



WCC

Wildlife Conservation Coalition



Proudly Supporting





The Wildlife Conservation Coalition is an association dedicated to fostering a collective and unified voice for conservation efforts in Northern Matabeleland. By uniting like-minded organizations under a single Board and Leadership Team, we aim to enhance our impact.

The Coalition serves as a platform that supports the ongoing initiatives of individual trusts operating under our banner, facilitating significant conservation work.

As a primarily implementing organization, we engage in daily field operations that address challenges at the grassroots level. By pooling our resources, expertise, and logistical capabilities, the Coalition strives to improve efficiency and expand our conservation efforts throughout the region.

With a shared commitment to our mission, the Coalition provides a cohesive and collective voice to authorities, stakeholders, and donors.

OUR TRUSTS



V F A P U

Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit- Was established in 1999 and primarily focuses on combating wildlife crime in and around Victoria Falls. A unique destination that sees fantastic coexistence between the 50,000 people that call the city home, and the abundant wildlife that share the surrounding natural environment. However, this does not happen by accident and much work has been done by the Unit to mitigate the ever-present poaching threat.

Website: <https://vfapu.com/>

Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/vfapu?mibextid=ZbWKwL>

Instagram:
<https://www.instagram.com/victoriafallsantipoachingunit?igsh=MWlrYjF2bWxydXAyeA>



V F A P U

The Victoria Falls Anti-Poaching Unit

Number of Rangers: 19 (4 Horse Mounted Rangers and 15 regular Rangers)

Number of Vehicles: 2

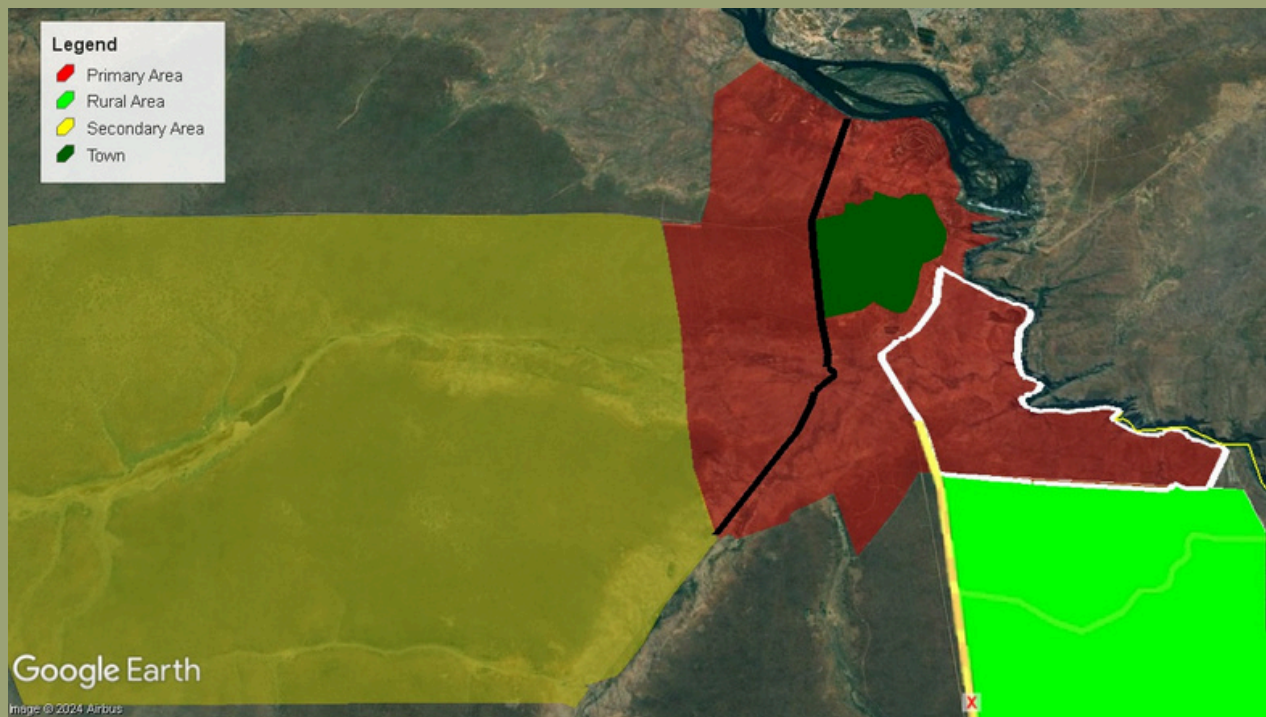
Size of area: 10,000 hectares of primary focus; 50,000 hectares secondary focus

Types of Poaching

- Bush Meat and Timber(deforestation)
- Occasionally deal with animal trophies such as ivory.

