

INVESTING IN AN ANTI-POACHING DOG

This is the second part of an article about the use of dogs in anti-poaching work. The first appeared in SWARA 2015-2



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Selecting, training and the upkeep of a dog for anti-poaching work is costly. Few animals display the temperament, aptitude and interest to learn the ‘tricks of the trade’ and before any specialist training can begin, the dog needs to be trained in basic obedience.

PHOTOS BY: DARYLL PLEASANTS/WHITE PAW TRAINING



PHOTO BY: COLLEEN HOGG-PHOTOGRAPHYLIFE/BIG LIFE FOUNDATION



PHOTO BY: CATHERINE CORRETT/K9 CONSERVATION

LEFT: Playing and training.

TOP LEFT: Chasing training.

TOP RIGHT: Agility training.

BOTTOM: Attack training.

It is difficult to be precise about the length of a training regime for an anti-poaching dog as breeds and training institutes differ. One claim is that it takes nine weeks for the specific anti-poaching training once the dog is 14 months old. Another regime takes 120 days for dogs that are between 16 and 24 months old.

Initially most dogs were trained in the USA or Europe. A training regime might start with the young dogs getting experience in scent work and ground disturbance using a combination of food tracks and scent trails. Special attention would be placed on getting the dogs to pick up a trail from a simple foot track, as this would be the main scent source in a poaching incident. Once the basic skills were learned, animal distractions would be introduced so that the dogs would have to discriminate between the scent they were following and other scents. Finally the trail layers would emulate poacher behaviours and capture and evasion techniques when laying trails. Altogether the intensive training regime could last around five months of five/six days a week. Once

PHOTO BY: DARYLL PLEASANTS/WHITE PAW TRAINING



in Africa, training has to continue in the habitat, climate and obstacles, such as water and fire, which the dog will confront.

Clearly it is of value to have the dogs bred and brought up in the country where they will work so that they are accustomed with the environment from birth. In 1998, Ol Jogi was the first ranch in Kenya to bring in two bloodhound sniffer dogs from the United States. They subsequently brought in a further two from the USA and successfully bred two litters. Ol Jogi have kept some of the pups and donated dogs and training to several other organisations including Lewa Nature Conservancy, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Oserian Development Company Ltd, Colceccio Ranch, Mugie Ranch, Ol Donyo Waas in the Chyulu Hills, The Mara Triangle, Shompole and the Kenya Wildlife Service. Some of these reserves are now running breeding programmes using imported dogs. This will also help reduce costs.

Of course it is not just the dog that has to be trained, the handler too needs training - both before it meets their dog and afterwards.

The initial training has to cover basic line handling, scent theory, training techniques, reading the dog, environmental impact on



PHOTO BY: JAMIE GAYMER/OL JOGI



PHOTO BY: WIKICOMMONS

TOP LEFT: All conditions training.

TOP RIGHT: Line training.

BELOW RIGHT: Specialist kennel facilities.

trails, and how to set up and mark training trails. In addition, nutrition, grooming, kennel maintenance and basic first aid are essential. Trainee handlers spend time each day feeding and grooming their dogs, learning how to approach and praise them. A critical skill all handlers must learn is to read the dog's body language and to get the feel of how to work a line.

An additional cost of keeping dogs for anti-poaching work is the need to train a number of other people in crime scene preservation so that the dog is not confused by a host of scents that do not belong to the poacher. Park management, lodge managers, field guides/rangers and all resident security personnel need to be taught how to approach and treat a crime scene and to understand the methods of preserving it.

Dedicated kennelling facilities of appropriate size, secure (from predators) with shelter from the elements and a sleeping area are essential.

An additional area for health care is advised. Kennels have to be cleaned daily.

Adult working dogs are normally fed commercial dog food

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SPOTLIGHT

PHOTOS BY:DARYLL PLEASANTS/WHITE PAW TRAINING



PHOTO BY: MADDELIN ANGERAND/ WIKKICOMMONS

TOP LEFT: Fido cam.
TOP RIGHT: Veterinary checks.
BELOW: Regular hygiene.

pellets between 450g to 700g, once a day and/or quality fresh dog meat.

Veterinary care is essential to keep working dogs in optimal condition to perform their duties. They need to be vaccinated once per year and de-wormed three times per year. To ensure they are protected against external parasites, such as ticks, lice, flies and fleas, they need to be dipped at least once per week.

Anti-poaching dogs need protective gear to shield them from armed poachers. Ballistic body armour is stab-proof, kick and punch-proof and also ballistic to AK-47 gunfire with plates in it. The latest technology being used is FIDO head gear, a digital video camera harnessed on the head which films what the dog can see and is displayed on a screen which the handler has. It can be equipped with night vision and a GPS system.

What do all these requirements add up to? While there are so many variations in anti-poaching dog units, it is difficult to show an example costings. The figures to the right give an indication of what can be the case.

