

Saving pri

Earlier this year poachers killed the last remaining rhinoceros in Mozambique; quite frankly, a disgusting state of affairs. We take a look at what is being done to make sure the same catastrophe does not befall South Africa.

Nick Krige



vate rhino





Not only is it a tragedy for a country to completely lose such a majestic animal, it makes it painfully clear how much danger South African rhinos are in. What is even more shocking is that 30 rangers are to appear in court on charges of assisting the poachers.

Rhinos are targeted because, according to eastern medicine, their horns are believed to be a cure for many ailments, including cancer. Contrary to popular belief, ground rhino horn is not considered an aphrodisiac in Asia. Its most common use is as a hangover cure and, now that the value has skyrocketed so significantly, as gifts to help sign business deals.

When you take into account that the horn is made of keratin, the same material as human hair and finger nails, it seems a ridiculous reason to slaughter rhino; they could just bite their nails a bit more. However, whether it works as medicine or not is not high on the poachers' priority list. As long as rhino horn remains more expensive than cocaine, gold or platinum at over R600 000 per kilogram, there will be people willing to take the risks of acquiring it.



This is war

The current rhino-poaching crisis on the Mozambique border has become so severe that it has led the Game Rangers' Association of Africa (GRAA) to label it an issue of national security in South Africa. The GRAA claims that bands of professionally trained and armed militia are entering the Kruger National Park through the Mozambique border and



plundering South Africa's natural resources. "These actions are tantamount to acts of war and such actions are putting not only South African citizens at risk, but also one of South Africa's economic sectors, namely tourism," reads a statement released by the GRAA.

The GRAA does not believe that rangers should be held responsible for protecting South Africa's borders in the event of what it believes are armed incursions into the country. "Game rangers operate in a constrained environment in terms of resources and legal boundaries compared to that of the military. The current poaching situation needs to be moved beyond the responsibility of the Department of Environmental Affairs. The financial pressure being felt through the deflection of duty to the Department of Environmental Affairs and, ultimately, conservation, needs to be challenged," says the GRAA.

Unsung heroes

South African explorer, Kingsley Holgate, recently embarked on the Izintaba Zobombo Expedition to raise awareness of rhino poaching in Mozambique. Part of the expedition is to raise money to donate a fully kitted out Land Rover to Project Rhino KZN's anti-poaching efforts.

On their travels through Mozambique, the group encountered a few unsung heroes in the war against rhino poaching. Sitting around a fire under a giant chamfuta tree, they met Rafael Chomane Chauque, a Shangaan ranger at Shongile Game Reserve on the Mozambique

side of the Kruger National Park. Chauque told the story of how much he loves rhino and how, when he and his fellow rangers find rhino on their side of the border, they herd them back into South Africa.

Rhino disperse with the first rains of the season and often move out of the Kruger National Park into Shongile. This can be extremely dangerous as the villages are home to many rhino poachers. Apparently, if left unprotected, the rhino are usually shot within 48 hours of arriving in Mozambique.

To counter this, six to 10 rangers get together and form a wall around the rhino and herd the rhino back to the South African border. It is a difficult process, as it often takes more than one attempt to turn the rhino around. It may take many days before the rhinos are comfortable with eating and sleeping with humans in the vicinity.

Once moving, the walk can take as long as seven days. It is no simple task and they are often followed by poachers just waiting for them to make a mistake. When it gets dark, the rangers create fake spoor to lead the poachers away from the animals. This sort of passion and dedication goes far beyond the call of what is expected of a game ranger, and they are putting their lives on the line for these rhino.

Impact on insurance


Donald Munro, managing director of Animalsure, reveals that the company still offers all risk cover for rhino, but the cover is subject

to a security survey of where the rhino is to be kept and a premium loading if the client wants to include cover against poaching.

