WCN
Wildlife Conservation Network

RHINO RECOVERY FUND

Progress Report
World Rhino Day 2026



(c) Suzi Eszterhas

LAND, LAW, AND COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Rhinos in Africa and Asia face a range of immediate threats that demand immediate action. While WCN's Rhino Recovery Fund (RRF) is committed to addressing these threats with necessary short-term measures like dehorning to protect rhinos from poachers, we also know that we cannot allow ourselves to fall into a constant state of triage. In order for all five remaining rhino species to survive and recover, they will also need sufficient safe habitat to thrive in, and a robust & functional legal framework that offers ongoing protection. The RRF is working to ensure that rhinos have both, and everything else they need to recover.

While it might not be as violent as poaching, having access to sufficient safe habitat can be a life-and-death issue for rhinos. As healthy, recovering rhino populations outgrow the reserves that they are confined to, rhinos are more likely to come into unnecessary conflict with each other. This is already driving higher natural mortality among some populations of greater one-horned rhinos in Nepal—not to mention causing conflict with local community neighbors, too.

Likewise, protecting rhinos from poachers means little if the legal frameworks meant to hold traffickers accountable are slow, weak, or riddled with gaps. That is why the RRF is working with grantees and other WCN Wildlife Funds to address enforcement and legislation wherever rhinos live, and wherever illegal rhino horn may be trafficked or sold. From the borders of Etosha National Park in Namibia, to an "exclusive" shop in northern Laos where tourists are pressured and manipulated into buying illegal wildlife products, the RRF is working with our partners to make sure poachers are stopped and traffickers face legal consequences.

On this World Rhino Day, we are looking at the longer-term challenges rhinos face, and how your support is helping us address them. These are forward-thinking investments, built on the hope that your steadfast support has given us. We are so grateful for that support and looking forward to building the future that rhinos deserve together.



(c) Catalin Grigoriu

LAND

Keeping Black Rhinos on the Right Side of the Fence

Frankfurt Zoological Society
Zambia

In Zambia's North Luangwa National Park, RRF support is helping Frankfurt Zoological Society manage a healthy and growing population of black rhinos. That includes maintaining sanctuary fencing that keeps the rhinos safe in their habitat. Only a few years ago, a black rhino escaped the fence and wandered hundreds of kilometers away, launching a complex rescue effort. But in the last year, thanks in part to significant investment in the park's rhino conservation area to maintain its sanctuary fence, zero rhino breakouts were recorded. Going forward, if available land ever does put a ceiling on this growing and well-managed rhino population, it can serve as a source to help reintroduce black rhinos elsewhere.



Greater one-horned rhino in Bardia National Park, Nepal.



Gonarezhou Conservation Trust relocating rhinos to holding pens as part of their 2025 rhino relocation to Gonarezhou National Park. *(c) Gonarezhou Conservation Trust*

Mobilizing Public Opinion for Greater One-horned Rhinos

Greenhood Nepal
Nepal

In Chitwan National Park—the oldest in Nepal—greater one-horned rhinos are relatively safe from poachers. But unchecked development around the park is degrading rhino habitat, restricting their room to roam, and even leading to premature death. That's why Greenhood Nepal is mobilizing public opinion to reduce the threat of development activities in rhino habitat. They published and distributed an illustrated story booklet on environmental compliance, which drove increased support for rhinos and rhino habitat among the local community. And when locals collectively raised their voices, a team led by the Home Minister of Nepal visited the site and ordered a detailed investigation into the environmental compliance of the industries impacting rhino habitats. It even made the national news—a powerful reminder that conservation efforts have no better allies than local communities.

