

## LOCALS RAISE OVER \$100,000 TO HELP SAVE ELEPHANTS

The efforts of Dubbo locals and other supporters to fundraise \$100,000 has had a global effect, helping to save lives nearly 13,500 KMs away. It's an effort the beneficiaries themselves are likely to never forget, too. Why? Because 'an elephant never forgets'.

The Askari Project, the brainchild of Dubbo man, Bradd Johnston, recently reached a milestone that has been 10-years in the making. Raising and donating over \$100,000 to help save one of the world's most endangered species – African elephants. More specifically, raising and providing funds to assist with efforts to save super tusker elephants, an animal highly sought after by poachers due to the size and weight of the mammal's ivory tusks.

"These African male bull elephants – 45-years of age and over, carrying ivory tusks weighing 45kgs-plus on each side; massive tusks that almost touch the ground as the elephant walks – are the true kings of the African savannah," said Bradd Johnston who has worked with elephants for almost 20 years.

"The title 'Super Tusker' is not given easily or lightly, with only a handful of these types of elephants in existence across the Tsavo Conservation Area in Kenya, with fewer than 30 living across the entire continent of Africa," said Bradd Johnston.

The Tsavo Conservation Area is made up of three key areas, Tsavo East National Park, Tsavo West National Park, and surrounding protected areas. Combined, the area land size is around 41,000 square KMs – roughly enough space to fit the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) 18-times. Only 10 super tuskers live in Tsavo, making them exceptionally rare. Shadowing these super tuskers – emerging tuskers, male bull elephants that will most likely, over time, grow into super tuskers. These shadow companions of super tusker elephants are also called Askari, which is a Swahili word for 'warrior'.

"The money we have raised for the Tsavo Trust, now one of Kenya's leading non-government organisations, has assisted in delivering essential community programs, helping to fund their ground monitoring and protection teams and also supplying aviation fuel for their small fixed wing aircraft which are essential in keeping 'eyes in the sky' and patrolling this vast landscape," said Bradd Johnston.

The Tsavo Trust works closely with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) as a leading NGO in the Tsavo Conservation Area. The Tsavo Trust's work also includes the protection of critically endangered black rhino found in Tsavo. Today, there are just under 1,000 black rhinos in Kenya, down from around 20,000 in the early 1970s. The extreme pressure caused by relentless poaching reduced numbers to as low as 300 in Kenya at the height of the crisis. The damage inflicted by a false belief in some cultures that the animal's horn possesses medicinal properties.

Bradd Johnston recently returned from Kenya where he was able to see firsthand the incredible work being done across the Tsavo Conservation Area by authorities and the Tsavo Trust. Some of that critical work has been supported with funds raised by generous locals across the Central West – an outcome that has humbled the founder of Dubbo's Askari Project.

"From an idea hatched in February 2015, through to being on the ground in Tsavo after a decade of supporting the Tsavo Trust and seeing what's being achieved, has been great," said Bradd Johnston. "It's involved a lot of hard work over many fundraisers here and there, but none of it would be possible without the fantastic support of locals and supporters further afield."

The 10-year anniversary of the Askari Project, and celebration of raising \$100,000 will be marked at this year's fundraiser on Saturday evening at the Macquarie Inn. The sold-out trivia night serving as another reminder that local interest in African wildlife conservation is alive and well, so too people's generosity. It's something Bradd Johnston is grateful for and will never forget... just like an elephant never forgets.

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