



2016 ANNUAL REPORT

Saving the world's most endangered antelope

About Hirola

Species details & IUCN Classification

Species scientific or Latin name(s): *Beatragus hunteri*

Common name: hirola

IUCN Conservation status: Critically endangered

Hirola's Geographic Range: Eastern Kenya between Ijara, Bura and GalmaGalla



>90%

**Reduction in
Population**

Major Threats

Our recent research identified habitat loss mostly stemming from overgrazing, fire suppression and megaherbivore extirpations as the primary factor responsible for hirola declines. These have led to massive tree encroachment (i.e., ~250% increase in trees between 1985 and 2012), translating to approximately 75% decline in grasslands. Hirola is a grassland dependent species therefore any shift in their habitat represents a real threat to their long-term survival. Other threats include heightened predation, drought, disease and poaching.

~250%

Increase in tree cover



Estimated population and Range

With a global population size of <500, the hirola is considered to be the world's most endangered antelope. This small population is restricted to <5% of its native range on communal lands along the Kenya-Somalia border with no formal protection. The highest numbers are in Ijara and Fafi areas in Garissa County, Kenya.

<500

**Hirola
GLOBAL POPULATION**

Conservation Actions

The future of hirola as a species depends on its native range which has experienced the expansive conversion of high-quality rangelands (grasslands) to tree cover. Range restoration efforts of the hirola's native area is therefore a prerequisite to the recovery of hirola in the long-term. Further, the employment of scouts and rangers and their collaboration with other security agencies to ensure that all security/poaching incidents in the entire range are monitored collectively is essential. In addition, all these efforts need the involvement and engagement of local communities through education, outreach programs and livelihood improvement.

HCP Goals & Objectives

The Hirola Conservation Programme (HCP) is a registered non-government organization that promotes the conservation of the endangered hirola antelope and its fragile habitat in partnership with local pastoralist groups in the community rangelands of north-eastern Kenya.



Based in Garissa county, the program spearheads grassroot efforts to save this critically-endangered antelope. Our objective is to protect and restore hirola populations through community involvement, research, communication and liaising with influential stakeholders and more specifically to:

1. Support the conservation of viable and existing habitat for hirola.
2. Plan, develop, implement and administer projects and programmes – including the appointment of project staff – in support of its primary aim, in co-operation with local communities and partner institutions, as appropriate.
3. Raise funds for hirola conservation and management.
4. Identify key threats to hirola and develop innovative ways to mitigate these.

5. Raise awareness of and promote the value of hirola conservation.
6. Collaborate with local, national and international partners on hirola conservation efforts.
7. Maintain a close working relationship with the IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group and the AZA Antelope and Taxon Advisory Group (TAG).

Capacity Building Of local communities



Letter from the Director

The year 2016 was very successful for the Hirola Conservation Programme. We incredibly expanded our operations across the entire hirola's geographic range in Kenya. From high moments of positive hirola population growth to witnessing one of the worst droughts in history which devastated the wildlife population in this region.

The hirola's geographical range experienced the worst drought spell that started around mid-2016. Yet again the short rains of 2016 (Oct-Nov-Dec) was 40% below the long-term average, thus prolonging the drought into 2017. In effect, lack of water and pasture led to mass mortalities of wildlife within the region. Some of the most affected species included hirola antelope, Grevy's zebra, buffaloes and the coastal topi. Every year, new threats and challenges confront hirola. With a diminishing population, the greatest challenge to saving hirola is habitat loss coupled with extreme climate variability and civil strife. However, our team is always poised to advance hirola recovery in the face of these challenges. With the birth of a new hirola calf, or the sighting of a new hirola herd in areas close to the Somalia border, we see change is happening which is making a difference. Given the challenges, we will continuously seek practical solutions for the recovery of hirola.

Our team work has always remained exciting. Our success with ordinary Somali herders in tracking hirola ("Herders for hirola programme") and our exciting wildlife films shown to school children are just a few examples of our dedication to hirola. The setbacks of drought and climate variability have strengthened our resolve to continuously expand our operations across the entire hirola's geographic range. For example, we established two new protected areas for hirola in 2016. Apart from providing a long-term lifeline for the future of hirola, these new protected areas benefitted other large mammals (isolated populations of Elephants, Grevy's zebra, African wild dogs, cheetah and the reticulated giraffes among others), if the recovery signs we have witnessed are anything to go by. These other large mammals face similar threats as hirola where habitat loss is one of the leading threats to their survival. To ensure threats to hirola and other species are minimized, we provide continuous trainings and support to local rangers in the region.