Protecting Habitat for White Rhinos in Gonarezhou

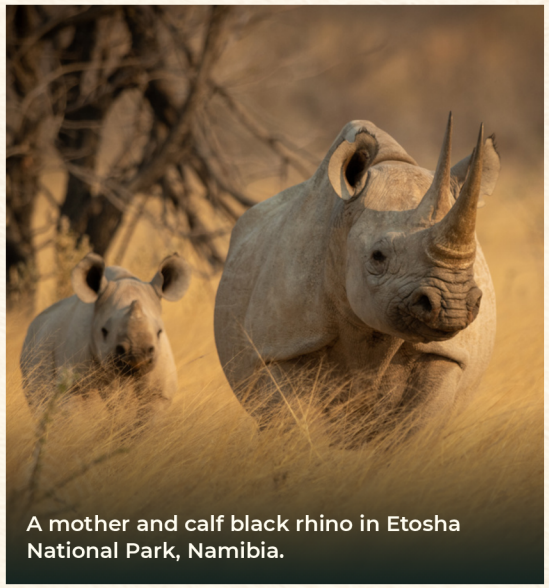
Gonarezhou Conservation Trust
Zimbabwe

For the first time since the early 1900s, a new generation of white rhinos has been born in Gonarezhou National Park. The Gonarezhou Conservation Trust relocated 30 individuals to the park in 2025—a population that has expanded to 35 this year with the first white rhino births in this part of Zimbabwe in a century. It is a major conservation milestone, but also one that will require serious landscape protections. For now, the rhino calves and their relocated mothers are restricted to an intensive protection zone that is about 1/10th of the park area, making monitoring and accounting for them easier. The Gonarezhou Conservation Trust seeks to double that area over the next five years, and will need $5 million to do so. Giving this expanding population more room to roam will help keep it healthy, reduce conflict between males, and help ensure many more generations of white rhinos are born in Gonarezhou. It will also benefit all other wild species across the park.



Ranger Donald Misheck and veterinarian Dr. Chap Masterson transporting a rhino to Gonarezhou National Park. *(c) Gonarezhou Conservation Trust*

LAW



A mother and calf black rhino in Etosha National Park, Namibia.

From Chat Rooms to Court Rooms, Combatting the Illegal Wildlife Trade

Education of Nature in Vietnam (ENV)
Vietnam

Vietnam remains both an important transit point and destination for a number of illegal wildlife products, including rhino horn. In order to address this complex problem, it is essential to both disrupt the online marketplaces where these illegal wildlife products are sold, and collaborate with law-enforcement agencies to pursue criminal cases against the traffickers. This year, RRF support has helped ENV advance progress on both fronts. They have mobilized an incredible community of supporters online, over 250,000 strong, who use social media both to encourage the public to reject the wildlife trade and to actively seek out and report online wildlife crime to the authorities. These reports, which result in an average of 11 new wildlife crime cases every day, are only meaningful because ENV helps ensure that they trigger real investigations and prosecutions. Enforcement like this also has an important deterrent effect, encouraging voluntary compliance and pushing traffickers off social media, making it harder for them to turn a profit from illegal rhino horn and other wildlife products.

New, Cutting-edge Tools for Namibian Law Enforcement

Rooikat Trust
Namibia

Rhino poaching syndicates are growing more sophisticated, and law enforcement in Namibia must constantly adapt to counter their evolving tactics. Etosha National Park's vast, rugged landscape makes it incredibly difficult to apprehend poachers in the act once they are in the park. But these poachers must use a limited network of gravel roads to access Etosha's borders, creating a critical chokepoint. That's why Rooikat Trust is working to support the Namibian government by strengthening the CCTV network along these access routes, upgrading cameras with number plate recognition powered by visual AI. Beyond helping intercept poachers along the park borders, this technology will also provide crucial data to law enforcement when immediate arrests aren't possible—laying the groundwork for future criminal prosecutions. It's a powerful innovation, and one that the RRF is proud to support.



A rhino crosses a road in the vast Etosha landscape.



Rhino horn and products seized by Hong Kong government.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

Multiple Wildlife Funds, Collective Impact

One of the strengths of WCN's Wildlife Funds is that they can work together across landscapes to address systemic issues and have a larger collective impact. Fund Directors regularly collaborate and share knowledge, and Funds are able to co-grant to the same organization. For example, both the RRF and the Pangolin Crisis Fund (PCF) support ENV's work in Vietnam to combat illegal wildlife trafficking. For the RRF, co-granting is an important way to address existential threats that affect not just rhinos, but a whole range of threatened species and landscapes.



Stopping zero-dollar tours stands to benefit elephants, and so many other species. *(c) Frank af Petersens*

Tackling Harmful "Zero-Dollar Tours"

Wildlife Conservation Society
Laos, Vietnam, and China

While the name may sound benign, "zero-dollar tours" are anything but. They are a deeply harmful practice in which unscrupulous travel agencies offer extremely low-cost tours, often to destinations in Southeast Asia, in which Chinese travelers are manipulated into purchasing illegal wildlife products including rhino horn, elephant ivory, and pangolin scales. The tours operate on a cost-sharing basis, with wildlife traffickers covering most, if not all, of the tour expenses in exchange for access to a captive audience of potential customers. And they are big business—media research identified 11 travel agencies involved in zero-dollar tours in Laos, with illegal trade revenues estimated to be as high as US$400 million in 2024.

