



MAVIC'S STORY

- as told by Care for Wild

Date of admission: 31st August 2022

Estimated age on arrival: 6-7 months

Current Status: Rehabilitation

It was early evening on Tuesday 30th August 2022 when Care for Wild received notification from the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve about an orphaned rhino calf. Security drone footage had captured a small calf walking alone. The onsite ground team confirmed the calf to be from a rhino cow killed by poachers the previous Saturday; the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve team had been searching for her baby ever since.

The small calf had already been without milk and protection for 3 days and was quickly growing weaker. Despite finally locating the calf, concern was growing rapidly as it was already dark, and the rescue helicopter was unable to fly. The team were fearful that the young rhino might not survive another night in an area full of hyena clans and prides of lion.

Determined to save this precious life, the team launched a full-scale protection and monitoring program to ensure the calf remained safe. Several DJI Mavic drones kept watch 20m above him and as each battery began to drain, another drone took its place. The team flying the drones never lost sight of the little rhino and by first light, he was safe and unharmed.

The Care for Wild team had departed from the sanctuary in the early hours of the morning and joined the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve team as the sun rose. The helicopter took off, expertly flown by pilot Jana Meyer and carrying Veterinarian Dr Joel Alves to dart the calf. After he was darted, the ground team moved in and carried him on a stretcher to Care for Wild's transportation crate. He was hypothermic and severely dehydrated but otherwise unharmed. He was given intravenous fluids which continued throughout his journey to Care for Wild.

On arrival at Care for Wild's Intensive Care Unit, the small calf was weighed, and blood samples were taken for analysis. Caregivers identified eye ulcers which were then treated accordingly. A blindfold and earplugs were applied to reduce stimulation and stress. He was given rectal fluids to quickly aid his hydration and intravenous fluids continued as he was settled into the warm ICU. Caregivers worked around the clock to stabilise their newest patient. Slowly his temperature began to climb but he was very tired and slept deeply for the first 6 hours.

It is important to remember that every rhino orphan is different, and their rehabilitation journeys are equally unique. One should never underestimate the physical and psychological trauma these orphans endure. From witnessing and hearing the brutal and horrific deaths of their mothers to fighting for their lives - starving, alone and afraid. Every rhino matters. Every calf rescued is a miracle and it most certainly takes a dedicated team to save them. In recognition of the efforts to save this little orphan, the Sabi Sand Nature Reserve team asked to name him Mavic.

As Mavic began to wake, caregivers offered him his first bottle of milk. He drank ravenously and fell asleep again. This process continued over the next 48 hours with the young calf drinking every 2-3 hours through the day and night. Mavic was very calm and very quiet. He didn't call or make any noise at all, and it quickly became apparent that he was still "hiding". Mavic was very scared and afraid, but as he grew accustomed to the smell and taste of the milk, he started to relax and make a positive association with his caregivers.

The caregivers started the process of desensitisation and gently rubbed his face and front legs as he drank. He took great comfort in this contact. As his caregivers worked to earn his trust, they removed the first earplug. Mavic was then able to associate the sound of their voices with milk. They also played him music as a way of creating a stable environment without sudden noises that might startle him.

In order to give Mavic more space and bring him closer to the other rhino orphans, his caregivers moved him from the ICU to the bigger bomas just 3 days after he arrived. Once he settled into his new night pen, they removed his blindfold and the last earplug. He was very nervous but retained the positive association of his caregivers' voices and music. His favourite song became Riptide by Vance Joy! His caregivers were able to apply drops to his eyes as he drank his milk.

With new confidence and his caregivers by his side, Mavic took his first steps out into the bigger boma. But the big wide world was too much for the little calf. He was still very afraid and stayed close to his caregivers. He growled at the other orphans through the fence and ran away to hide.

Mavic loved to lay next to the giant tractor tyre. It was most likely - and very sadly - the closest comfort he could find to remind him of his mother. Young bull calves are protected fiercely by their mothers as they are often targets for older, dominant bulls. It was clear that Mavic missed his Mom desperately. He was seeking the kind of comfort only another rhino could provide. The Care for Wild team had seen this behaviour before and knew what needed to be done.

Over the next few days, they introduced Mavic to fellow orphans Shiloh and Aquazi through the boma poles. With time and repeated exposure, Mavic began to trust his neighbours and after 3 days, he began to call to them. Shiloh and Aquazi answered back, and their caregivers opened the gate to allow them to meet properly.

The older orphans never cease to amaze us. Their patience, their empathy, their compassion, and their gentleness. It's an unspoken connection to a shared and devastating past. A glimpse into the emotional intelligence of a gentle giant.

That was the moment. One of the most important milestones in Mavic's rehabilitation journey. The second his caregivers released the breath they were holding in since he arrived. For the first time since he felt the warm skin of his mother, little Mavic found peace next to Shiloh and Aquazi.

He followed his new friends everywhere. Not unsurprisingly, he gravitated towards the slightly older rhino cow, Shiloh. Over the following week, Mavic began to settle into life with his new family. He found comfort and acceptance and was no longer afraid. He found compassion and peace. He is the first of the trio to come running for his bottle at feeding time.

Mavic is still in the very early stages of rehabilitation. He will drink milk for another 10-11 months before being weaned. Now that he is settled in a rhino crash, he will remain with his friends throughout the rehabilitation process and will one day enter the rewilding and reintroduction program. He will become the rhino he was always supposed to be and will go on to secure the future of his species."