

RHINOS IN PERIL

A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT TO
AFRICAN WILDLIFE NEWS



Craig F. Sholey

THE BIG FOUR?

Africa wouldn't be the same without rhinos

By Kathleen Garrigan

Look at a South African 10 Rand banknote and you'll find one of the country's famed wildlife species—a white rhinoceros—staring back at you. With 93 percent of Africa's rhinos living on South African soil, the fact that the horned herbivore made it onto the currency should come as no surprise. Shuffling and eating its way through the savanna and tropical bush lands of nine countries—South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Swaziland, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Botswana, Zambia, and Mozambique—the rhino is one of Africa's most charismatic animals and a member of Africa's illustrious “Big Five,” along with the elephant, lion, leopard, and cape buffalo. And as the planet's second-largest land mammal after the elephant, the white rhino puts the “mega” in megafauna.

GRAZERS VS. BROWSERS

Not all rhinos are built alike, and while Africa's two species of rhino—the white and the black—are similarly hulky, they nevertheless exhibit physical features and behavior that readily distinguish one from the other. A mature white rhino bull is larger than its black counterpart, weighing in at around 2,500 kg and 1,000 kg, respectively. For both rhinos, their large body size means they are landscape shapers, creating pathways and “holes”

The African rhino, like the white rhinoceroses pictured here, is a continental treasure that delivers both ecological and economical benefits to the continent—provided, that is, that poaching doesn't wipe it out.

through underbrush, which in turn are used by other animals. The rhino is also an “umbrella species,” in that its conservation—and the conservation of the spaces it needs to survive—will ensure the protection of thousands of smaller species that share its habitat, from servals to dung beetles.

As can be clearly seen on the 10 Rand banknote, the white rhino has a long, wide mouth, adapted for grazing savanna grasses like a lawn mower. By comparison, the black rhino has a prehensile, hooked lip, which it uses to browse higher vegetation from shrubs and trees. Even from a distance, it may be possible to tell a white rhino from a black one depending on its head posture, as the grazing white rhino's head tends to face downward, whereas the browsing black rhino's natural head posture faces upward.

Africa's rhinos have been around for 6 million years, with the lineage of the black rhino diverging from the white rhino about one and a half million years ago. In spite of its long history, today the future of the rhino is in jeopardy, with the black rhino's population reduced by 90 percent in just three generations. Read on to learn about Africa's threatened rhinos and what AWF is doing to ensure the survival of one of Africa's most treasured species for future generations. ■

RHINOS UNDER THREAT

Numbers tell the story for Africa's rhinos

The magnificent rhino is battling serious threats. Here's a by-the-numbers look at the status of Africa's rhinos:

CURRENT POPULATION

About 25k

Africa's black and white rhino populations bottomed out in the 1990s, with the continent's entire black rhino population numbering only 2,410 in 1995. Since then, both populations have steadily increased, with the white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*) at an estimated 20,160 and the black (*Diceros bicornis*) at 4,880.

POACHING RATES

448 rhinos

Even with the rebound of the rhino population in the past two decades, the world's rhino population has still declined by 95 percent since 1970. What looked like the end of the rampant poaching of the 1970s and 1980s was merely the calm before the storm. 2010 saw a massive escalation in rhino poaching deaths in South Africa, with 330 killed. And year after year, the numbers have continued to climb. In 2011, a record 448 rhinos were poached, and in the first 6 months of 2012, nearly 300 rhinos were killed. More than 2 rhinos are poached each day, putting 2012's projected year-end total at more than 600.

DISTRIBUTION AND GEOGRAPHY

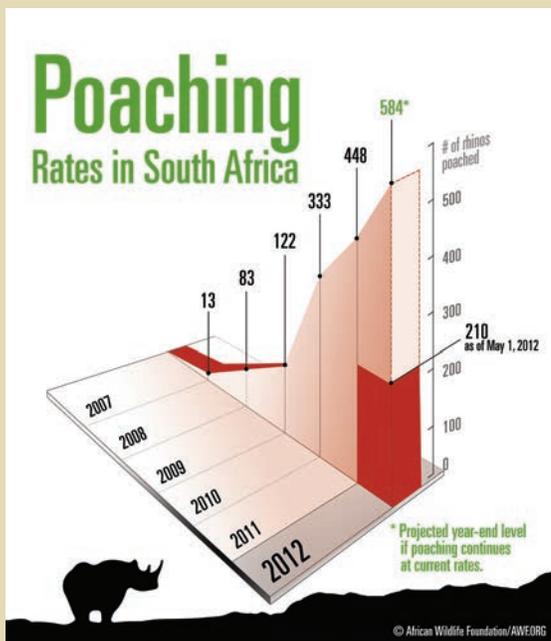
98%

Rhinos once roamed much of the continent of Africa. While they can still be found in several countries, 98.3 percent of rhinos live in four range states—South Africa, Namibia, Kenya, and Zimbabwe—with 93 percent in South Africa.

