

Hello, again, and welcome. I'm Jim Tedder in Washington. Our program today is all about animals. First we will hear about a group of people who are working to save the African elephant from poachers. New money and new ideas are involved in the project. Then we will focus attention on Kenya. Officials there have begun using small electronic devices to protect rhinos.

As It Is, information you can use to help you learn English is coming your way.

The Clinton Global Initiative is working with conservation groups and African governments to increase efforts to save the African elephant. The animal's existence is severely threatened. In just 2012 alone, poachers – illegal wildlife traders -- killed more than 35,000 of the animals.

John Calvelli of the Wildlife Conservation Society described the organization's 80 million dollar plan to reporters in New York. He said the goal is to stop the killing. Mr. Calvelli said funds will be used to support national governments to improve anti-poaching enforcement at 50 top places where elephants are found. An additional 3,100 park guards will be hired.

“To stop the trafficking, efforts will be increased by strengthening intelligence networks and penalties for violation. And adding training and sniffer dog teams at ten key transit points.”

Lack of money makes catching poachers in the act of killing even harder than it already is. And, rangers are sometimes said to get more money from illegal payments to ignore the law than they do to enforce it. And, much of their equipment is broken or outdated.

Elizabeth Bennett is also with the Wildlife Conservation Society. She says the organization's funds will increase salaries and pay for new technology. GPS units for the rangers, for example, will help them find both elephants and poachers.

“When they’re going around they can record what poaching signs they see. They record what elephant signs they see, and what signs of any problems they might see. And that all gets fed into a central database to see where the real problems are, and therefore where the enforcement effort needs to be.”

When many people think of poachers, they may think of a lone villager heading going into the wild to make a quick killing for easy money. But Patrick Bergin of the African Wildlife Federation says going after the little guy has limited results.

“For every one who is apprehended there may be 15 or 20 other people behind him ready to take his place. That is not an effective strategy. We need to go higher up the food chain. There are people commissioning this and trading it. These are criminal gangs.

Mr. Bergin says poaching is organized, international crime. And he says fighting it requires national legislation not necessarily related directly to poaching.

“Immigration charges. Arms charges. Money laundering charges. Movement of goods-over-borders charges. And they can confiscate bank accounts, houses, aircraft. This is where it really becomes punitive.”

He gave the example of the owner of a helicopter letting someone he does not trust rent the helicopter. The people may seem a suspicious, but they will pay in cash. But Mr. Bergin said if you deal with them, your helicopter might not be coming back

Carter Roberts, president of the World Wildlife Fund, says stopping the demand for ivory is also necessary.

“And that means making people in places like China and Thailand and even the United States, aware of what it means to buy an ivory product, where it came from and what the consequences are. We’ve seen people's minds change about diamonds, about fur, and I believe that we can change the way people look at these products too.”

Jane Goodall is a famous British anthropologist best known for her pioneering field work with chimpanzees. But she has also spent time observing elephants in the wild. She said compassion – sympathy - not just policy, is also extremely important.

“If you once watch young elephants playing, splashing each other having fun in the water, then you realize that like so many other creatures, they have emotions similar to ours. Then you realize it’s not just that we face extinction of a species. It’s that this is causing unbearable suffering to some very amazing animals with whom we share, or should be sharing, this planet.”

Microchips May Save Rhinos

Wildlife officials in Kenya say workers have begun placing microchips into rhinoceroses. The Kenyan Wildlife Service is acting to stop poachers, who kill rhinos for their horns. Workers will use the microchips and scanning equipment to follow the huge animals as they move around. The chips can also help officials link recovered or seized horns to poaching cases. Bob Doughty is here to tell us more.

The Kenyan Wildlife Service received the equipment from the World Wildlife Fund. Robert Magori is a spokesman for WWF Kenya. He says each rhino will have a microchip placed in its body. A second chip will be placed in its horn.

He says that if the microchip tag on a recovered horn can be identified, it can be linked to a poached animal. The device provides evidence of a poaching incident.

Such incidents are increasing among Kenya's comparatively small population of about 1,000 rhinos. Mr. Magori says poachers killed at least 23 of the animals last year. This year, they have already killed at least 10. He believes the microchip will help stop people from cutting off rhino horns and then try to take them out of the country.

In his words, "They will have no idea where the microchips are. And so, it could be extremely dangerous for them to go through ports of entry as well as any immigration areas without them being noticed."

The process of separating the horn from the rhinoceros is cruel. Poachers cut off the horn while a drug makes the rhino unable to move. Many times, the animal is left to bleed to death. Or, it never recovers from its drugged condition.

Rhino horns are made from the same material as human fingernails. Many people value them as a cure for disease. Traditional medicine says the horn material helps reduce high body temperatures. But medical experts say horns cannot cure any sickness. I'm Bob Doughty.

Thank you, Bob. Now, a quick look at what is going on at the Smithsonian National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C., better known as the National Zoo. People have been visiting the zoo in joyful numbers since its recent reopening. The animal park had been closed for more than two weeks during the government shutdown earlier this month.

Dennis Kelly, the zoo's director, says the animals missed their human visitors. And another zoo official reported that the maned wolf howled at unexpected times. The animal performed its voice exercises during the day instead of at night. The wolf looks like a fox, and is famous at the zoo for its unpleasant odor. Some people say it smells something like a skunk.

But unlike the maned wolf, the zoo's baby giant panda generally kept to its usual activities during the shutdown. It slept with its mother, and it ate. The as yet unnamed baby panda gained about two pounds and grew more fur while the zoo was closed. And her squawking grew louder.

And with that, we will conclude this **As It Is** program, with a reminder to stick around for more learning English, and then world news at the beginning of the hour, on VOA.

