

# From tracking down terrorists to contributing to conservation

**Felix Patton**



is a rhino ecologist, who writes and broadcasts about the species from Africa and Europe. He has an MSc in Conservation Biology and a PhD based on research into individual rhino identification and social behaviour. He is a frequent contributor to SWARA.

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**J**ohannes Jacobus Genade is the owner/manager of Amuka Lodge set in the pristine woodlands of Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary in central Uganda. This new build lodge was officially opened in August 2011 and marked the remarkable journey of Johan Genade from an army 'squaddie' into full time wildlife conservation.

A native of Namibia, Johan was brought up in a small village on the edge of the Namib desert in southern Namibia. In a family of three brothers, much time was spent hiking and camping in the desert among some of the world's most spectacular flora and fauna, not the least of which was the Namibian Oryx. After school, like many of his contemporaries, he was drafted

into the South African National Defence Force. There he stayed graduating through the ranks to become a Company Sergeant Major. An opportunity existed, and was accepted, to change from eight years of practical soldiering to work as an officer in Intelligence and Counter Intelligence where he stayed for a further eight years. With the expertise built up in managing security operations, Johan moved to the private sector in the Angolan mining industry managing administration and training for a security company. But a hankering after being his own boss saw him make a sea change by starting up a carpentry products business back in South Africa.

Wanderlust crept slowly back in and Johan sold up and moved back into the security world in Angola and then on to

Uganda, where his family joined him. In September 2008, Johan's wife Angie was appointed as Executive Director of Rhino Fund Uganda based on the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, where the only wild rhinos in Uganda can be found. From this point on the whole Genade family immersed themselves in wildlife conservation. The two sons worked as volunteers while Johan helped out when not at work in Kampala.

With the ever-present threat of poaching to Ziwa's rhino population, upgrading the security systems was paramount. The expertise that Johan had gained in the military and industry was an asset not to be ignored. He took on the role of Security Adviser, recommending system changes, advising on personnel issues and







**Top Left: Instilling discipline in the rangers through drill**

**Below Left: A security meeting with Rhino Fund Uganda Executive Director Angie Genade and Staff Sergeant Lutalo Godfrey**

**Top Middle clockwise: Johan hands on building the Lodge**

undertaking the basics of ranger training in discipline and teamwork. His most recent project is to establish and train a dedicated six-man anti-poaching unit with the ability to lay an ambush and undertake offensive and defensive actions.

Never one to miss an opportunity and wishing to put all his project management and practical skills to good use, Johan found that there had been a failed attempt to start a game lodge on the sanctuary. On close inspection and with some market research, Johan came to the conclusion that the failure had largely been caused by bad timing and a poor location. So strong was his belief that there was a niche in the market for a mid-range priced, quality facility that he decided to go ahead and take on the project himself with the help of his two sons. But what also drove the concept was the opportunity to create a new income stream in support of the rhino conservation project whereby a percentage of Lodge profits would

be channelled directly to Rhino Fund Uganda. “It was the perfect opportunity for me, with my family as part of the team, to embark on a project that has such important goals and diverse objectives” says Johan.

Having gained a concession from the landowner, Joe Roy, Johan set about designing a Lodge with a rustic feel reminiscent of a well-worn farmhouse and which would blend in with its surroundings. A combination of wood, stone and canvas was used including old, recovered mahogany beams and timber planks from a sawmill abandoned in the Budongo Forest some 30 years ago.

Construction of what is today a 10 bed, chalet based, facility with sun deck, plunge pool, restaurant and bar



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**Top Left: The Lodge staff**  
**Top Right: Training the chefs**  
**Below Left: Planning with his sons and fellow directors Nico (left) and Duan (right)**  
**Below Right:**

all in an ‘African style’ was started in September 2010. The business employs 12 people from the local community supplemented by local contractors when required. Says Johan “the staff took enthusiastically to the rigorous training programme I put them through in order to meet the standards expected of an upmarket hotel and this has given them a real sense of responsibility in their work and pride in being part of the Amuka team.”

In addition to gaining the Lodge concession, Johan was later appointed by the board of the land owning company as a consultant charged with

studying and reviewing the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) approved management plan for the area and ensuring that the agreed actions were started. In this capacity he attends the annual UWA Wildlife User Rights meeting.

So what are the main tasks of Johan as owner/manager of Amuka Lodge?

The easy answer, being the owner, is everything, of course, but Johan’s two sons are fellow directors. “I always taught my sons to be respectful of their environment and of the wildlife. Little did I know we would end up working together in our own conservation business”.

All three have specific responsibilities – Nico, 27, looks after the infrastructure and building development while Duan, 23, looks after the hospitality side not least the kitchen. This leaves Johan

to only have to deal with personnel, reservations, marketing, product development, finance, logistics and the most enjoyable part of the job – being mine host to the guests! This aspect of the job is not to be under-rated as a key objective of the Lodge is to promote wildlife conservation and especially rhino conservation in Uganda. Many guests have enjoyed the chats they have had with Johan over a drink around the campfire on conservation issues. As Johan says “Guests to the Lodge are potential ambassadors, donors or fund raisers for the conservation project. It is no chore for me to ensure they understand the importance of the work”.

Key to the success of any new Lodge enterprise is getting the accommodation as full as possible as often as possible. The majority of international tourists

travel through safari operators and a big challenge for any new business is to get on to their itinerary. Johan meets regularly with the operators using the Kampala/Murchison Falls route to encourage them to have a stop-over at Amuka Lodge and have their guests experience rhino tracking, bird and nature walks and even the chance to see the rare Shoebill. Johan's research had also suggested that there was a big potential from people such as embassy staff, company and NGO managers and those involved with the International schools living just two hours or so away in Kampala/Entebbe as a getaway from the bustle of the city.

Much of Johan's time and effort goes into marketing the Lodge using such as Facebook, Twitter, Trip Advisor and so on, building up a reputation for the Lodge as an ideal family friendly place for a long weekend or mid-week break. And by giving himself the responsibility for bookings, Johan can see the results of his marketing on a daily basis while keeping an eye on cash flow. Behind



PHOTOS BY: FELIX PATTON

the jovial 'mine-host' persona is an astute businessman who bases decisions on detailed financial and development planning.

Just about all the raw materials for the running of the Lodge have to come from Kampala, be it cement for building or steaks for cooking. Securing the supplies and arranging their transport to the

**Top: Financial planning with Nico**  
**Below: Checking the braai with a guest**

Lodge on a timely and cost efficient basis is a major logistics operation but one which, with his industrial experience, is right down Johan's street.

They say you can take the man out of South Africa but you cannot take South Africa out of the man and this is fortunately true if you are lucky enough to taste a Johan prepared potjes from the braai!

Amuka Lodge is now entering its second expansion phase with the construction of five single bed chalets. Not one to stand by and watch others, Johan can often be seen with saw in hand putting his carpentry skills to good use. Johan is clearly proud of the achievement so far – "It's extremely satisfying to see what started out as an idea on paper becoming a reality and then to have proved such a success that we are having to expand".

Conservation is not just about rangers and researchers, NGO's and donors. The tourist industry is the key provider of money and jobs essential in maintaining the wildlife and its habitat. The role of the Lodge owner and manager should not go unnoticed. If all goes to plan, Amuka Lodge will make a significant financial contribution to the running of Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary which, in addition to the fees paid by Amuka guests for rhino tracking and other activities, will amount to some \$35,000 per year and that will be down to Johan Genade's vision and his ability to put it into practice. ●

