

MEANWHILE IN BOTSWANA... RHINOS RELOCATED AWAY FROM POACHERS

At least three rhinos were poached since the aerial survey (*REF Journal*, Vol 7, Nov 1992) which highlighted the need to take urgent measures. Under the guidance of Natal Parks Board's crack rhino capture team, the Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks initiated Operation Rhino to save Botswana's last free-ranging rhino and to move them to a safe place.

In February 1993, two rhinos, a cow and a calf, and two days later a white rhino bull were captured and transported seven hundred kilometres to the Khama Rhino Sanctuary, established by an enthusiastic community of Botswana citizens in Serowe.

While the capture operation was in progress, poachers exchanged fire with Botswana game guards, and a three-year old bull was saved from death at the last minute by the game capture team bringing to four the number of rhino captured and relocated to the sanctuary. Unfortunately, the rhino wounded by poachers died four weeks later despite constant veterinary care.



Pictures by Vere van Heerden, courtesy of Natal Mercury

NPB game capture team members Peter Openshaw, Peter Rogers and a game guard inspect a darted rhino in Chobe National Park. The massive bull was one of the four rhinos the team were able to capture in a bid to save them from international poaching gangs.



Sawing off the bull's horn to reduce the risk of injuries during translocation.

The Rhino & Elephant Foundation committed itself to the funding of the holding facilities at the Khama Rhino Sanctuary as well as to additional feeding of the rhinos while in captivity over a protracted period of time. Special thanks to EPOL for generously sponsoring horse cubes for a six-month period.

COMPUTER NETWORKING FOR ANTI-POACHING ACTION

The tragic decline of Zimbabwe's black rhino has put South Africa on "red alert", preparing for an unprecedented wave of poaching to hit rhino sanctuaries throughout the country.

When monitoring a poaching incident, conservation agencies have turned to an unusual source: corporate and credit information.

KREDITINFORM operates and maintains a computer linked network. On hearing of a local conservation agency's needs for tracing those behind the financially-motivated slaughter of rhino, KREDITINFORM recently donated free access to their on-line system to the Foundation – a donation valued over R20 000.

By using the on-line network, new data can be added to existing records and then be

circulated between various conservation agencies nationwide. Access to information helps to build a legal case which can lead to arrests or comprehensive dossiers handed to the relevant authorities for action.


KREDITINFORM director, Peter Sullivan, visited a bushveld area for the official "hand-over" of the donation. "The poachers are committing genocide not only of individual animals but of complete species. If our contribution can save one of these magnificent creatures, then we shall be pleased."

KARIBA CORPORATE CHALLENGE SUPPORTS RHINO CONSERVATION

This is the inaugural year for the "Kariba Corporate Challenge", a unique commercial/conservation venture. While enjoying the experience of an ultimate corporate adventure on Lake Kariba, business corporations can support the Rhino & Elephant Foundation's activities in southern Africa and Zimbabwe. No longer can the survival of the black rhino be solely dependent on hand-outs and donations.

This exciting challenge involves 30 houseboats - each participating company can invite eight guests to form a team to compete in a fishing competition with a difference. The cost of securing a houseboat for three nights (2-5 September 1993) entitles the company to eight return airfares, all meals and local drinks - including a prize giving and spit roast, a captain and crew to take care of all their needs, and two fishing tender boats and bait.

At a special black-tie gala evening on 1 September (the eve before departure), each team can bid for a specific houseboat. All funds generated from the evening will be donated to the Rhino & Elephant Foundation. This gala event will also give participants the opportunity of meeting other guests and testing their eagerness in gaining a competitive edge!

Should you require any further information on the Kariba Corporate Challenge, please contact John Ingram at (011) 803-9775. 

IN MEMORIAM

The Rhino & Elephant Foundation has received (at the time of going to press), with thanks generous donations in memory of the late Mrs Paddy (Dorothea B) Fullerton who had a special fondness for elephants, from the following relatives and friends:

Derek G Fullerton (USA), Mrs J Roman, Miss E M Marsh, Mr & Mrs P S Reinecke, Norman C Bloom, Mrs P Wood, Trish & Kerry Zschenderlein, Ms L Stier & Mr B Flowers, Mrs M Walker, Roderic Macmillan (UK), John Macmillan & Sarah Capitanio (UK), Stephen Macmillan (UK), Brenda, Oscar & Leila Macmillan (UK), Doreen & Ron Titler (UK), North American Exploration, Inc. (USA), Exmin Corporation (USA), Gordon, Brian & Leigh-Ann Fullerton (USA).

These funds have been specifically allocated for elephant projects in southern Africa.



