our only chance if we're going to put an end to poaching. We need to learn a lot about animals, nature, the

environment and children's rights at a young age. That way we'll be better than parents today, and we won't send our children out to poach but ins-

tead give our girls and boys the right to go to school as they should.

"We must also stop thinking that poachers are cool and successful. They are nothing more than criminals. We need role models who have been successful because they have gone to school and worked hard, not

because they have stolen and killed. I want to be such a person. I want to be an engineer and earn money, have a lovely house and a nice car. But I also want to shine by doing something important in life, for society. For building and helping, instead of tearing down and destroying." 🌍



Family against poaching

"At the moment, eight men from the village are in prison in South Africa, with long sentences of up to eight years. And eleven villagers have been shot and killed by rangers: ten in South Africa and one in Mozambique," says Luis' dad Isaac.

"My cousin was killed in South Africa for poaching rhinos. His two-year-old son was left without a dad. It's terrible. At the same time I understand why it happened. Poaching is a crime, everyone knows that, but he still went off," says Luis.

Football best

"Playing football with my friends is the best!" says Luis.



Dad killed for poaching

“My dad was shot dead by rangers in South Africa when he was poaching rhinos last year. I miss him every day,” says Ronaldo, 13, in one of the villages at Limpopo National Park in Mozambique with many poachers.

“Dad and I were best friends and it feels very empty without him. At the same time I’m really angry with him for going to South Africa as a poacher and getting killed. I hate poaching. It’s wrong to kill animals because they’re innocent and can’t speak up for themselves. And it’s against the law to kill animals. I wish my dad had done some-

thing different, but he did it because we’re poor.

“Mum and I live alone now, and nothing is like it used to be anymore. My two younger sisters have moved to my aunt’s in another part of the country, because mum couldn’t take care of all her children herself. Mum goes fishing and sells the catch at the market in town.

Sometimes we have enough

money, sometimes not, and I often go to bed hungry.

“I’m in year 6 now and my uncles help pay my school fees, but we can’t afford a school uniform. Sometimes I get teased because of it. The others say that I’m poor and that makes me sad. But there are lots of other children in school just like me. They don’t have a dad at home anymore either, because they’ve been

caught poaching and been shot or put in prison. Men usually earn more than women here, so when the dad disappears it’s really hard for the mum to take care of her family alone.

“I’ll never be a poacher. On the weekends I help grandad with the cattle, but my dream is to be an engineer. And I love playing football, it’s the best thing ever!” 🌍



Mira is a ranger

“When I was 13, I got the opportunity to start a preparatory teacher training course. It was my dream, and mum was really proud, but dad said no. He said that higher education wasn’t for girls. And because men have the say here, not women, I had to quit school,” says Mira. She is now one of three female rangers in Limpopo National Park in Mozambique, with the dangerous job of tracking, arresting and imprisoning poachers.



My parents divorced when I was three years old. Dad forbade me and mum from meeting and forced me to move in with him and his second wife. I didn’t get any food until all their children had eaten their fill and there were just scraps left, which were never enough. I was constantly hungry, and used to go to the market to pick up breadcrumbs and anything else that I could eat from the ground.

“When dad forced me to quit school, I was meant to stay in

his house all day. I was devastated. But what dad didn’t know was that for a few years I’d been managing to meet my mum in secret at the market on my way home from school. I decided to run away to her to continue my education.”

Beaten

“After three days I took off, but dad caught up with me and dragged me home. He tied me to a chair and hit me with a rubber hose. He said he would beat the evil spirit out of me that mum had infected

me with. Then he left me with his sister in a village far from home, where I had to work in her fields. When I explained that I’d rather go to school, she said that the only thing I needed to learn now was how to use a hoe.

“Nine months later, I found out one day that mum had

suddenly died. I cried so much. I hadn’t even had time to say goodbye to mum when I was taken away, and now it felt like I had nothing left to live for. But in the end I gathered my strength and decided to honour my mum’s memory by running away, finishing school and making a good life



“I love animals!”
Mira hugging Cruiser the tracker dog.



Peace with dad

“My grandma, who lived nearby, eventually discovered that I was being badly treated. When dad and his wife went to the fields, grandma hid food for me in a hole in a Mafureira tree that grew right outside our house. I think she saved my life.

I gave my first salary as a ranger to my dad. He also got a nice suit, a hat and shoes. That made him cry. I think he was ashamed at how he had treated me. But I’ve made peace. I’ve forgiven him,” says Mira.



Mira not like other girls

"Mira manages over 23 men in the camp. It's unusual for women to manage men here in Mozambique. But Mira is a manager because she's the best, not because she's a woman," says a proud José Zavala, who is one of the camp leaders.

for myself. I knew it would have made her happy."

Home help

"I managed to escape to the capital Maputo, where I started working as a domestic help. I was 14 by that time. After a while I'd managed to save up enough money to move to a relative and start school again. While attending school, I cooked food which people bought for their parties, and it helped me pay for and finish secondary school.