CURRENT THREATS

Up to \$65k

Rhinos' only natural predators are humans. A number of Asian societies believe rhino horn to be a magic medicine, curing a multitude of ailments, from cancer to hangovers. This, coupled with a rising middle class in East Asia, has caused a seemingly exponential increase in demand for rhino horn—and, as a result, an increase in rhino poaching. China and Vietnam are the primary destinations for these illegal wildlife products.



Rhino horn currently can demand up to US\$65,000 per kg on the black market. And although 2012 has seen more than 170 poacher arrests thus far, the high value of rhino horn continues to drive an intricate scheme of illegal crime.

Habitat loss, though less prevalent than poaching, also affects rhinos. These large species require a sizeable area to support them. Deforestation for agriculture or development forces rhinos into smaller, overlapping habitats, resulting in a shortage of food and a limited gene pool for breeding.

—Christine Runion ■

AWF TAKES ACTION

AWF undertakes innovative projects to turn around the devastating rhino situation

From helping to re-establish the rhino population in Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park in Zambia to providing ranger training and other support to Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary in Kenya, AWF has long helped conserve rhinos across Africa. AWF took further action this year with a number of innovative projects aimed at ensuring the long-term survival of the African black and white rhino.



REDUCING DEMAND

AWF entered into a partnership with NGO WildAid in China. The campaign will include a series of high-impact advertisements featuring leading Asian celebrities in spots that educate consumers about how demand for rhino horn leads to poaching. A spot featuring former NBA player Yao Ming has already costarred.

"This partnership leverages African Wildlife Foundation's network and experience operating in Asia," said Patrick Bergin, AWF CEO. "While we aim to halt the poaching, we also need to reach out to those who are causing the damaging effects of their actions."

THE ROLE OF CITES

You may have seen the term "CITES" when referring to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, a.k.a. CITES, is an international agreement between governments that the international trade in wild animals and plants is controlled.

The trade of rhino horn is currently banned, but if legalizing it will help minimize poaching. It is currently being officially submitted for a vote during the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Thailand this March, but we will continue to monitor the situation.

SNIFFING OUT ILLEGAL TRAFFICKING

Sniffer dogs in Kenya are trained to detect elephant ivory, rhino horn, and weapons with greater than 90 percent accuracy. A well-trained dog and its handler can examine passengers and baggage arriving on a Boeing 747—about 300 passengers, each with two suitcases and a carry-on bag—in 20 to 30 minutes. The same feat would take the efforts of at least 36 human customs officers.

Kenya Wildlife Service currently deploys a canine unit of six dogs. Because of the shortage of canines and personnel, however, dogs and their handlers have to work 12-hour shifts daily, according to KWS canine master Charles Rono. The ideal scenario, he noted, would be to have units working six-hour shifts.

AWF therefore plans on supporting 8 additional sniffer dogs and 10 handlers. Talks are underway to implement sister canine units in other countries like Ethiopia and Zambia, other known conduits for wildlife trafficking onwards to Asia.



AWF CEO Patrick Bergin recently witnessed a sniffer dog demonstration at Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Kenya. Here, he poses with sniffer dog Dickson, named after the head of the Kenya Wildlife Service antipoaching unit.

Amara Rono/Kenya Wildlife Service

CATCHING RHINOS—AND POACHERS—ON CAMERA

AWF donated 20 camera traps, along with metal casings, to KWS for rhino monitoring and surveillance in Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary,

a fenced “safe” area for rhinos in Tsavo West National Park, and the Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ), an unfenced but heavily protected area to which many of the Ngulia rhinos are relocated. These camera traps allow KWS to more easily locate and protect the Eastern black rhinos residing in the 103-sq.-km sanctuary and IPZ. (Interestingly, the cameras also recently took photos of poachers—KWS has reportedly submitted the photography to police for suspect identification.)

