

## Fish and Wildlife Service Grantee Wins Prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize

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On April 11, 2011, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grantee and long-time partner Raoul du Toit was named to receive the internationally recognized Goldman Environmental Prize for Africa.

Each year, the Goldman Foundation selects six environmental heroes, one representing each of the six inhabited continental regions of the earth: Africa, Asia, Europe, Islands and Island Nations, North America, and South and Central America. The honor recognizes individuals for sustained and significant efforts to protect and enhance the natural environment, often at great personal risk.

Each winner receives an award of \$150,000, the largest international award for grassroots environmentalists. The Goldman Prize views “grassroots” leaders as those involved in local efforts where positive change takes place through community or citizen participation in the issues affecting them. Through recognizing these individual leaders, the prize seeks to inspire other ordinary people to take extraordinary actions to protect the natural world.

Mr. du Toit was selected for the prize for his heroic efforts to protect rhinos in his native Zimbabwe. Rhinos have become extinct in thirteen African countries in the past thirty years, but rhinos survive in healthy numbers in southeastern Zimbabwe, largely due to the bravery and commitment of Mr. du Toit and the Lowveld Rhino Trust. He and his dedicated team of Zimbabwean rhino monitors, land managers, owners, veterinarians, and community members have successfully protected more than 340 black rhinos and 175 white rhinos on private conservancies in Zimbabwe’s southeastern lowveld. Overall, the team currently takes care of 77 percent of the country’s rhinos.

In 2008 and 2009, Zimbabwe suffered the highest levels of rhino poaching recorded since the late 1980s, with 192 rhinos illegally killed for their horns. At this rate, rhinos would have been driven to extinction within a decade. However, the Zimbabwe government and Mr. du Toit managed to stop the decline by getting ahead of the poachers by moving rhinos from hazardous areas onto more secure areas offering a strong local commitment to protect rhinos from outsiders.

Simultaneously, law enforcement authorities in the United States, South Africa, and Zimbabwe shared their evidence concerning an illegal poaching syndicate operating out of South Africa. In September 2010, South African authorities arrested nine veterinarians, professional hunters, and businessmen implicated in a rhino poaching syndicate that may have coordinated more than 100 of the recent rhino killings.

“We are thrilled that Raoul and his team are getting the recognition they deserve. With the incredible poaching pressure Africa is currently facing, protecting rhinos is a difficult and dangerous job, and the Lowveld Rhino Trust has done a remarkable job in simultaneously saving rhinos and building a wildlife-based economy for the area in spite of tremendous obstacles.” said Dr. Michelle Gadd, African Rhino and African Elephant program coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Mr. du Toit has been a partner of the Service since 2002, receiving grants from the Rhino Tiger Conservation Fund. Lowveld Rhino Trust work supported by the agency has included the costs to dart and translocate rhinos to safer habitat, and emergency veterinary expenses to intervene when rhinos are caught in snares or otherwise injured.

Other Goldman Prize winners that have been sponsored by Service species programs have included Eugene Rutaragama of Rwanda, Corneille Ewango of Democratic Republic of Congo, and Tuy Sereivathana of Cambodia.

To learn more about the work the Service is doing to help protect rhinoceros in Africa and Asia, go to <http://www.fws.gov/international/DIC/species/rhino/rhino.html>.

Follow the Service's International Program on Twitter @USFWSInternatl and on Facebook, USFWS\_International Affairs.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is to work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals and commitment to public service. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

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