Map Below Illustrates the following:

- Dark Green- City of Victoria Falls
- Light Green- Large Rural Community
- Red- Our primary area as its the hottest poaching threat
- Yellow- Our Secondary Area of focus
- Black Line- Represents the Zambezi National Park Boundary
- White Line- Victoria Falls National Park, which is fenced, and under private management



The map clearly illustrates the overlap between animal habitats and human spaces. Notably, there is a significant red area that lies outside the designated Park Boundaries. This region remains bushland, rich in wildlife, yet it is encompassed within the city limits. This situation presents various challenges, as it is not prohibited for people to access these bush areas, resulting in elevated levels of human activity in these environments.



Our Work

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Our Primary goal is to be a force for good within this high activity wildlife area. Whilst we can celebrate the successful coexistence between animals and people already present in Victoria Falls, there is much work that goes on behind the scenes to achieve this, and more that can be done.

VFAPU is proud to be one of the major reasons that wildlife still abounds within the city limits of Victoria Falls. We believe the situation would be very different if the VFAPU had not been a constant force for good within the bush for the past 25 years.

Our major poaching threats are timber (deforestation) and bush meat. Both of these have varying degrees of severity. Some is subsistence, but much of it has a commercial scale to it. There is a high demand within the Victoria Falls City for both firewood and bush meat. We deal with daily incursions for timber, and regular incursions for bush meat.

Animal trophies such as ivory or lion bones are poaching threats that we mitigate, and always in partnership with the Authorities. These threats are less common (thankfully) but we remain vigilant and ready to respond should an issue arise.





A Multi-Faceted Approach

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- Boots on the Ground remains our most effective tool. This exists in both a horse mounted unit and regular foot patrol units. With the high level of activity we experience, Rangers are regularly picking up incursions and reacting to them. Having rangers out in the field daily acts as a deterrent for would be poachers, but also a primary source of information about poaching attempts and incursions, as well as the animal's well-being.

Our Rangers are often the first to identify a distressed animal. More often than note, the distress is caused by a wire snare. In such cases we work closely with an organization called the Victoria Falls Wildlife Trust. They focus specifically on animal rescue, and have a team of vets who are able to sedate the animals so that they can be assisted. The Horse unit is particularly effective here as animals are far more relaxed around people on horses, than people on foot. Working with the horses allows the rescue teams to be far more effective.

One of the more unique aspects of the bush meat poaching we deal with is the methods of using wire snares. The traditional method is to lay snares on game trails around a regularly used resource, such as a waterhole. The snares are left set, with the poacher returning every day or so to check if he has caught anything. This method is used in our area of operation, and our approach to this is pretty straight forward. When we identify an active snare line, we ambush it, and more often than not, catch the culprit on one of his regular checks.

However, we are noticing a growing and more worrying method whereby poachers actively "hunt" with their snares. What this entails is a poacher, or group of poachers walking through the bush with the snares on their shoulders. They identify a herd of animals they wish to target, jump ahead of it and lay a line of snares. They then get back behind the animals and herd them toward the snare line. This is particularly the case of commercial buffalo poachers in our area, who supply several butcheries around the city.

This method has developed due to the familiarity between the animals and the people. The animals within the city limits are more accustomed to having people around them, and therefore a person can approach much closer than a more skittish animal deeper into the park.

Boots on the ground, and being a force for good in the bush, remains our most effective way of mitigating this threat.



Technology

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- Technology is fast becoming an integral part of our daily work. We are fortunate that there is good cell phone coverage in our primary area of operation, and so make use of cellular camera traps. These provide 24-hour surveillance, strategically placed on known paths that poachers use. Our limited arsenal of two have been instrumental in multiple successful arrests and convictions and we intend to greatly increase our number of cameras so as to have greater surveillance.

Night vision and thermal imagery make night observations far more effective. We have one pair of excellent thermal binoculars, our intention is to get more, so that we can deploy several observation units at the same time.

