

Katrin Pfeil's Report 2014

In 2014 I was awarded the CSAR bursary, which helped making a unique opportunity become possible. I used the bursary towards a research project on wildlife crime in South Africa, where I spent two months on fieldwork in public and private game reserves in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Poaching in South Africa, especially rhino poaching, has been escalating over the past five years and poses a direct threat to the survival of the species, the lives of rangers, the economy of the country and even international security. Yet, from a criminological perspective, the causes and dynamics, let alone effective interventions, are not well researched or understood. Several approaches to counteract this trend are being discussed on a national and international level, but there is a massive lack of evidence to inform policy and support decisions. The aim of my project was to help build a basis for discussions by systematically analysing data and gather in-depth knowledge from different groups of people involved in anti-poaching programmes. I was able to conduct 32 interviews with professionals ranging from park managers, sections rangers and anti-poaching units to local NGO representatives, prosecutors and investigators. It was an incredible experience talking to all these people who battle poaching on the ground and listen to their opinions and insights. It is my hope that the information from such a broad range of professionals is used to inform policy and help game reserves and governments become more efficient in battling poaching. In addition to successful data gathering, meeting these passionate people and spending two months in rural South Africa and especially in national parks was an incredible experience. Zebra, nyala and impala were regular visitors in my camp and at night, I was oftentimes woken up by the bushbaby that was living in the tree outside my hut. Twice I was able to walk in the bush with a guide and experience white rhinos, giraffes and even cheetahs on foot. The most incredible experience however was yet to come. After a few weeks I was fortunate enough to witness something extraordinary: A flying rhino. As part of a rhino expansion project, a team of rangers, vets and pilots were darting rhinos deep in the bush and then flying them out by helicopter - upside down! I was instantly reminded of the pressing nature of wildlife crime and the importance of my project. Seeing a flying rhino and all these other magnificent animals, as well as the African night sky and sunsets over the bush will be locked in my memory forever. This was a unique opportunity and I am very grateful to the CSAR for their support. Attached are a few photographs I took during my trip.