Central to our efforts, is fostering community involvement in hirola conservation through education and outreach. In this, we work with 10 local communities and 15 schools in developing and disseminating conservation educational materials. We work with these communities through holding special events (such as World Hirola Day) that promote long-term co-existence of hirola and local livelihoods. Further, in 2018, we wish and remain committed to building infrastructure for these new protected areas alongside strengthening the capacity of local communities overseeing these sites. Internationally and nationally, our profile continues to grow with the formation of new partnerships and increased media coverage. Truly, we have changed



the face of hirola conservation from a localized effort to an international partnership. Therefore, in 2018 and beyond, we are full of hope and optimism for this globally endangered antelope.

All these successes have been made possible by our friends and supporters of Hirola Conservation programme. Your continued support will enable us to ultimately save hirola from extinction. Together we can save the World's most endangered antelope.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Abdullahi H. Ali". The signature is stylized and fluid.

Abdullahi H. Ali, Ph. D
Founder & Director

Conservation Impacts

Newly Established Conservancies

Since the 1970s, the hirola population has constantly been declining and the remaining herds are restricted to communal lands with no formal protection. In 2016, and in partnership with The Rainforest Trust and local communities, we set up the largest ever established protected areas for hirola.

1,562,942

Acres of newly protected areas



The newly established protected areas include three new conservancies within the hirola's native range.

5,195

sq. kms
BURA EAST CONSERVANCY

800

sq. kms
SANGAILU CONSERVANCY

330

sq. kms
GABABA CONSERVANCY

Habitat Restoration

We embarked on a long-term rangeland restoration project to restore the immensely degraded hirola habitat. The project involved;

- 1) physical cutting, uprooting or breaking of branches in an attempt to restore grassland at scales of hundreds of hectares in prioritized areas within the hirola range,

10

Sq. kms
OF CLEARED INVASIVE TREES

- 2) the planting of native grass seeds alongside fertilizer (manure) at scales of hundreds of hectares,

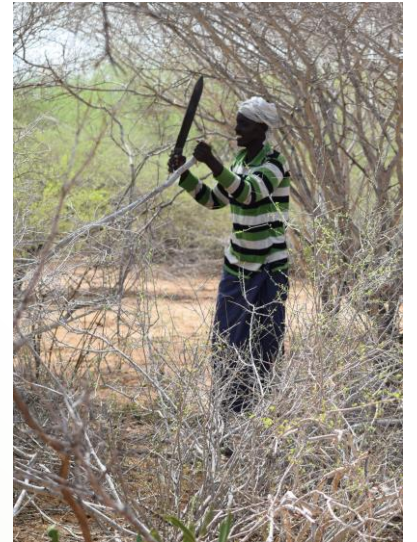
80

Kgs
Of native grass planted

2

Sq. kms
Of areas reseeded

- 3) community-based protection of elephants (in the form of anti-poaching squads and enhanced communication between villages) to encourage elephant herds to reside on community land



Watch Range Restoration Video Updates

Threat reduction

We have also recruited more reliable rangers to work within the new and existing conservancies. They completed trainings on bush skills, survival tactics, security drills and data collection techniques to help monitor hirola herds and curb poaching within the hirola's geographic range.

30 rangers

Recruited
and Trained

30 new

Members
(Herders for hirola)



In addition to the rangers, we have also recruited more members into the herders for hirola program who voluntarily report hirola sightings, mortalities and poaching.