Clearly the start-up and running costs of a dog unit are a significant investment but their value in anti-poaching work is immense. ●



COST OF A TRAINED DOG

\$3,500 to 9,500 depending on breed/skill required

Cost of handler training

\$3,000 to certificate level

Cost of kennel & equipment

\$1,500

TOTAL START UP

\$8,000 to \$14,000

ANNUAL RUNNING COST

Food

\$1,000 high quality special dog food

Veterinary and medical

\$250 general health, non-emergency

Tick and flea control

\$150

Handler salary

\$3,700 quoted cost of one handler

TOTAL RECURRING

\$5,100 per dog

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

Ballistic Armour

\$900 bullet and stab resistant

Patrol kit

\$550 for grooming and training

Working dog kit

\$1,000

Canine first aid kit

\$180 for field use

Camera system

\$5,000 back or chest mounted, B&W camera works in low light

Camera system

\$1,000 head mounted, B&W low grade

Camera system FIDO

\$15,000 head mounted, colour with handler colour monitor

TOTAL ADDITIONAL

\$3,000 to \$18,000

Anti-poaching dogs at work – some success stories

KENYA

In June 2009, a tracker dog unit was introduced in the Mara Triangle at the Ngiro-are Outpost, near the Tanzanian border. Poaching for the commercial bushmeat trade, indiscriminate killings using illegal snares and hunting with spears and bows and arrows was decimating the wildlife. Cattle theft by rustlers from across the border was also serious. Effective protection



PHOTOS BY: LINDA PORTER/CANINE TRAINING ACADEMY

required the arrest of all individuals in a poaching gang. The dog unit, now with six bloodhounds, has led to a higher success rate in arrests making poaching and rustling a less viable source of income.

Two ivory and firearms detection dogs have been introduced to inspect incoming and outgoing vehicles for contraband. ●

LEFT: Tracking in the Mara Triangle.

RIGHT: Mara Triangle bloodhound and handler.

TANZANIA

Big Life tracker dogs are the first to be used in Tanzania for wildlife conservation and have been a great success. A patrol team found a rhino trail littered with cable snares that had been set the day before. The ground in the area was mainly lava rock and impossible for conventional tracking so the dogs were bought in. Four hours later, the dogs led the rangers to a small hut on a farm. On searching the hut, the rangers found more snares, poisoned arrows and a gin trap. This single operation would have saved many animals.

In another incident, the Chief Park Warden of Tarangire National Park called for support after an elephant had been shot and the park terrain made it difficult to follow the poachers tracks. The dog team arrived in the late afternoon and set off on the trail, which wound in and out of the park, through a village and back again. The scent was lost when a large herd of cattle crossed the path of the poachers' tracks.

Next morning the dogs set off with a new strategy to pass by every village and, through a process of elimination, reduce the possible options. In each village, young men were lined up and the dogs "interrogated" them via scenting, one by one. In the town of Makuyuni, the scent was picked up again but the tracks disappeared where the poachers had boarded a car. Within half an hour, a vehicle was intercepted with three men not from the area. The dogs were called in for another line-up and picked out both men. ●



PHOTO BY: JEREMY GOSS/BIG LIFE FOUNDATION



PHOTOS BY: COLLEEN HOOG-PHOTOGRAPHY/LIFE/BIG LIFE FOUNDATION

TOP LEFT: Rocky on a track.

TOP RIGHT: Dog tracking.

BELOW: The Dog unit.

SPOTLIGHT

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Virunga National Park, a Unesco World Heritage site in the war-torn eastern region of DR Congo, is home to gorillas, chimpanzees, okapi, forest elephants and buffalo, among other wildlife. Poaching of elephants has been a particular problem.

To assist the ranger team, a bloodhound programme has been introduced with the help of a specialised Swiss centre and volunteers from the German police. The Virunga habitat presents special challenges to bloodhounds in terms following scents across streams, rivers, and through dense, thorny vegetation, and biting insects.

The 'Congohounds Project' has so far resulted in five teams of a handler and dog receiving intensive training for over a year. In one incident, rangers found a poached elephant and two dog teams were deployed to the scene by helicopter. They tracked the poachers scent for seven kilometres to a small fishing village and found the culprits who fled leaving their weapons behind.

Two Springer Spaniels have also been introduced and trained to detect ivory when checking vehicles, building or areas. Apart from its anti-poaching work, the programme will greatly improve the ability to find lost and critically injured rangers, many of whom have died needlessly awaiting help. ●



PHOTOS BY: VIRUNGA.ORG

TOP: congohounds against elephant poaching.

BELOW LEFT: Congohounds on patrol.

BELOW RIGHT: Congohound Lulimbi.

PHOTOS BY: RUTH STARKEY/WCS/ANPN



GABON

Having lost 30% of their forest elephants to poachers, the Gabonese National Park Agency (Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN) along with the Ministry of Water and Forests (MINEF) and Wildlife Conservation Society funded a feasibility study on the effectiveness of using search dogs to detect poached items.

In 2013, a newly formed team started work. The dogs are trained to detect ivory, pangolin scale, leopard skin, shark fin,

and iboga tree products and bush meat, with other scents being added as the need arises. They search luggage at the international airport and do checks at the train station, they sniff containers at the city port and they are deployed at roadblocks, picking up scents inside vehicles.

The dogs have been a major success making finds of ivory in checked-in luggage, pangolin hidden inside a truck, several sacks of shark fin hidden within other fish products and large hauls of illegal bush meat from a railway station, and on a road check point. ●

LEFT: Searching baggage at a railway station.

MIDDLE: Searching vehicles at a roadblock.

RIGHT: Searching a container.