AWF has supported Ngulia since its creation in 1985, from supplying binoculars and GPS systems to supporting rangers and fixing and maintaining fencing.



Daudi Sumba (left), AWF vice president of program operations, officially handed over stealth cameras to Linus Kariuki, action rhino program coordinator at Kenya Wildlife Service, for use in Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary.

STABILIZING SAVÉ

AWF recently directed resources to protecting the critically endangered black rhino in Savé Valley Conservancy, Zimbabwe’s largest conservancy. Zimbabwe has the fourth-largest population of black rhino in the world. But since 2006, 89 percent of all black rhino losses on the continent have occurred in Zimbabwe. Supporting antipoaching units in Savé—which has 100 Southern black and 35 white rhinos—provides a feasible way of stabilizing and eventually increasing the continent’s black rhino population.



Savé Valley Conservancy contains 100 of Zimbabwe’s black rhinos.

John Butler



to conduct a public awareness campaign in fact public service announcements (PSAs) and sports, entertainment, and business, educating the illegal poaching of rhinos. (A billboard came out.)

ation’s expertise in rhino conservation and a to put an end to the demand for rhino efforts are being made on the ground to e who buy the horn and show them the

ading about wildlife trade. The erred Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, tween governments that works to ensure d plants does not threaten their survival.

ut some conservationists believe that ot yet known whether this issue will th meeting of the CITES managing keep you updated as news unfolds.

HOW TO COMBAT RHINO POACHING

Early this year, AWF saw that appropriately addressing the rhino poaching problem would require a coordinated, comprehensive response from the collective of rhino stakeholders. So, together with Kenya Wildlife Service, AWF hosted an emergency Rhino Summit this past April at our Nairobi, Kenya, headquarters.

Attendees—who included wildlife authorities, scientists, private reserve owners, and rhino trade and security experts, representing more than 25 organizations from Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, the United States, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—agreed that strong political will and coordination between countries is necessary to reduce poaching and prevent the illegal trafficking of rhino horn. The Summit also resulted in an action plan that rhino stakeholders should take to more effectively combat rhino poaching. The plan features four tiers of effort:

1. SUPPORT BOOTS ON THE GROUND

Due to limited resources, rangers are often put into the field with little to no follow-up support. But case studies of Asian rhino protection have shown that an increase in trained, properly equipped anti-poaching staff in the field leads to a reduction in poaching. Specific suggestions include:

- Share knowledge on paramilitary training
- Use technology (horn implants, night-vision goggles, fence alarms, surveillance cameras)
- Catalog DNA of remaining rhinos



2. BUMP UP LAW ENFORCEMENT

Given the potential for high reward and low risk—rhino horn is said to command more than US\$65,000 per kg on the black market, while laws related to wildlife offenses are still quite lenient in many African countries—rhino poaching and the illegal trafficking of rhino horn has become particularly attractive to organized crime syndicates. To combat this, the action plan suggests:

- Prosecuting rhino poaching and trafficking as organized crime, as South Africa is doing
- Maintaining comprehensive records of rhino horn stockpiles



3. CURB DEMAND

While suppressing the supply of illegal rhino horn (through the anti-poaching engagements discussed) is necessary, Summit attendees noted that the other side of the supply–demand equation must be addressed. As noted on p. S3, AWF has partnered with WildAid to jointly develop and conduct a multimedia public awareness campaign in China, one of the countries with the largest demand for rhino horn.

- Studies should additionally be commissioned to better understand the drivers of the illegal horn trade



4. PUSH POLICY

All of these efforts should be supported with expanded outreach to influence policy makers, financiers and government officials at the highest appropriate levels on the issue of rhino poaching and illegal horn trafficking.

The AWF/WildAid partnership includes plans to engage policy makers in the Chinese government to generate support for the rhino public awareness campaign. ■



At a Rhino Summit convened by AWF and Kenya Wildlife Service, Pelham Jones, chair of the Private Rhino Owners Association in South Africa, speaks about the security measures being taken on South Africa's private rhino reserves.

Noor Khamis

YOU, TOO, CAN TAKE ACTION!

Visit awf.org/donate

Want to do your share to combat rhino poaching in Africa? It's easy! First, spread the word about the rhino poaching crisis in Africa, and direct your friends to awf.org to learn more about the issue.

Second, please consider making a generous donation to AWF, where we can leverage your gift with others' to support specific actions against rhino poaching. Together, we can ensure that rhinos enjoy a long, prosperous future in Africa.