

*Promoting more effective wildlife monitoring by understanding the perceptions and occupational culture of wildlife rangers*

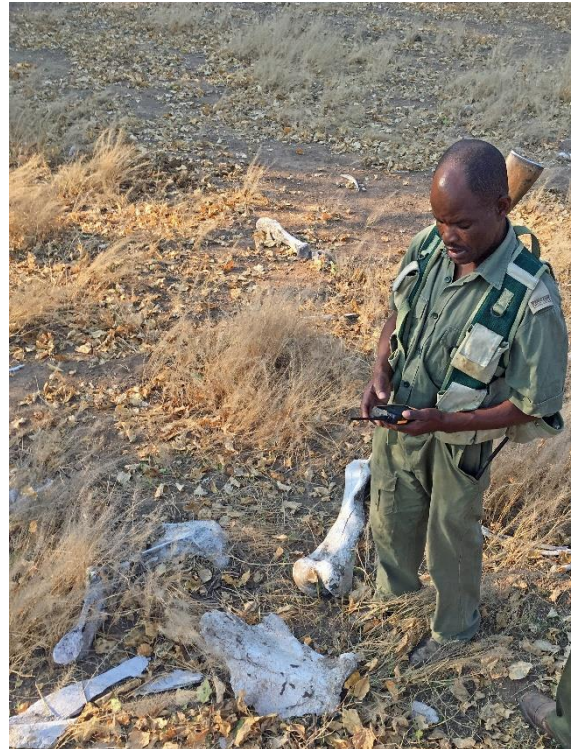
Timothy Kuiper, Francis Massé, Nobesuthu A. Ngwenya, Blessing Kavhu, Roseline L. Mandisodza-Chikerema & E.J. Milner-Gulland

Rangers work at the frontline of wildlife protection, so engaging their perspectives is critical to effective conservation. Globally and daily, hundreds of thousands of rangers patrol wide areas within protected lands, making observations of plants, animals and poaching. These data have significant potential to inform conservation decisions, at scale and low cost. For example, assessing the effectiveness of interventions to tackle elephant poaching requires accurate estimates of poaching levels over time, which could be provided through ranger detections of elephant carcasses. Yet if rangers do not see the broader value of monitoring, they are unlikely to collect data accurately and consistently.

We interviewed 26 rangers in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe to understand their attitudes towards patrol-based data collection. Rangers saw data collection as a fundamental duty, and reporting field observations to their supervisors as an important way to demonstrate a job well done. We found that the occupational culture of rangers at our site – particularly their strong sense of duty and their deference to authority – to be a key driver of these perceptions and their broader behaviour. Indeed, this occupational culture strongly coloured how rangers perceived their roles and responsibilities around data collection and management.

These insights helped us design a strategy for achieving more meaningful engagement of rangers with monitoring. We make the case that building on existing ranger culture, while also fostering a greater appreciation among rangers of the data they collect and how it ends up being used, can help achieve the goal of more effective monitoring. Actions to address the well-being and resource challenges rangers face in their daily duties must accompany this building of ranger culture. More broadly, our work demonstrates the value of meaningfully engaging rangers in conceptualising and tackling conservation problems, rather than seeing them as

passive nodes through which conservation strategies are enacted.



*A wildlife ranger records data on an old poached elephant carcass encountered while on patrol in the Zambezi Valley, Zimbabwe. Photo credit: Timothy Kuiper.*