Drones, and particularly thermal drones are an area we intend to expand into. We do not have our own drone, but have borrowed one on multiple occasions. This is particularly useful when an incursion has been detected at night. With wild animals around, it is far safer to stick the drone in the air, find the culprits and position our rangers so as to intercept the poachers. Our ultimate goal is to use the various forms of technology as much as possible to monitor our wildlife areas and detect incursions. Our boots on the ground teams then become more of a reaction team.





Information gathering and undercover operations

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- Information gathering and undercover operations are a major part of our anti-poaching efforts. With such a large community sharing these spaces with wildlife, the demand for meat and other products is high.

We have an established informer network that act as eyes and ears within the community for us, as well as run several undercover operations to better understand the trade of poached parts, and improve our chances of apprehending the culprits.





Working with specialised K9's

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- Working with specialized K9's. The Take Action Trust moved to Victoria Falls in the second half of 2023. They specialize in K9 training and in particular for anti-poaching work. We have been working very closely together to mitigate the poaching threat. Dogs have been instrumental in reducing our follow up on poachers, particularly those deploying anti-tracking techniques. Whilst we track with our eyes, the dog tracks by scent.

We have also had several successful arrests of poachers who have tried to flee from a scene. The dogs are trained to tackle such culprits, and have helped us increase our number of arrests.

We are currently working on developing a K9 unit that will focus specifically on detecting bush meat, and other animals' products. Thus enhancing our mission of combatting wildlife crime from within the community.





The Challenges

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The greatest challenge for this Unit is the very “Urban” nature of our primary focus area, due to the high levels of human traffic. Much of it can be deemed innocent but a large portion of it is more sinister. Naturally, when animals and people are in such close quarters, poaching is an inevitable challenge.

Because of this high activity, the possibility of our operations being compromised is large. We are confident that poachers have their own informers that act as general pedestrians, but are rather their eyes and ears regarding our Rangers movements. Whilst we make ever effort to keep our operations a secret, it remains on of our greatest challenges.

This is made more difficult with the ease of communication within our primary areas. Whilst the great cell phone coverage is an advantage to us, it’s also a disadvantage. Communication between poachers is instant and has proved to hinder our operations in the past.

Poachers are also making use of vehicles for a lot of their illegal activities. Again, it is not illegal for people to drive the many roads within the city limits, and it actually makes for great game viewing. But poachers use vehicles to scout out the area. Checking for both the ranger movements, and the animal movements. Much of the time poachers are deployed by vehicle, and more often than not collected by vehicles. Especially if they have made a successful kill.





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The Solutions

Given the challenges faced by this Unit, we are constantly adapting and improving to remain ahead of the evolving poaching threat.

Boots on the ground will always be a major part of our operations. These units detect incursions, identify distressed animals and often bump into poachers whilst on patrol. It is also one of the more effective ways to deal with those poachers who are “hunting” with snares.

We have embraced technology and currently have two cellular trail cameras in our arsenal. These have been invaluable in our early detection work. Having identified multiple entry and exit points used by poachers, we rotate our trail cameras throughout these routes as a means of detecting incursions. Our aim is to get more of these cameras to cover more of the route’s poachers are using, with the eventual goal of having all the routes monitored 24/7.

Our boots on the ground teams, are then bought in to react to these incursions.

We also work closely with a specialized K9 unit run by the Take Action Trust. The addition of dogs to our anti-poaching work has been invaluable, especially on reactions. Poachers will often adopt anti-tracking methods which can be challenging to follow when just tracking by sight. The K9 unit cuts back our follow up time significantly by being able to follow the poacher’s scent.

Intelligence and information gathering is one of the key pillars of our anti-poaching work. Although relatively new to our operations, it has been invaluable in several recent arrests. This consists of both an informer network whereby rewards are offered for information that leads to a successful arrest. But also includes the employment of undercover Rangers, generally those who are from out of town, and unknown. They infiltrate the community and aid in identifying where the poacher products are being sold.



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Recent Results

January to August 2024

- Poacher Arrests:432 Total
- 16 charged and sentenced for bush meat poaching,.
- 7 charged and sentenced for illegally fishing.
- 6 charged and sentenced for illegally mining within the Parks Estate, the balance charged and fined for illegally harvesting timber within the Parks Estate.
- Snares Recovered:572
- Animals Poached:17
- Animals Rescued:19

VFAPU's latest reports can be found in the link below.
<https://vfapu.com/reports/>





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