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- Wine Route River Adventure
- Two Ships Camel & Canoe Safari

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COMMERCE IN RHINOS



Photo: Peter Higgins

In 1929 probably less than 100 white rhinoceros survived in the Zululand reserves of the Umfolozi/Hluhluwe complex. Those were all that remained of the once great numbers of rhino inhabiting the South African bushveld regions. Shot to the brink of extinction by hunters, traders and sportsmen, rhino miraculously survived in this small pocket and once protection was in place, their numbers crept up to an estimated 437 by 1953.

That same year, Ian Player, today a patron of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation and at the time employed by the Natal Parks Board, carried out an aerial survey in the Umfolozi Game Reserve which revealed that there was a danger of too many of these great creatures inhabiting the sanctuary. His recommendation to begin removing some eventually led to the translocation of more than 3 000 white rhino to government and private reserves in southern Africa and to some 200 zoos around the world. This very effort ensured the survival of the white rhino and, at the same time, placed an

economic value on the animal. Today one can expect to pay up to R50 000 for a breeding bull or cow.

After an 86-year hunting ban, the authorities allowed the species to be placed back onto the South African hunting licence. Since then, more than 300 have been taken by trophy hunters, some of whom are willing to pay upwards of a premium R130 000 for the best trophy head.

There are many people who find this thought detestable, but don't forget that the decision to hunt rhino was based on the excellent recovery of the species. There are some 6 000 white rhino in South Africa of which in excess of 500 are in private reserves, while the world's zoo populations approach 700. The fact that one is able to hunt them today bears testimony to their successful re-establishment.

By contrast, let's look at the black rhino. Its former range far exceeded that of the white rhino. In 1980 there were still an estimated 15000 black rhino throughout their range

in Africa and the ban on hunting them and trade in horn was firmly in place. Yet the species collapsed to the point where we now have only 2 500 surviving in a few countries, mainly in southern Africa, hanging on grimly to an uncertain future.

South Africa has the largest population, a distinction held until recently by Zimbabwe. In 1990 the Natal Parks Board again took a bold decision: to dispose of some black rhino. At their first black rhino auction, in June of that year, they realised the highest price ever paid for the species when Dale Parker of Lapalala Wilderness successfully bid R2.2 million.

There was shock and amazement among wildlife followers at the prices paid. Some people had doubts – did the private sector have the expertise or capability of caring for such a rare species? Only time would tell. The Natal Parks Board, however, was delighted as the proceeds gave their conservation coffers a handsome boost. Suddenly the black rhino had an economic value and again, the private sector had led the way.

But perhaps the larger point was that the private sector had a choice: if people wanted black rhino on their reserves, it had become a possibility, but they would have to pay for the privilege, and pay dearly. (In Kenya, by contrast, rhino belong to the state regardless of where they live. The private landowner becomes custodian and spends money on essentials such as fencing and security, but the state agency has a complete say on management issues.)

When people make the choice of owning the black rhino for pleasure, for tourist reasons, to help conserve rare species, for breeding purposes and subsequent resale, or for hunting, the fact is, it was done for the white rhino and must surely now be done for the black rhino. The black rhino has real economic value now quite aside from its horn, and given the ability of private enterprise to meet all manner of challenges, this value must improve the animal's chances in the longer term.

That's the theory. In reality, protecting such an asset is far from easy. The situation facing all rhino has worsened dramatically as numbers in most countries have plunged and organised

crime continues to penetrate even carefully guarded sanctuaries. Five white rhinoceros have recently been slaughtered in the most protected of all African sanctuaries, the Kruger National Park.

The small sanctuary concept – keeping rhino in limited areas – has great merit because it improves monitoring enormously. The ability to monitor rhino and staff daily, if not hourly, is essential. That sanctuaries be well away from areas of high human settlement is an important prerequisite. Running such a sanctuary is costly, however, as well as being labour intensive. But as this form of rhino conservation grows, so too will the opportunities for breeding to improve the black rhino's overall status and thus pave the way for sale of surplus rhino to establish new populations and perhaps eventually allow hunting of mature bulls at premium prices.

One can rely on private sector operators to develop new strategies for rhino conservation now that they are in the game. The breeding of endangered or rare species is a noble pursuit, if viewed idealistically. Yet one should also be prepared to view it in a business light. It has been said that there are no perfect men in this world – only perfect intentions. If someone's intention is to make money breeding black rhino and success leads to the enhancement of the status of this species, then so be it. Business-minded people are amazed that one does not trade in rhino horn. If illegal harvesting of horns is the root cause of the problem and the gravest threat to rhinos, then why not deal with the symptom?

It would indeed be a sad day (and there are those who believe it will come) if we were so preoccupied with keeping rhinos alive at all that we wouldn't even consider trade in their horns. Trade in horn might *help* the species survive. Similarly, where is the harm in allowing an ageing bull to be hunted for the good of his own kind? There are some perfect men with perfect intentions who won't let either of these options get much of a hearing.

We should not accept that. We need to press for bold new initiatives and explore every means at our disposal on behalf of the black rhino. It worked for the white rhino. 