12000

Km covered in Patrols

15

Arrested Poachers

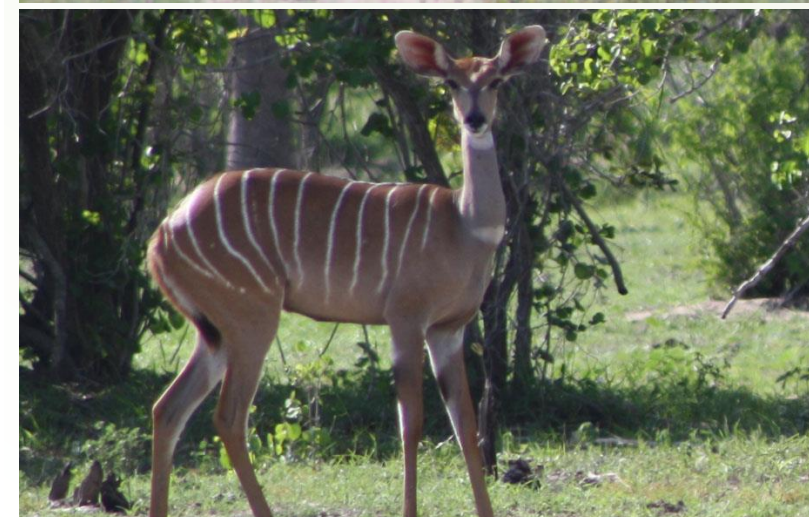
100

Snares and Traps recovered

We train Hirola Rangers on bush skills, survival tactics, security drills and data collection techniques to help monitor hirola herds and curb poaching within the hirola's geographic range.



Conservation of Large Mammals



Scientific impacts

Since 2010 and in conjunction with collaborators, we have initiated a locally supported scientific research to understand the reasons underlying hirola declines, and to explore management options to curtail these declines. Our work is focusing on hirola population dynamics, habitat use, and the effects of land-use change in northeastern Kenya for hirola. In addition, we are working with local communities to better understand social factors affecting the survival of the species and the future of hirola conservation in the region.

We have completed the following studies so far:

- 1) Resource selection and landscape change reveal mechanisms suppressing population recovery for the world's most endangered antelope. Published in *Journal of Applied Ecology*.
- 2) Demographic drivers of a refugee species: large-scale experiments guide strategies for reintroductions of hirola. In press, *Ecological Applications*.
- 3) Evaluating support for range-restoration practices by rural Somalis: a win-win for local livelihoods and conservation of the world's most endangered antelope? In review.

Ongoing research projects include:

- Hirola habitat restoration project
- Hirola nutrition, sociobiology and foraging behavior
- Predators dispersal, abundance and occupancy within the hirola's geographic range
- Large herbivores competition and facilitations
- Area wide hirola monitoring using Somali pastoralists as citizen scientists



Capacity Building & networking



In 2016, we continued to grow our programmes and increase our networks through partnerships and collaborations. These provided invaluable support to our efforts and we believe collaborations is key to achieving a sustained long-term community based conservation and livelihood impacts.

Local Networks & Collaborations

In 2016, we organized 10 meetings with community elders and government officials and 5 village based meetings with local communities which resulted in the establishment of the new hirola protected areas and the identification and recruitment of able rangers from each village within the hirola's geographical range. We also used these forums to disseminate hirola research findings and create a new partnership with the Ishaqbini conservancy group

To effectively curb the poaching menace in Ijara and Fafi sub-counties, we trained upto 30 rangers and formed a new partnership with Kenya Wildlife Service wardens in these areas. This has thus far helped decrease poaching and encroachment into wildlife core areas.



> 800

Individuals Reached

Throughout 2016, we organized community films screening about wildlife ecology, rangeland management, tourism etc. in all the villages and most schools within the hirola's range. The conservation films attracted and reached over 800 individuals in the schools and villages within the hirola's native range.



International Networks & Affiliations

With our strong and strategic conservation efforts, we have been able to engage international partners with transformative results. For example, in early 2016, we secured a long-term partnership with the Rainforest Trust, an organization that protects threatened tropical forests and endangered wildlife in partnership with local communities. This resulted in the creation of three new protected areas for the critically endangered hirola antelope.

Our range restoration efforts with the support of the Houston Zoo, Columbus Zoo and Aquariums and the Saint Louis Zoo has been very successful so far.

IUCN Antelope Specialist Group AND AZA Antelope and Taxon Advisory Group (TAG)

We continue to maintain a close working relationship with the IUCN SSC Antelope Specialist Group and the AZA Antelope and Taxon Advisory Group (TAG).

