

RHINO FACT FILE - RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

What is the problem?

By the end of October 2011, over 350 rhinos had been killed by poachers. Most of these were in the Kruger National Park. Last year, 333 rhinos were killed illegally by poachers, 10 were black rhinos which are critically endangered. This total death count is nearly three times more than in 2009.

Poaching is being carried out by well-organised criminal networks that are linked to drugs, arms and human-trafficking syndicates. These people have high-tech equipment and automatic weapons. This major increase in poaching is due to an increased demand for rhino horn from Asian markets where it is used for various medicinal purposes. It was apparently claimed recently by a Vietnamese politician that rhino horn could cure cancer despite lack of medical evidence. This claim has helped to popularise rhino horn in Asian markets.

Why should we care?

Rhinos are part of a group of animals known as the Big 5. The other animals in the Big 5 are lion, elephant, buffalo and leopard. These animals have always been part of the wildlife found in South Africa and are part of our heritage as South Africans. South Africa would just not be the same if we no longer had rhinos in our game reserves and to show future generations of our children.

Tourists come from all over the world to see the Big 5 animals, which are considered the most exciting and impressive animals to see in the African bush. Game reserves, game lodges and the supporting industries around the game reserves provide jobs and a large amount of revenue for the South African economy. If there were no longer rhinos, this would affect the tourist industry, which would affect job-creation and directly impact many people's livelihoods.

Rhinos are not only important for creating jobs and generating money in tourism. Many game farmers breed and sell rhinos for hunting. If rhinos are poached, the value of the rhino will become less and farmers will no longer want to farm rhinos which means that jobs in this sector will also be lost as well as much revenue for the South African economy.

In the early 1980's, the rhino nearly went extinct but thanks to a project called "Operation Rhino" South Africa was able to save rhinos and since then the numbers of rhino have grown. South Africa became famous for saving the rhinos and for supporting other countries by selling rhinos to them in order for those countries to grow their own populations of rhinos. It would be a sad thing to see the victory of the 20th Century reversed!

What can people do to help?

Intelligence through the public is a key source of information for the police and investigators. Not everyone can contribute financially but anyone can contribute information. It's our collective responsibility to blow the whistle on rhino poaching. Call a hotline if you see something suspicious or have info 0800 205 005 or 0860 10111.

If you do want to contribute financially, do your homework. There are many fraudulent organizations disguised to look like anti-poaching organisations. If you don't know which organization to donate to directly, RAGE is a good option.

Its not only about donating money. We all have skills and resources to offer.

Who is RAGE?

The *Rhino Action Group Effort* (RAGE) is part of the LeadSA initiative that was set up last year (2010) when concerned groups from both the public and private sectors put their

heads together to harness public support against rhino poaching. Whether in the form of skills, resources or financial donations, RAGE channels support to the places where it's needed most and in this regard is a fully transparent organisation, audited by KPMG. RAGE also performs a function in creating awareness and informing the public about rhino poaching, helping to dispel myths as well as assimilating and redirecting information back to the National Wildlife Crime Reaction Unit. After the Minister of Environmental Affairs' rhino summit in 2010, RAGE was identified as the civil arm of the National rhino strategy.

Other useful information:

- Commercial hunting helped to give an economic value to the rhino without which there would probably not currently be as much as 20% of the approximately 18000 rhino in SA on private land. Many private owners have invested in land and breeding rhinos because of their value and contribute hugely to the conservation of the species.
- Many people don't realise that the trade in rhino horn isn't legal in China or Vietnam either.
- The live import/export of rhinos anywhere is not illegal. Live animals can be sold and transported out of SA according to CITES regulations (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species). This is not considered trade in horn.
- SANParks have kept records of its rhino sales over the last few years. They no longer conduct auctions wherein there is no control over who buys the rhino. Now, buyers have to be carefully checked before a sale is made.
- A new DNA database called RHODIS, is helping to keep track of the origin of rhino's and where they come from so if illegal sales take place, these crimes can be addressed. Horns can also be matched to crime scenes which will result in many more prosecutions.
- Asian traditions have been around for 1000's of years. The perception that rhino horn is effective as medicine needs to change urgently but it's unlikely to be effective coming from the Western front. South Africa needs to lead by example and we can't tell the Asians not to poach rhinos if our own people still chop off vulture heads and feet to win the lottery!
- The financial value of an animal and its conservation status are linked. Little serious international consideration has until recently, been given to legalising trade to undermine illegal trade and slash the value of stockpiles; meeting annual consumption by sustainable production of horn; promoting trade relationships with and sustainable use practices in consumer states; maximising sustainable economic benefits from rhino to support conservation costs and promote rural development; and increasing the number and diversity of stake-holders in rhino survival. These possibilities are being investigated.
- Solving the rhino poaching problem is a complex issue which is multifaceted. It involves security and coordination of animals on the ground as much as legislation and policy on a local and international scale. The laws of a country, the natural history of the animal, the traditional beliefs of people involved and the greed that drives criminal industries all need to be understood and addressed at different levels.

***NOTE: It is generally not considered prudent to publish the price of rhino horn as this advertises to criminals how lucrative the industry is and encourages further involvement in syndicates.
