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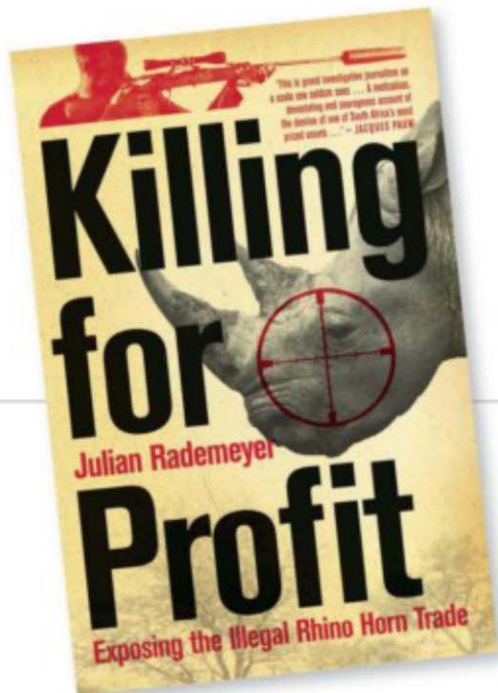
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Killing for Profit:

Exposing the Illegal Rhino Horn Trade
by Julian Rademeyer

by Dr Peter Oberem, Afrivet

I have lost a magnificent rhino cow that had a one-month-old calf with her, when she was murdered by pitiless poachers on Easter Sunday in 2012. When I first heard about this book, I was reluctant to read it, not wanting to refresh the painful memories and thinking that I knew it all.

But because the police and Hawks have not, after nine months, arrested my former employee who has confessed to having been in regular contact with the poachers prior to the poaching, nor the poachers named by my employee, I decided I wanted to know more.

The book sets the scene at a galloping pace, describing the wounding and capture of a poacher during August 2009 in southern Zimbabwe, a country in which at least 123 rhino were poached the previous year and where they are now all but extinct.

Then, without losing any of its pace, we are taken back to the "beginning", the massive poaching of many species of animals including giant sable, elephant for their ivory and rhino by factions in the SADF in southern Angola. This fed the market in the east and fueled their demand. At this time FBI investigations in the USA even uncovered an illegal leopard trophy that had been sourced from Ian Smith, the former Rhodesian Prime Minister.



When, although it took many years before our new democratic government acknowledged the role in poaching by the previous regime, that source was cut off, the growing demand from the east was first filled by "amateur" poachers from along the SA/Zimbabwe borders.

This source was quashed by police work and the CITES ban on rhino horn trading, except for trophy hunting. Soon, however, expatriot Vietnamese and later Thai citizens living in South Africa exploited this "legal" loophole and used Asian women, sometimes prostitutes, as "trophy hunters" to obtain the permits and horns from unscrupulous South African outfitters and game ranchers.

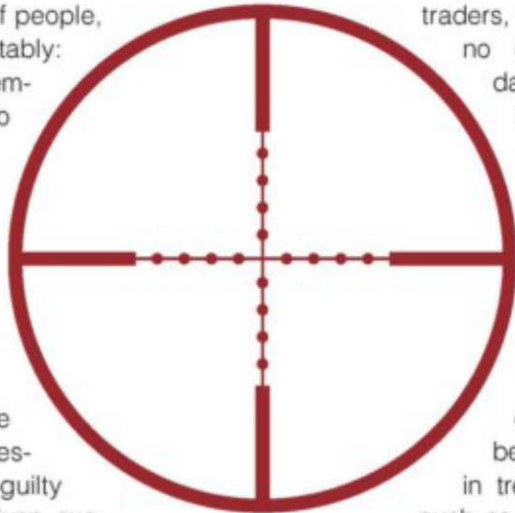
Then one of the local South African lackies of the Thai syndicate spilled the beans leading to the arrests

of a number of people, but most notably: Chumlong Lemtongthai, who was recently sentenced to 40 years in jail. This was an important turning point because up until this case the Asians arrested and found guilty were fined, given suspended sentences and deported. This was no deterrent.

During these investigations and the trial, the name of Xaysavang Trading Export-import Co. Ltd, with an address in Loa Peoples' Democratic (a misnomer) Republic or Laos, as it is commonly referred to, came to the fore. It seems that Chumlong, although a Thai, was the "second in charge" of this company which specialises, under the protection of the ruling Communist dictatorship in Laos, in trading in massive numbers of rare animals ranging from snakes to turtles, tiger and lion bones, ivory and rhino horn. The sole director is named as Vixay Keosavang, a top official of the provincial government in this country that was ravaged during the Vietnam war.

Visiting the border areas of Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and talking to the locals, some involved in rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park, Rademeyer paints a bleak picture of poverty, greed and exploitation, which leads one to believe that stopping the scourge using conventional security means will never succeed.

Rademeyer then travelled to the East and visited Vietnam and Laos to see for himself what drives the demand and also to talk to the




traders, which was with no doubt a very dangerous task.

It is clear that rhino horn is part of the ancient Chinese (and Vietnamese, 2006) traditional medicine pharmacopoeia as being "effective in treating ailments such as high fever, delirium, convulsions and headaches".

However, more recently rhino horn has gained a reputation in Laos and Vietnam for helping during the early stages of cancer. Given the huge shortage of hospitals catering for cancer patients, the rapidly growing numbers of cancer patients in these countries, and exacerbated by the demand generated by its high price and rarity in a country where the rich are overtly ostentatious, the myth of the healing powers of rhino horn has grown, perhaps fanned by smuggling syndicates themselves.

While China has banned the trade in rhino horn and the use thereof in traditional Chinese medicines, no amount of education is going to be effective in Vietnam and Laos, where governments are not sympathetic to the conservation of rhino, in reducing the demand.

This is a most informative book, written by a dedicated investigative journalist who obviously cares. It moves fast and is a very easy read for anyone who wants to form an opinion on what must be done to combat this scourge and save these magnificent species, which are extinct in many parts of their former ranges in Asia and Africa. Go and buy it now! 

The author: Julian Rademeyer

Julian Rademeyer is an investigative journalist and prolific author having worked for a number of major South African newspapers. He is also an internationally recognised freelance reporter.

To research this book meticulously, which took two years and many thousands of kilometres travelling to remote and sometimes dangerous places in Southern Africa and Asia, Julian resigned his job at Media24.

The results of his courage, as disturbing as they are, are here for all of us to see.

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