Utah State University

We have partnered with Utah State University to study ideal conditions under which we can restore habitat for hirola.

University of Wyoming

We have continued to collaborate with the University of Wyoming to maintain strong research presence in eastern Kenya.

National Museums of Kenya & Kenya Wildlife Service

We have also partnered with the Kenya Wildlife Service and the National Museums of Kenya to carry out field research in eastern Kenya.

Recognitions & Media Coverage

Recognition

Hirola ranger Ali Hassan Ali, was recognized and awarded the prestigious Houston Zoo 2016 Wildlife Warrior Award. The award is designed to increase the recipient's conservation community network and inspire empowerment by providing opportunities to gain further education through training or experiences.



2016

**Wildlife Warrior Award Winner
(Ali Hassan Ali)**

HCP Director and Founder received the **Outstanding Dissertation Award** for his impressive dissertation. The award is granted to a graduate student for an exemplary doctoral dissertation. The dissertation focused on the range collapse, demography and conservation of the critically endangered hirola antelope in Kenya.

The Hirola Conservation Programme became one of the **Top 15 finalists of the prestigious Whitely Awards**. The award offers support to outstanding nature conservationists around the developing world.



Media Coverage

The Conservation "The Hirola is the world's rarest antelope. Here's how it can be saved" | May 17, 2017

The Standard "Scientist on mission to save endangered antelope in Kenya" | March 13, 2017

Wyoming Public Media "Antelope Advocate Works Beyond Borders" | March 3, 2017

The Houston Zoo Blog "Saving the World's Most Endangered Antelope" | February 27, 2017

Rainforest Trust "Haven for the Hirola: Protecting Vital Habitat for the World's Rarest Antelope" | February 22, 2017

Science Daily "Decline of grass threatens world's most endangered antelope" | February 16, 2017

UW Researchers "Decline of Grass Threatens World's Most Endangered Antelope" | February 15, 2017

The Applied Ecologist's blog "Why hirola are the world's most endangered antelope, and what it will take to save them" | February 15, 2017

Mongabay "Increasing tree cover threatens world's most endangered antelope" | February 13, 2017

