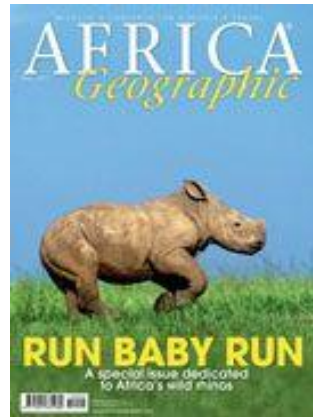


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April 2012: All about rhinos

Special issue - rhinos & the poaching crisis

80 and counting...

That's the number of rhinos killed in South Africa in the first two months of 2012. We dedicate this entire issue to finding out about rhinos and their precious horn, establishing exactly what is driving the poaching onslaught and examining the pros and cons of suggested solutions.

features

All about rhinos

Find out what we know about Africa's rhino species – how many there are and where they live – and about their horns, the unique evolutionary attribute that arguably makes them the most controversial and written-about animals of our time.

A chequered past

Prior to colonial times, Africa's rhino population across all species is thought to have numbered in the hundreds of thousands, possibly over a million. From the 1800s to the present, our summary tells their story. Rhino numbers, however, remained guesswork until the 1960s – and even today there is an element of uncertainty that is compounded by secrecy for security reasons.



The crisis

Crisis? What crisis? After all, rhino numbers for both species in southern Africa are actually increasing. It sounds crazy given a poaching scenario that is seemingly so out of hand, but it is true. It doesn't mean that rhinos in the wild aren't in trouble though – they are. We unpick the inner workings of the poaching syndicates and look at what we know about the Vietnamese and Chinese consumers who are driving the demand.



The solutions

We know rhinos are in trouble. We know we want to save them. But how do we do this, in the face of such seemingly overwhelming odds? The proposed solutions are as hotly debated as they are numerous. Do we increase security and penalties, should we stop legal trophy hunting or focus our efforts on changing mindsets in Asia? We evaluate every one, including the hottest potato of them all: calls to legalise the trade in horn.

Find it here:

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Peter Borchert
Founder

We chose our engaging little model for the cover of this issue for two reasons: relief from the brutal images that inevitably accompany so many stories about rhinos these days, and as a message of encouragement: for as long as there are rhinos being born that will grow up in the wildest of possible circumstances, there is hope for the species. Our exhortation 'RUN BABY RUN' is, therefore, as much a call for our baby pachyderm to be the essence of what it is, as it is a call to run for its very life.



mind-shifters

So far, you've been reading about on-the-ground efforts in Africa to combat rhino poaching and the pros and cons of regulating the supply of horn into Asia. The ominous truth, though, is that if rhinos are to survive in the long term, a new front has to be opened up – one that targets the demand for their horn.

For Morné du Plessis, CEO of WWF South Africa, it's a straightforward reality. 'The battle to protect rhinos is not going to be won in Africa,' he says. 'It's going to be won where the demand is – in Asia.' And fighting it is going to require more than crossing physical frontiers; it's going to involve getting into the minds of people who believe that rhino horn is, in some way or another, beneficial to their well-being. This, however, is far easier said than done.

To date, much of the messaging to reduce the demand for rhino horn has focused on 'cute' animals or blood-and-gore shock tactics. Although it's difficult to judge the effectiveness of such campaigns, the fact that the slaughter of rhinos continues is an indication that they are not working, suggests Sabri Zain, Director of Advocacy and Campaigns for TRAFFIC. 'They jump straight to the message without thinking about the attitudes and behaviour that need to be changed,' he says. 'It is clear that the initial focus

of our work to reduce the consumer demand [for rhino horn] should be on understanding the underlying motivations of the consumer.'

Galeo Saintz of Rhino Reality (www.rhinoreality.org), a coalition of conservationists with a campaign that specifically targets the end-users, can help with this. He explains that the belief in the medicinal qualities of rhino horn is a meme, a

“ If our descendants have to ask us why they can only see rhinos in photographs, how can we tell them that it's because some people among our ancestors felt that rhino horn had medicinal value and so killed them? Jackie Chan ”

deep-rooted conviction that goes back many generations. A reversal of this meme – or 'super meme' as Saintz calls it – is not going to happen overnight, but by means of insight and awareness it may be achieved. 'Essentially,' he says, 'we have to decouple economic and emotional factors from the rhino conservation issue.' Flooding the market with rhino horn to make the price fall, as some have suggested, will only lend credence to the meme.