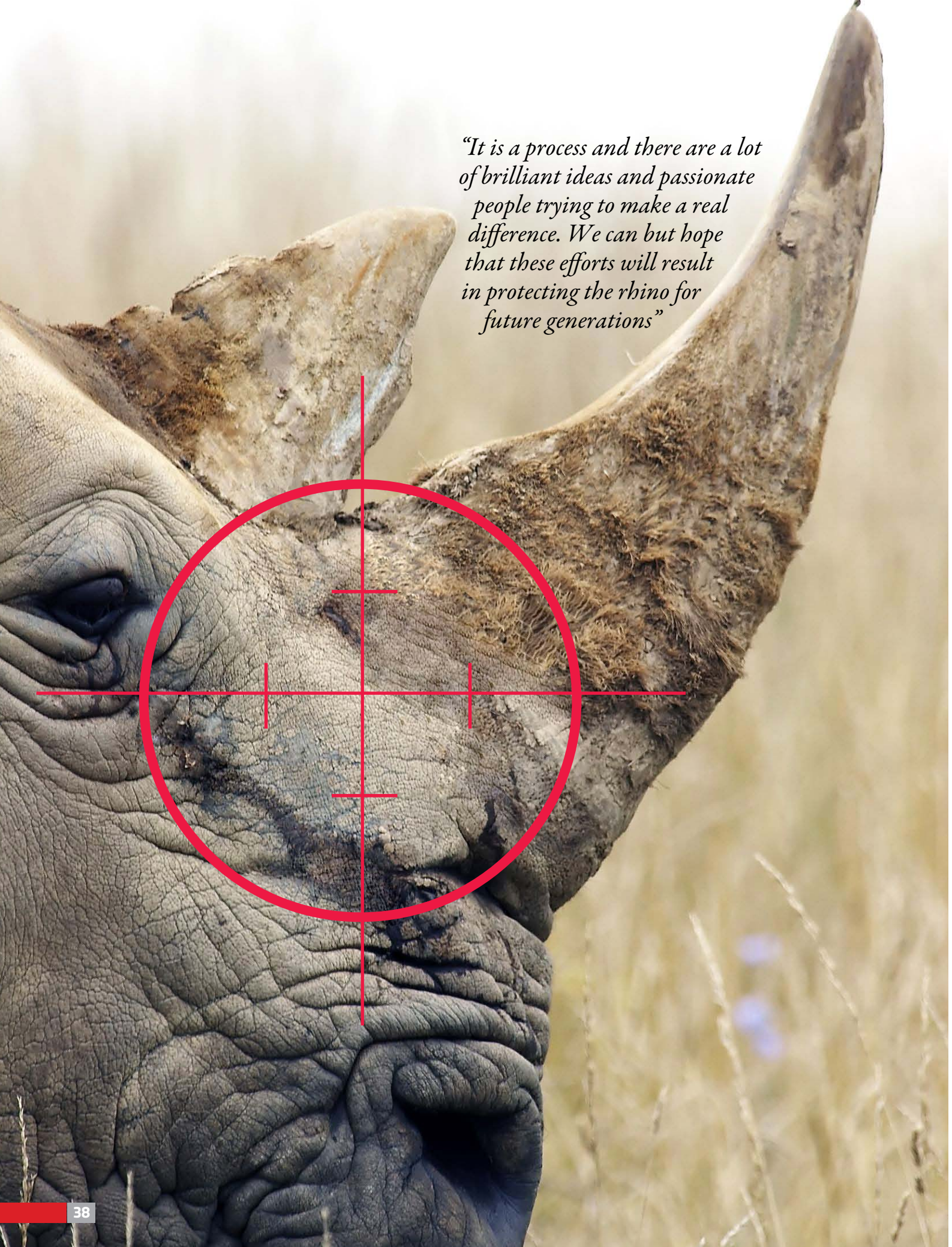
ONE wildlife insurance provides cover for rhinos and underwrites the Rhino Rescue Project (RRP), a rhino preservation programme that involves treating the horn with a substance that contaminates the horn and renders it useless. Joan Jackson, head of wildlife at ONE, boasts that since the company began underwriting the RRP last year, its clients have not lost a single rhino to poaching, which has allowed them to keep their rates stable.

Animalsure says that poaching has made rhino the most expensive individual species to insure relative to the cost of the animal. However, its impact on exotic species insurance as a whole has been minimal due to rhino only making up a small portion of insured game in South Africa. "As premium is based on value, buffalo, sable and other exotic species make up the majority of the insured value," says Munro.

Another factor affecting the price of wildlife insurance is that national parks tend not to insure their animals against poaching. This means that the vast majority of rhino in Southern Africa are not insured. However, the private sector is spending large amounts of money to protect those animals. Therefore, most insurance companies are happy to insure wildlife, including rhino, subject to a safety check and a risk management assessment. Despite the increasing risk of poaching, head of wildlife insurance at Etana, Tammy Jackson, explains that providing insurance cover for



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rhino is vital for the industry. "The rhino is a precious species and our clients need cover for the daily procedures involving them. These include transport to and from auctions, rhinos being moved to more secure areas, and equipping farms to be properly monitored to protect the animals against potential poaching," she says. "Providing cover for poaching of rhino has become more challenging for us, but with the correct risk management in place, the risk is minimal. Etana spends significant resources on risk management expertise and it delivers advantages. The problem arises in the relevant parks where these security procedures are not practised and the poaching has increased in those areas. This is why the Transfrontier park now finds itself in this situation with no rhinos," continues Tammy Jackson.

Other high-risk game

As an endangered species, it is understandable that rhino has currently received so much press coverage. However, we tend to forget that there are other species of wild game that are at risk. "Colour variants, such as golden wildebeest, white kudu and black impala, have shown to be a high risk. But with the proper procedures in place, these losses can be prevented. We do provide cover on these species, although the underwriting structure will differ from lower risk animals like buffalo and sable," explains Tammy Jackson.

Another factor is the price that a particular

species of game will fetch at auction. Rhino poaching has decreased the price of the animal as demand from farmers has dropped, which affects the price of insurance. "Buffalo is easily sold for R10 million plus and the market has seen record prices of R14 million for a sable and R30 million for one buffalo. These values increase the exposure of the insurer, as we only deal with total loss," says Munro.

