

# REALLY, RHINOS!

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## ZIMBABWE'S RHINO WAR [Swara, September/October, 1989]

First the good news. There has been a sharp drop in the number of rhinos lost to poachers, from 149 in '87 to 62 in '88 to only 21 by the end of June, '89. Since 1985 just under 600 are now known to have been killed while at the same time over 300 have been successfully translocated out of the lower Zambezi Valley. A recent survey suggests a remaining rhino population of between 500-600, and Zimbabwe's conservationists would like to stop translocating them and try to protect these in their natural habitat.

And now for the bad news. In order to protect the remaining rhinos, a force of 500 game scouts would be needed as compared with the 100 currently fielded by Operation Stronghold. The World Wildlife Fund has withdrawn its support of the anti-poaching helicopter which was the kingpin of the effort. Although it is still flying thanks to an anonymous benefactor, its future is not secure.

Gun battles between poachers and park rangers have occurred throughout a larger area of the national parks. Hwange National Park was thought to be one of the safe areas where rhinos captured in the Zambezi Valley could be released. After a gun battle last year which left two Zambian poachers dead (though no rhinos were lost), this is a

very serious setback.

The ultimate success of Operation Stronghold also depends on Zambia, but so far efforts to persuade it to take serious action to curtail the poaching from its side has had little success. Zambia has to first even admit it has a problem. It is suggested that poachers are being recruited in the suburbs of Lusaka and supplied with modern weapons and ammunition leading one to suspect that corruption exists at levels well above that of the poachers themselves. The Zambian government denies this accusation and has even threatened libel action against Britain's Sunday Telegraph.

Good can come from evil. Last December, the chief warden of Zimbabwe's parks, Mr. Glen Tatham, was involved in an incident in which a Zimbabwean poacher was killed. This led to his temporary imprisonment with murder charges against him and resulted in low morale among the anti-poaching forces. At the same time, there was an upsurge in the success rate of the poachers with 17 rhinos lost that same month. The upside was that charges were not only dismissed against Tatham but a bill was drafted in Zimbabwe's parliament to protect anti-poaching personnel against murder charges if they

kill poachers. The Protection of Wildlife Indemnity Act was quickly passed, placing the law unambiguously on the side of the anti-poaching forces.

The key to protecting the remaining rhinos in the lower Zambezi Valley is early detection and interception of poachers before they've had a chance to kill. The sad fact is that Zimbabwe's parks haven't the resources or the manpower to be able to eliminate a rate of attrition which, however low, will inevitably reduce the rhino population to a level no longer genetically viable.

A new harrowing twist involves the oil exploration contract for the whole Zambezi Valley which is about to be signed between Zimbabwe and the Mobil Oil Corporation. Oil exploration will almost certainly result in increased access to the more remote parts of the rhino habitat, and give new opportunities to poachers.

It's not too late to halt the rhino's decline in Zimbabwe, but what is needed is money. If any of you are so inclined, please write to Mobil and tell them of your concern. They probably won't stop the exploration, but maybe they will donate some money to help save the remaining rhinos in the Valley.

(sung to "Santa Claus is Coming to Town")

You better dig deep and fork over cash  
So we can save every African crash  
Rhinos are endangered again!

We can't watch them all whatever we do  
Our only hope will be people like you  
Rhinos are endangered again!

They're hunted for their great horns  
Despite the myths and lies  
Extinction is forever  
We can succeed if we will try.

Write letters, complain wherever you can  
Get everyone to support the CITES plan  
Rhinos are endangered again!

## RHINO SONG TRILOGY

(sung to "Auld Lang Syne")

The earth is one big family  
Each member should have rights  
No matter if it's fish or fowl  
Or germ or man of might.

Should all the rhinos disappear  
Be on this earth no more  
Our family pain would persevere  
As we know what is in store.

Each life on earth is intertwined  
Each loss should make us vexed  
As life is taken we should ask  
Whose turn will now be next?

(sung to "O Tannenbaum")

Oh rhinophile, oh rhinophile  
Your hobby's a unique one.

Oh rhinophile, oh rhinophile  
Your hunting brings you great fun.

And aren't you glad you're not alone  
When so called pals begin to moan?

Take heart my friend and keep it up  
Obsession need not cause you fear.

So listen for those magic words  
Yes, we will take your Visa here!