Rhino Reality has approached WildAid (www.wildaid.org), an international organisation that has been delivering media messages about the use of bear bile, tiger parts, shark fins and the like to the Chinese for a decade. Its president, Steve Trent, admits that rhino horn poses particular problems. 'Targeting ▶

Scenes from 'Rhino horn is a killer, not a cure,' a YouTube clip posted by Humane Society International in English, Vietnamese and Chinese. Social media, with their global reach, provide an excellent platform for not only spreading the anti-poaching message to all and sundry, but also targeting the psyche of those who use rhino horn.



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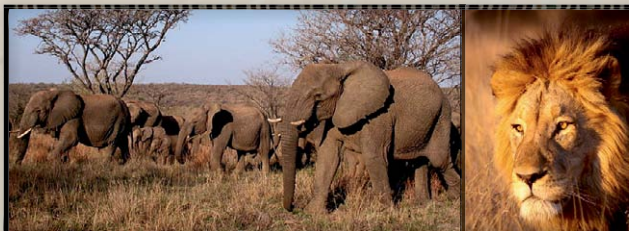
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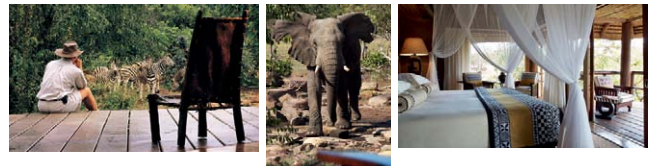
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With a decade's experience of trying to persuade people to not consume wildlife products, WildAid has perfected the use of celebrities – both local and international – in commercials and public service announcements. While Jackie Chan here defends the right of tigers to live, he has also spoken out against the consumption of rhino horn.

the consumers of rhino horn is unusually difficult and complex,' he says. 'Because it's very expensive, its use is largely hidden and exclusive.' He adds that many Western perceptions of the Chinese are ill-conceived and cautions against generalisations. 'It's not a case of "Chinese people don't care". That simply isn't true. There is a growing awareness of animal welfare in China. Many Chinese people would be shocked if you showed them gruesome images of a dehorned rhino, but the man in the street would feel that it has nothing to do with him because he is too poor to use rhino horn. It's a complex communication challenge – we have to target the right people.'

Trent also warns that there can be pitfalls in the message itself. If it takes the conservation route and emphasises how endangered the rhino species are, there is a good chance that its less scrupulous recipients will equate increasingly rare with increasingly valuable and will themselves jump onto the poaching bandwagon. Some, it is rumoured, are even speculating – if rhino horn is valuable now, imagine the profits to be made should rhinos go extinct. And if the message stresses that rhino horn does not cure cancer, the mere association of 'rhino horn' and 'cancer' may have the opposite of the desired effect. With 56 different languages in China and many dialectical variations in Vietnamese, a negative is easily lost in translation.

wildlife consumerism
 China is the largest consumer of endangered wildlife products. WildAid projects that about 250 million new middle-class consumers will enter the market over the next decade.

So where would WildAid begin a campaign to reduce consumption of rhino horn? 'Firstly,' says Trent, 'we'd have to focus on strategic niche markets. We'd encourage border officials to look out for horn and highlight how seriously smuggling it is viewed in China and internationally. Where it's used in traditional medicine, we'd encourage the use of alternatives. And we'd engage with consumers on a philosophical and cultural level.' But he concedes that the plans are still on paper, and he and his colleagues are still looking for the most effective ways to contribute. 'We need to

find the right kind of people – people with stature and authority in China – who can convey the message with maximum effect.'

WWF has plans too. Joseph Okori, manager of its African Rhino Programme, speaks of the roll-out of a major, multi-faceted campaign in July. 'Part of our focus will be on Asian migrant workers who act as couriers of rhino horn. We need to make them aware that such wildlife activities are illegal,' he explains. 'Countries that issue visas to foreign visitors will include an information brochure with each visa. There'll be an ad campaign too, and we'll get government officials to talk about rhino horn on TV – it's important to reach the next generation,' he adds.

James Compton, TRAFFIC's Senior Director for Asia-Pacific, agrees with this practical approach. 'We have to go

beyond posters at airports,' he says. 'We have to come up with innovative strategies, of substantial scale and duration, to address demand. If we can make the consumption of endangered wildlife uncool among young people in Asia, then perhaps we have a chance of really shifting things.'