ONE reports that it regards cat species as high risk because the bones are used for a similar purpose as rhino horn, making them an additional target for poachers.

Looking ahead

The amount of attention rhinos are getting makes it difficult to imagine a scenario where they are allowed to become completely extinct. The passion people have shown towards protecting the rhino has resulted in many anti-rhino poaching initiatives popping up in the last couple of years.

These include raising money to help train rangers and provide them with better equipment; companies donating fully kitted out anti-poaching vehicles such as Land Rovers and helicopters; injecting substances into the rhino horn to contaminate it without harming the animal; and humanely removing the horn before poachers can get to the animal. There is talk of legalising the rhino horn trade to

combat the extensive black market for rhino horn.

One thing that is certain is that no one anti-poaching initiative will be successful on its own. Only a concerted effort from all parties involved to follow the available avenues will help create a safe environment for the rhino. "There is no quick fix at this stage in South Africa. The various initiatives of the private sector are slowing down the poaching process and the pressure on government to lift the ban on the rhino horn trade will all have a positive outcome.

This will not stop the black market, but it will help to provide the much-needed cash to support the protection initiatives and to make rhinos a less dangerous and profitable species to farm with. ONE is very positive that the private sector together with government will find a workable solution to protect our heritage," says Joan Jackson.

Nothing is going to be solved overnight, and it is imperative that the anti-poaching initiatives do not lose momentum if a light starts to appear at the end of the tunnel. "It is a process and there are a lot of brilliant ideas and passionate people trying to make a real difference. We can only but hope that these efforts will result in protecting the rhino for future generations," concludes Munro. →

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Anti-rhino poaching initiatives

Rhino Rescue Project – contaminating the horn

How it works

The rhino's horn is treated by infusing it with a compound made up of depot ectoparasiticides and inedible dye that contaminates the horn and renders it useless for ornamental or medicinal use. The only possible danger to rhinos is the stress caused by being immobilised.

Why it will work

Reserves that have treated their rhinos' horns post signs around their perimeter advertising the fact that the horns have been tampered with and will be useless to poachers hoping to sell them. In addition, the bright pink dye is clearly visible while the rhino is alive, which will alert poachers that the horn is of no value to them.

Rhino Revolution – dehorning

How it works

Rhino Revolution is based in Hoedspruit, South Africa and is a community-based initiative dedicated to curbing the poaching of rhino in the area. The idea is to remove the rhinos' horns in a safe and humane fashion while publicising the fact.

Why it will work

Once the poachers are aware that all the rhino in an area have already been dehorned, there will be no reason for them to enter the territory, let alone hack and slash the animals. The group claims to have already successfully deterred a poaching group from the Hoedspruit area due to them being unsure of whether the local rhino had horns or not.

Rhino Revolution does admit that even they do not view dehorning as a solution to poaching, but it does serve as a deterrent for a period of time, allowing more time to set up effective anti-poaching measures.

Operation Rhino – educating Asia's youth about rhino horn

How it works

The Silent Heroes Foundation decided that tackling the problem at its source could have more impact than just reacting to the sudden spike in poaching. They came up with the idea to distribute education flyers to schools and universities in Asia to help educate the next generation that rhino horn is not medicine.

Why it will work

The flyer publishes information on the status of rhino in the wild, and enlightens students about the plight of the rhino and rhino conservation. Not only will this approach destroy the myth about rhino horn's usefulness as a medicine, it could inspire a generation of people in Asia to get actively involved in saving the rhino.

Legalising trade of rhino horn

How it works

ANC MP and chairman of Parliament's Environmental Affairs Portfolio Committee, Johnny de Lange, has called for an end to the 35-year Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) ban on the trade of rhino horn. He argues that the ban

has done little to curb the poaching of rhino. In fact, the ban is a primary cause of the escalated prices for rhino horn on the black market, which directly incentivises poachers.

Why it will work

The theory behind opening the trade on rhino horn is that a consistent, steady supply will decrease the price of the horns. The potential for less profit will hopefully make poachers think twice before going after South Africa's rhino.

A closely regulated market will also allow authorities greater control, shifting the market out of the hands of organised crime, and will provide a taxable revenue stream; the proceeds of which can be put back into conservation efforts.

Anti-poaching associations

How it works

Not everyone is able to pick up a rifle and start patrolling game reserves for poachers, which is why groups exist that allow the public and business to provide whatever support they can, from information to funding. Associations such as Project Rhino in KwaZulu-Natal and the Wilderness Foundation's Forever Wild Rhino Protection Initiative provide the public with an avenue to lend support, which is used to fund efforts to combat poaching.

Why it will work

People do want to help. However, it is not always easy for the average person to get directly involved. Associations such as these are a conduit to the public lending a hand. It provides a feel-good factor, and vital funding and support for those on the front lines.