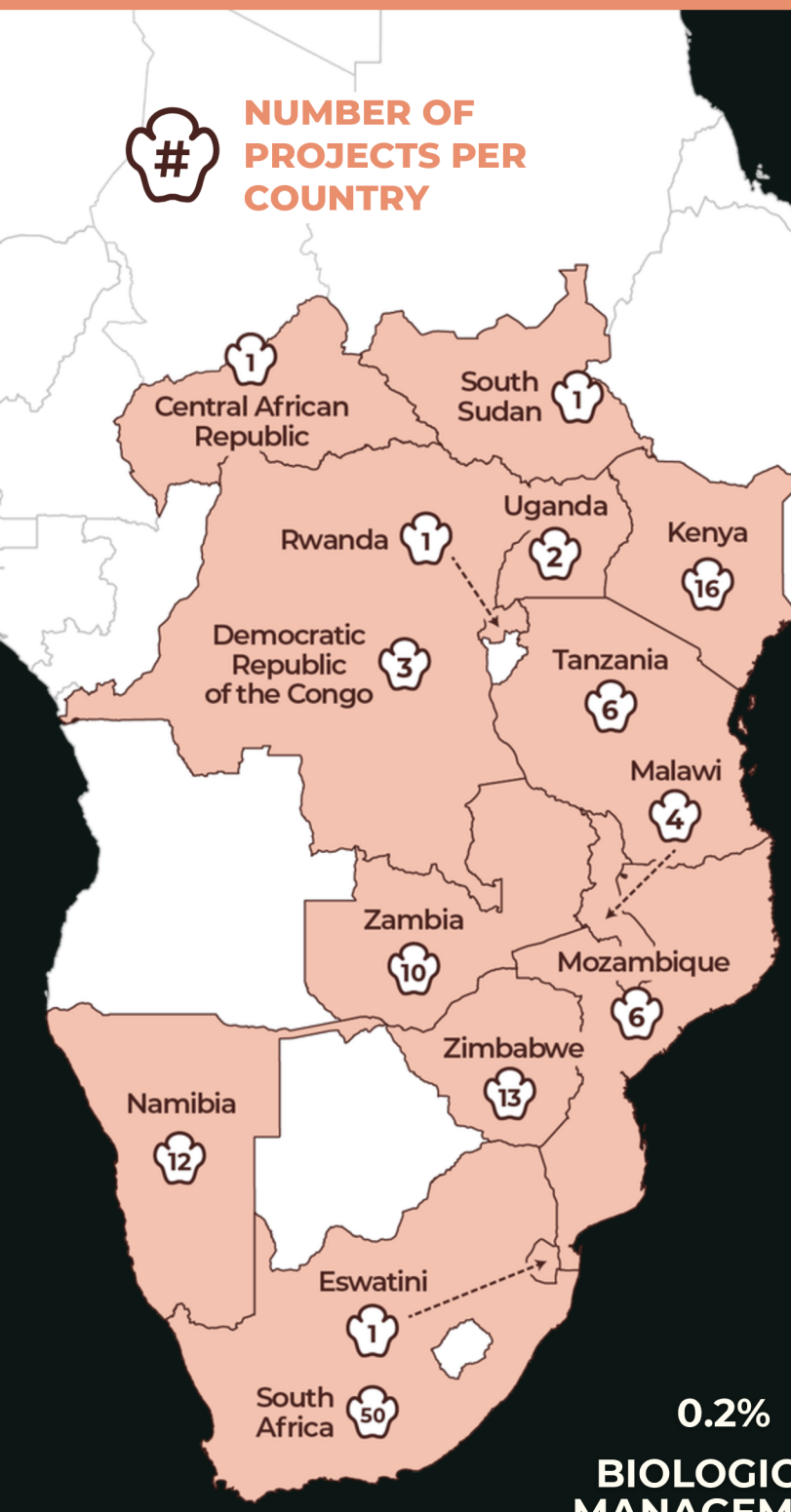
Given the scale of the problem and the sheer number of species affected, the RRF has collaborated with the PCF, and the Elephant Crisis Fund on a joint grant to the Wildlife Conservation Society. The project's goal is to end harmful zero-dollar tours through a coordinated regional approach that will improve cross-border tourism governance, change consumer behavior, and push for better domestic enforcement across China, Laos, and Vietnam. It moves beyond piecemeal enforcement in a single country or province, which can simply cause bad actors to relocate, and addresses this regional problem at a regional level.