This is where social media also has a part to play. Humane Society International has posted a YouTube clip called 'Rhino horn is a killer, not a cure' (www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSiEGOHqcaA), which carries the warning 'This video contains graphic images of mutilated rhinos'. Significantly, it is also available in Vietnamese and Chinese.

For Rhino Reality, media of various kinds – but predominantly Asian – will be put to work on overturning the 'super meme'. Sainz and his colleagues have a structured three-pronged plan of attack, the first phase of which involves investigating the potential and feasibility of a public service announcement campaign across China and Vietnam. Then they will take leading Asian journalists and bloggers on a seven-day safari to South Africa to show them the environmental and social impacts of rhino poaching – impacts that will be relayed to readers back in Asia. Finally, a leading Asian celebrity will be invited to really get to grips with the poaching problem by walking through rhino territory for 21 days. Daily web updates and a TV documentary will enable followers back home to share the experience – and, it is hoped, gain a better understanding of the plight of South Africa's rhinos.

Relatively speaking, when you consider the respective populations of Vietnam (90 million in 2011) and China (1.37 billion in 2011), the number of rhino-horn consumers is very small. Yet it's a number that has huge potential to grow. And because so few rhinos survive, it doesn't take a very big surge in demand to wreak havoc on populations. Preventing a surge – and, better still, curbing demand – has to be an integral part of the battle to save the rhino. **AG**



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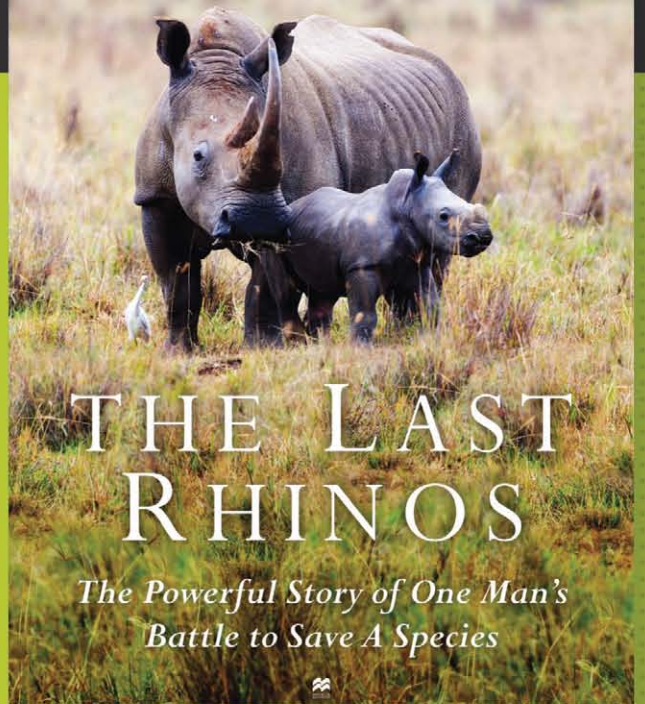


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Mapungubwe revisited

BY NOEL ASHTON

190 x 300 x 110 mm, bronze sculpture

800 years ago, on the top of Mapungubwe Hill, where the great Limpopo and Shashe rivers converge, a member of the royal family was laid to rest. Within the grave was placed a little rhino, 152 millimetres long and made of pure gold. This compelling artwork speaks through time and, as an artist, I see its significance not only as a symbol of the rich cultural legacy of Africa but, because it was a complete rhino and not a fragment of horn or body part, it embodies a deeper connection with and reverence for this magnificent animal. The gold rhino connects these people to the land through a sacred thread of belonging.

It speaks to me and offers a signpost to something that we may have forgotten, though fortunately not lost. It reminds us that the natural world is much more

than a commodity, space or view; it is an intrinsic part of who we are and where we have come from – and with each rhino killed or tract of land destroyed we lose another part of ourselves.

This little gold rhino makes visible the deep connection we have with the natural world, a connection that sustains our souls and reminds us to tread more lightly upon the earth.

