

## Rhinos benefit from 'extraordinary' South Africans



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*Faye Peters (actress on MNet's The Wild and presenter on 50/50) with tandem master Laurel Thatcher*

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The event took the campaign's fundraising tally a step closer to the R10million goal, with three other Skydive for Rhinos events still to take place around the country. Already, close on R4million has been raised by participants, the business community, schools, shopping centres and general donations to the African Conservation Trust's Rhino Fund and challenges are increasing on social media networks to those too 'chicken' to skydive, to show their support in other ways.



Springbok and Blue Bulls rugby player Juandre Kruger was one of the 64 'Rhino Skydivers' who jumped from 10,000ft at Rustenburg airfield last weekend. He joked that he would rather face the All Blacks than jump out of a plane, but the rhino crisis was serious enough for him to do it. Kruger made an impassioned appeal for all South Africans to either join or donate to the campaign as it moves around the country. "I have soft spot for animals and being a part of this campaign has been very enjoyable and worthwhile," he said.

Skydive for Rhinos is the African Conservation Trust's year-long campaign to raise funds and increase awareness of the escalating rhino poaching crisis facing the country's game reserves, conservation and tourism sectors. It allows people from all walks of life to stretch their own limits and raise funds for urgent anti-poaching needs at the same time. Organisers are aiming to have 448 people taking a 10,000ft leap of faith - one for every rhino killed by poachers in 2011. Each participant is asked to raise a minimum of R5,000: R1,600 covers the cost of their tandem-skydive and the balance goes to the ACT Rhino Fund.

Raising funds for rhinos and facing one's fears at the same time seems to have caught on. Elise Daffue, founder of StopRhinoPoaching.com, one of the South African conservation leaders taking part in this national effort also skydived at the Rustenburg launch. "This was one of the scariest, most incredible and insane moments of my life!" she said. "From way up there you can see forever and I couldn't help but get very emotional, knowing that the rhino reserves and their security staff in the areas below us are being constantly challenged by poaching gangs. The huge significance of this campaign, each and every one of us facing our fears and taking a giant leap for rhinos, really struck home. What an amazing day with such inspiring people."

Lead vocalist of South African rock band Wonderboom, Cito Otto concurred, "I would do anything to help in

the fight against the desecration of these amazing creatures. It was a challenge that turned out to be the best ride of my life! I'm still smiling and would happily do it again." Other South African personalities that also participated were stars of MNet's The Wild mini-series Michelle Bradshaw, Josette Eales, Tyrone Keogh, Faye Peters and Keenan Arrison. The youngest participant was 13 year old Tristen Simmons, who skydived alongside his father Richard.

The Skydive for Rhinos campaign now moves to KwaZulu-Natal for the weekend of 18-19 August, before heading to Port Elizabeth for the first weekend of September. It culminates in Robertson in the Western Cape on World Rhino Day, 22 September.

Whilst the campaign's main events focus on skydiving in the name of rhinos, the African Conservation Trust has sent out an appeal to the business sector to either support their employees who want to participate or to give their own donation to rhino anti-poaching needs. Others who are participating in the R10million effort include schools, ex-South Africans living in the UK, small businesses donating from product sales and adventure sports events.

There are places available for the Port Elizabeth and Robertson events for those who want to face a fear, or tick off a bucket-list item and show their support rhinos in crisis at the same time. To sign up, visit: [www.skydive4rhinos.org](http://www.skydive4rhinos.org).

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