Rainforest Trust "Notes from the Field: Kenya" | May 03, 2016



The
Journey
ahead



Looking Ahead

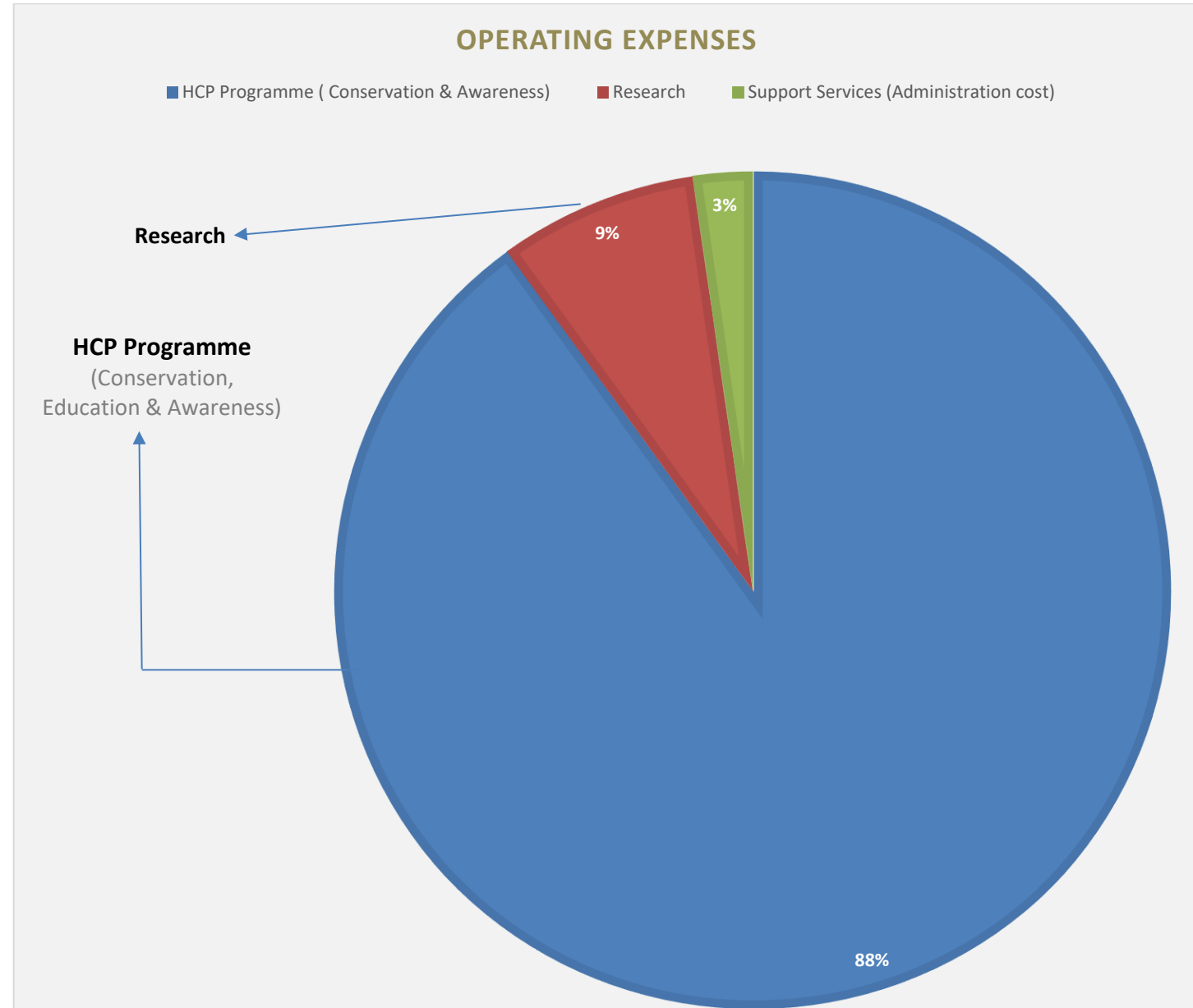
For the year ahead we will focus on the following:

- Establish one more protected area for hirola in Eastern Kenya.
- Improve and expand our anti-poaching effort to enhance the recovery of elephant population in Eastern Kenya.
- Increase our conservation team to support current activities throughout the hirola's geographic range.
- Continue with our long-term hirola conservation research in eastern Kenya, in close partnership with community conservancies and with the international conservation community.
- For World Hirola Day 2017 – 12th August: raise awareness and support for hirola
- Raise awareness for hirola conservation at presentations and events internationally.
- In partnership with hirola community conservancies, advance our evidence based conservation approach through hirola groups monitoring across the hirola geographic range.
- Work with other partners to implement long-term hirola habitat restoration for the hirola antelope.
- Enable local and international partners to integrate hirola conservation in their broader conservation goals.

Our Finances

Operating Expenses

90% donation received by HCP is directly spent on Hirola Conservation in Eastern Kenya. Your continued support has allowed us to explore new partnerships and expand our Hirola Conservation throughout and partner with more communities.