Noel Ashton's
Wildlife Studio www.noelashton.com and
www.facebook.com/pages/NoelAshtonWildlifeStudio. **AG**



'Mapungubwe Revisited' signifies my journey of seeking a deeper connection with the earth and sharing it through the 52 Artworks: A year in nature initiative. In creating this sculpture I hope to encourage reflection on our interconnected place within the wider living world, and to honour the magnificence of our wildlife heritage.' – Noel Ashton 52artworks.wordpress.com

52 ARTWORKS
A YEAR IN NATURE
FROM THE STUDIO OF WILDLIFE ARTIST NOEL ASHTON

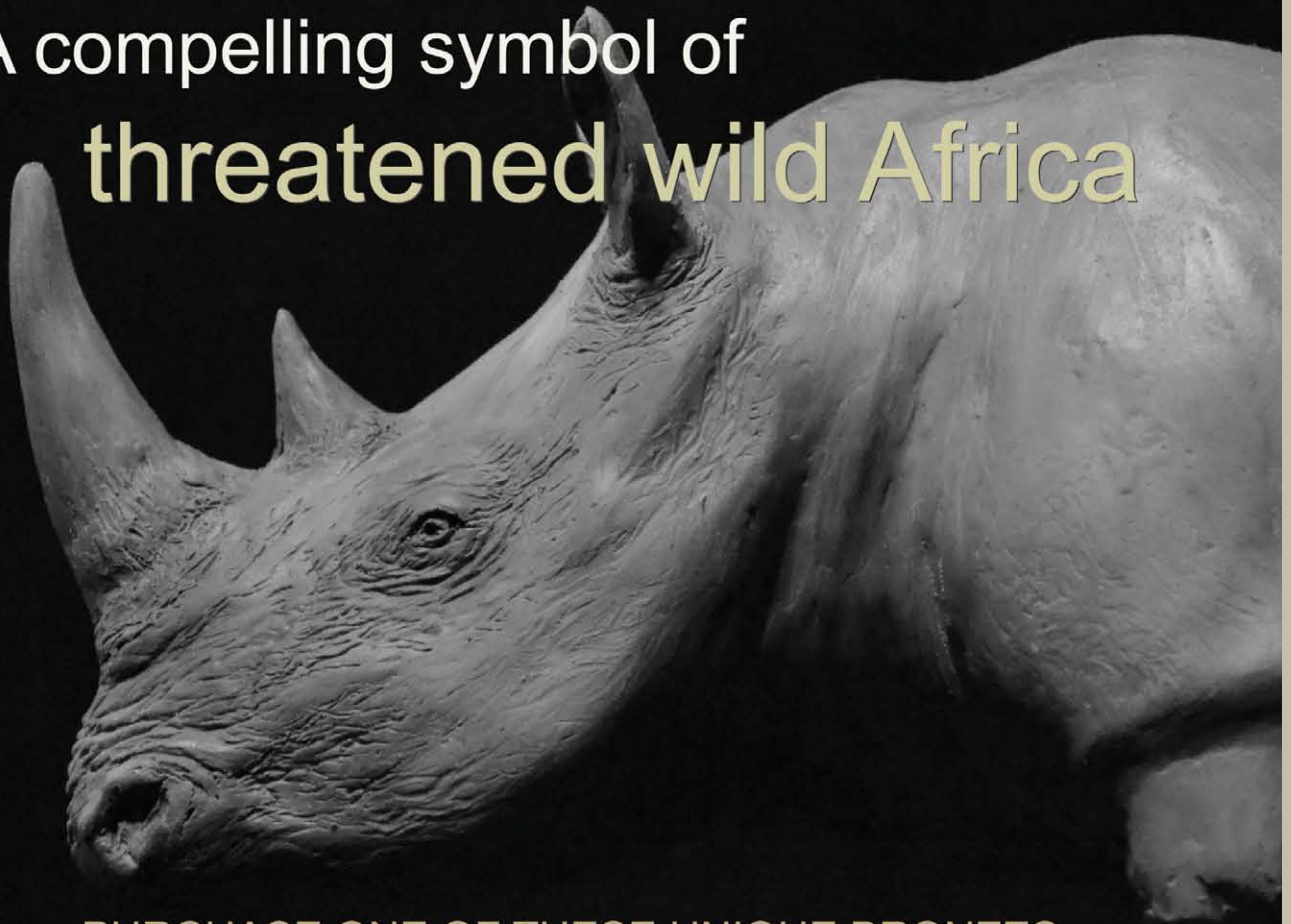


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'Noel and Belinda Ashton's *Mapungubwe Revisited* is a brilliant initiative to honour the rhino. The reverence of the ancient people for this wonderful animal is a sharp reminder to so-called civilised man to ensure that the species survives in our modern world.' Dr Ian Player



NIGEL DENNIS

The sculpture

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Funds from the sale of each bronze sculpture will be donated to WWF-SA and its rhino conservation work.

The *Mapungubwe Revisited* initiative will be launched at the Everard Read Gallery in Johannesburg in April 2012. Please contact Belinda Ashton for any additional information.

For enquiries, please contact
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