



# SALAMBALA

## *Forbidden romance & the birth of a conservancy*

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### **A TALE OF TWO LOVERS**

Deep in the Zambezi Region, on the protruding southernmost tip of the Strip, lies an abundant landscape dominated by Mopane woodland and floodplain grasslands. It's an environment that boasts a large diversity of exotic bird species – many of which are unique to the area – and plenteous wildlife, including four of Africa's Big Five.

This lush paradise marks the setting to Namibia's very own version of the legendary tale of 'star-crossed lovers', who managed to steer the course of history for two rival communities.

Myth has it that our two main characters, Sala and Bala, fell in love. And when – despite great protest from their respective families – they continued their forbidden rendezvous, were unconditionally banished to the forest. What finally happened to them remains a mystery, but the couple did manage to create enough of a local interest for the area to be named in their honour.

### **THE BIRTH OF A CONSERVANCY**

The Salambala Conservancy that carries the lovers' name covers 930 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to more than 8 500 inhabitants, all of whom co-exist peacefully and without any sign of civil unrest.

In fact, in recent years, this conservancy has been praised to deserve the 'Oscar for Community Conservation', if ever such an award were to be allocated.

Salambala was one of the very first communal conservancies to get gazetted in Namibia, and since then has featured in various conservation films, showcasing best practice for other conservancies and community-based initiatives.

Most recently, it made headlines as recipient of the first set of e-bikes to be used for conservancy patrol and wildlife protection.



Edward Mwauluka has been proudly protecting Salambala's wildlife since 2011.

## A MAN ON A MISSION

True to its roots, Salambala still produces local legends and our man of the moment is a conservation hero in his own right.

Edward Mwauluka is a ranger who patrols the Conservancy. "My job is to protect our local wildlife from poachers. I enjoy this job very much, because I'm watching over nature and it helps me to get to know the animals and their behaviour."

Edward has been proudly protecting Salambala's wildlife since 2011. He is one of 20 rangers who work in one-week shifts to make sure the animals are kept safe. A team of five rangers usually patrols a selected area, starting their day at 6 a.m. and spending up to three hours of continuous patrol by bicycle as they make their rounds and attend to problems.

With the recent handover of e-bikes to rangers, Edward is positive that it will be of great benefit to the work they do.

"With the support of the e-bike, it will be much easier to attend to the scene of a crime, or catch poachers in the act. It will help me not to get tired when on patrol, and to not feel pain in my thighs when I'm riding for longer periods of time. I wish each game guard could have such an e-bike."

His group leader, Martin Mushabati agrees, "With a normal bicycle you can barely cover 5 km through this wild terrain before you're exhausted. I'm certain that with these e-bikes we'll easily travel 10 km without even knowing it!"

In this case, proof is in the pedal, and during the first two days of using the e-bikes, Martin and Edward had each travelled 60 km, testimony to the fact that these bikes can easily double the range covered by conventional bicycles.

Edward is especially excited that the journey home now takes him 10 minutes, where previously it took him up to an hour. "Even thick sand is no problem, these bikes have built-in 4x4!"

## FORWARD-THINKING MOBILITY

E-bikes provide a sustainable, fast, silent and cost-effective alternative, which could reshape the future of mobility in Africa – very much like our lovers Sala and Bala managed to do with the course of local history.

Namibia is facing a great challenge in terms of transport, especially in rural areas where distances are vast and public transport inadequate, or simply non-existent.

Game guards are in an even trickier situation, as they need to be on constant patrol. They often have to cover large areas, mainly by foot, to move as silently and efficiently through the wild environment as possible.

Apart from its mobility benefits, Salambala's e-bikes are powered by solar equipment, and with free energy from the potent Namibian sun a 100% carbon neutral pedal patrol is ensured. Solar recharge stations could also be used for powering small electrical devices such as mobile phones and camp lights.

These additions see to it that our rangers can stay in constant contact with their seniors, while also enjoying some of the basic necessities of life in the depths of the forest where their base camp is located.

## LOOKING AT THE FUTURE

Caretaking and maintenance are often the biggest obstacles to the success of sustainable projects, but when guards are given ownership it often provides for a more encouraging outcome.

Says Edward, "This is my bike. I have the key in my pocket and no one can take it away from me. If you share your bicycle with others, it always comes back with problems. I am taking care of this e-bike."

As caretakers of the very first e-bikes for game guards, Edward and Martin are global e-mobility pioneers in their own right.

If the use of these bikes turns out to be a success, more bikes will be delivered to game guards in Salambala, and hopefully also to other conservancies throughout the country.

With direct local involvement, dedication and passion, Namibia's conservation success story is ever growing as organisations and individuals create new initiatives to protect and preserve our natural resources.

Sala and Bala would have been proud. **TNN**

The delivery of e-bikes to Salambala game guards was made possible by SunCycles Namibia in partnership with the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO) and WWF Namibia.

For more information on e-bikes as alternative transport solution in Namibia, visit [www.suncycles-namibia.org](http://www.suncycles-namibia.org)

## FROM TOP

Conservancy rangers are introduced to e-mobility. Caretakers of the very first e-bikes for game guards, Edward and Martin. Salambala was one of the first communal conservancies to get gazetted in Namibia.