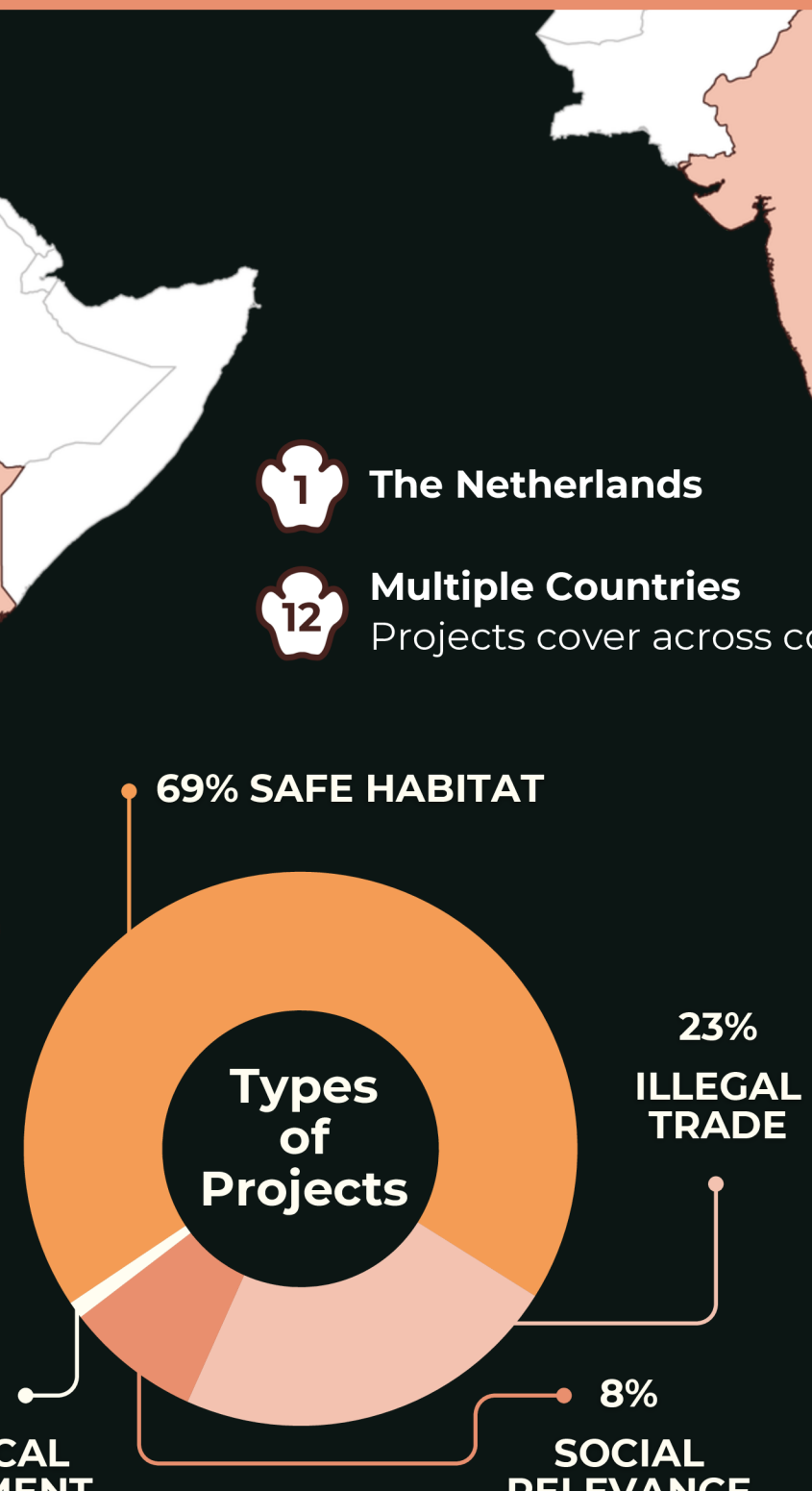


Bushels of pangolin scales seized by authorities. *(c) Charles Emogor*

RHINO RECOVERY FUND PROJECTS

NUMBER OF PROJECTS PER COUNTRY





1 **The Netherlands**

12 **Multiple Countries**
Projects cover across countries

To date, the Rhino Recovery Fund has granted over $12 million, investing in

22
COUNTRIES

162
PROJECTS
Projects represent the number of grants issued.

Above information as of September 2026.

THANK YOU FOR BUILDING THIS FUTURE WITH US

None of our progress this year, from mobilizing communities in Nepal, to building smarter enforcement tools in Namibia, would have been possible without you. Your support has allowed the RRF to respond to immediate crises while also giving conservationists the resources to build the future rhinos need—land where they can thrive, laws to protect them, and partnerships that multiply our impact across borders and landscapes.

But our work is far from finished. On this World Rhino Day, we ask that you continue to stand with us as we protect and recover rhinos. Every donation helps. Here are just a few ways in which your continued support can have an immediate impact. Thank you again for everything you've made possible. We couldn't do this without you.

- $3,000 buys a cutting-edge surveillance camera with visual AI, helping to disrupt poaching networks that target rhinos in southern Africa and make the criminal cases that stop them for good.
- $4,200 provides one month of full time salary to a wildlife veterinarian in Zambia, doing essential work to keep rhino populations healthy.
- $10,000 extends sanctuary fencing around nearly 300 acres of white rhino habitat in Zimbabwe, increasing their room to roam.

Rhino Recovery Fund

WCN Wildlife Conservation Network

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