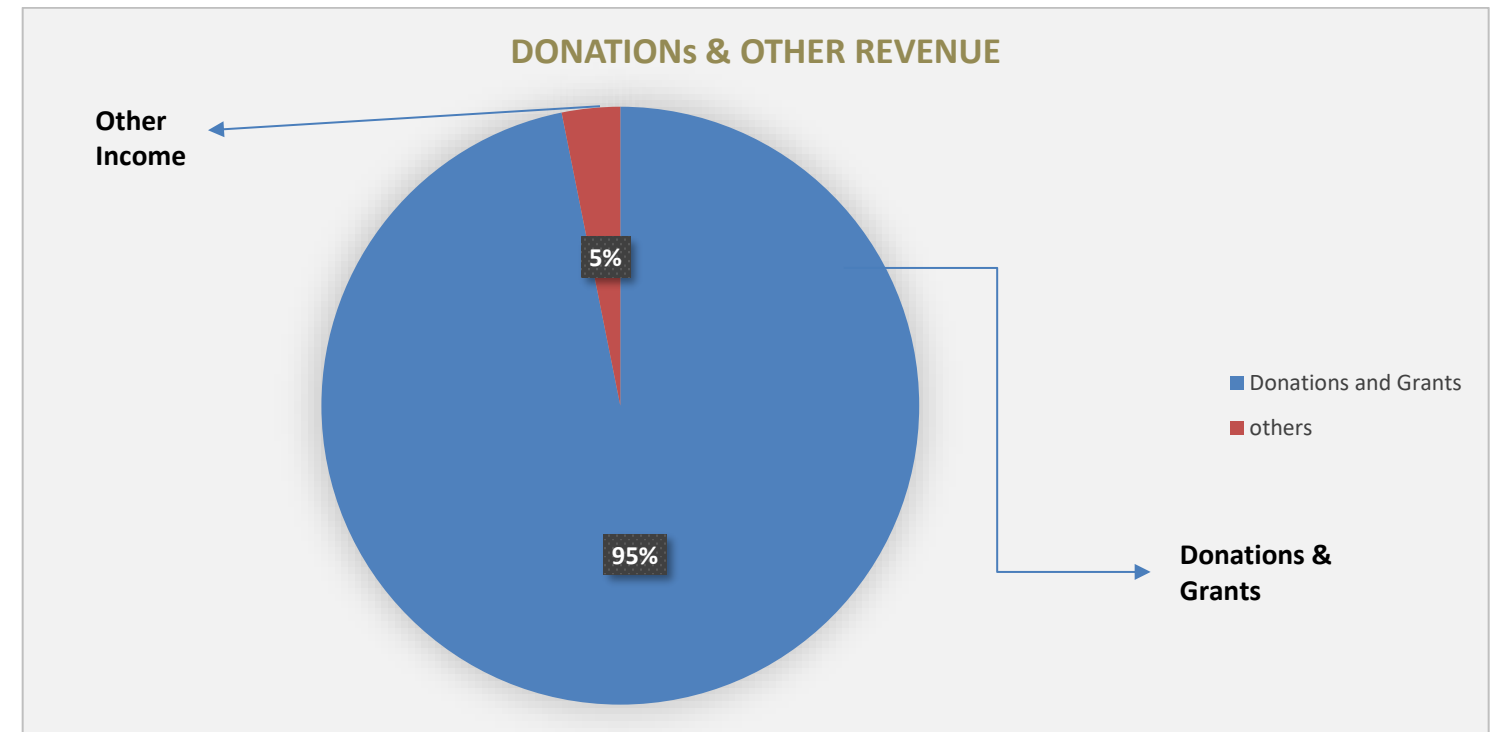
HCP Programme (Conservation and Awareness)	-	\$181,488
Research	-	\$ 19,437
Support Services (Administration cost)	-	\$ 6,331

Financial Summary

2016/17 financial year represents significant progress for HCP having received financial support from various organizations and private donors, consequently increasing our annual income. HCP has been able to further expand our conservation programs and partnerships throughout Eastern Kenya and internationally. During this financial year HCP has managed to increase Hirola conservation impact significantly, benefiting a wider range of other species occurring within the hirola's geographic range.

Donations and Other Revenue

The financial year 2016/17 we have seen a significant increase in donations towards hirola conservation and these has increased public awareness and campaigns locally and internationally.



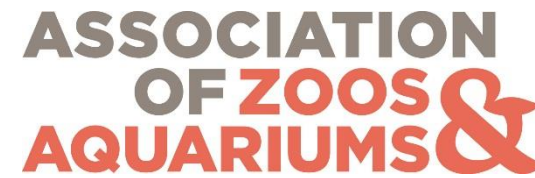
Donations & Grants	-	\$207,493
Others	-	\$ 10,256

Thank You

Your overwhelming support and generosity has enabled us to incredibly expand and strengthen our conservation efforts in 2016. We rely on this support to keep our operations running and to help us realize our vision of documenting the struggles of the world's most endangered antelope. We are humbled and very grateful to all the donors, individuals and institutions who support us.



RAINFOREST TRUST



Hirola Conservation Programme
www.hirolaconservation.org
hcp@hirolaconservation.org

 Hirola Conservation Program

 @hirola_program

P.O Box 16362 - 00100,
Nairobi, Kenya.