"One day I saw on TV that a national park was to start up a training course in ecotourism. I had always loved animals and nature, so I applied imme-

diately and was accepted. When I'd finished the course, I applied for ranger training here in Limpopo. It is known as the best and toughest training in the whole country. After some really hard tests in terrain running, hiking, cycling and lots of other things, there were 40 of 140 applicants left. And just three girls, including me. I was delighted!"

Ranger

"I've been a ranger and group leader here now for ten months, and I love it! My job is to protect the biodiversity of animals and plants here in Limpopo. For me, this mainly involves tracking, capturing

and arresting poachers. We also collect snares and educate villagers about the importance of preserving animals and the natural environment. Financially, because wild animal tourism creates jobs and generates money – for example ten of my workmates are from poor villages just outside the park – but also socially and culturally. The wild animals are part of our heritage and our identity.

"When we visit the villages, it is very clear that boys and girls do not have the same rights here. Girls do not have the same opportunity to go to school, and many parents marry off their 14-year-old

Radio contact

"We report everything that happens to base via radio. For example, if they need to send the helicopter to pick up poachers that we've captured."



daughters in exchange for cows and money. I hate that. Other girls are forced to sell their bodies to survive.

"I want to visit villages and schools and tell them about wildlife conservation and girls' rights. To show that it is possible to succeed and do important things in life, despite having it tough and being poor. Despite being a girl." 🌐





Dangerous job

"I'm actually called Lucrencia Macuacua, but everyone calls me Mira! Naturally I'm worried that I or one of my workmates will get injured or killed. But if I die on the job, I can die happy, because then I will have died defending and fighting for what is right," says Mira.

Long hikes

"We hike for at least 20 km a day when we're doing patrols on foot. We have food, water and everything we need to stay as long as we have to in the bush to track poachers. The longest I've been out is five days. We sleep on boulders, never on the ground, because there's a risk of being trampled by buffalo! We work three weeks on and one week off," says Mira.



Footprint book



Water bottle



Compass



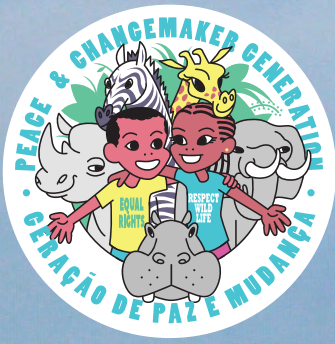
Handcuffs



Valuable rhino horn

"Not long ago, I was part of a team that tracked and captured poachers on the South African border who had killed rhino. I've just given evidence in court, and now the poachers can expect a 20-year prison sentence. One kilo of rhino horn is worth USD 8,500. The minimum wage here is USD 60 a month, but there are a lot of people here who aren't even on that much. But even if you're poor, you have the chance to say no when organised criminals from Asia tell you to shoot our animals. You always have the opportunity to do the right thing," says Mira.





Save the Rhino

The rhinoceros has been around for 60 million years. The name means 'nose horn' and is often shortened to rhino. There used to be 30 different species of rhino, but now there are just five species left and all of them are endangered. In the peace park, *Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park*, there are now no rhinos left in the areas that fall within *Gonarezhou National Park* in Zimbabwe and *Limpopo National Park* in Mozambique. An average of two rhinos are killed every day by poachers for the sake of their horns.

A rhino calf weighs 60 kilos when it is born, and the white rhino, the second largest land mammal, can grow to a height of 1.8 m and weigh 2,500 kilos!

Rhinos have a reputation for being dangerous and grumpy. This is mostly because their eyesight isn't very good, so they cannot see any further than about 15 metres, making them vulnerable and liable to feel threatened.

An important role

As mega-herbivores, rhinos play a crucial role in ecosystems. They are considered an "umbrella species", which means that other species, from plants and birds to insects and mammals, depend on them. They consume large amounts of vegetation, which helps to keep a healthy balance within the ecosystem. Removing rhinos changes the landscape and makes it unsuitable for species such as antelopes, which in turn leave the area.

As one of *The big five*, rhinos contribute to economic growth through tourism, which creates job opportunities and provides benefits to local communities.



A threatened species

At the beginning of the 20th century, there were more than 500,000 rhinos. Today, only 23,500 rhinos survive in the wild. An average of two rhinos are poached for their horns every day. There is a ban on the international trade of rhino horn. However, criminal syndicates organize the illegal poaching and trafficking of rhino horn from Africa to Asia. While poachers risk severe punishment and their families are often severely affected, the syndicate leaders make vast amounts of money.

Buyers are mainly based in China and Vietnam, where rhino horn, which is made of clumped hair or keratin, the same type of protein that your hair and fingernails are made of, is believed to have healing powers and is used in traditional medicine. The horns have also become a status symbol and are sold as a high-value gift item.

Taking action

Several organizations are fighting to save the rhino. Peace Parks Foundation is:

- Training anti-poaching units to be better at detecting, tracking and arresting poachers.
- Providing anti-poaching units with helicopters, tracker dogs, thermal cameras and radar systems.
- Improving wildlife crime investigations through strengthened cooperation between security and law-enforcement agencies in Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe.
- Working with communities in and around parks to develop economic alternatives to poaching.
- Saving rhino calves that have been orphaned due to poaching.
- Educating young people in Vietnam and China about the consequences of poaching and the illegal trade in rhino horn.