A close-up photograph of a rhino's head, showing its thick, textured skin and a portion of its horn. A thin, light-colored branch or twig is positioned in the foreground, partially obscuring the rhino's face. The background is a blurred natural setting with green and brown tones.

Rivaling the price of gold on the black market, rhino horn is at the center of a bloody poaching battle.

Rhino Wars

Game scouts found this black rhino bull wandering Zimbabwe's Savé Valley Conservancy after poachers shot it several times and hacked off both its horns. Veterinarians had to euthanize the animal because its



Blindfolded and tranquilized, a black rhino is airlifted in a ten-minute helicopter ride from South Africa's Eastern Cape Province to a waiting truck that will deliver it to a new home some 900 miles away.

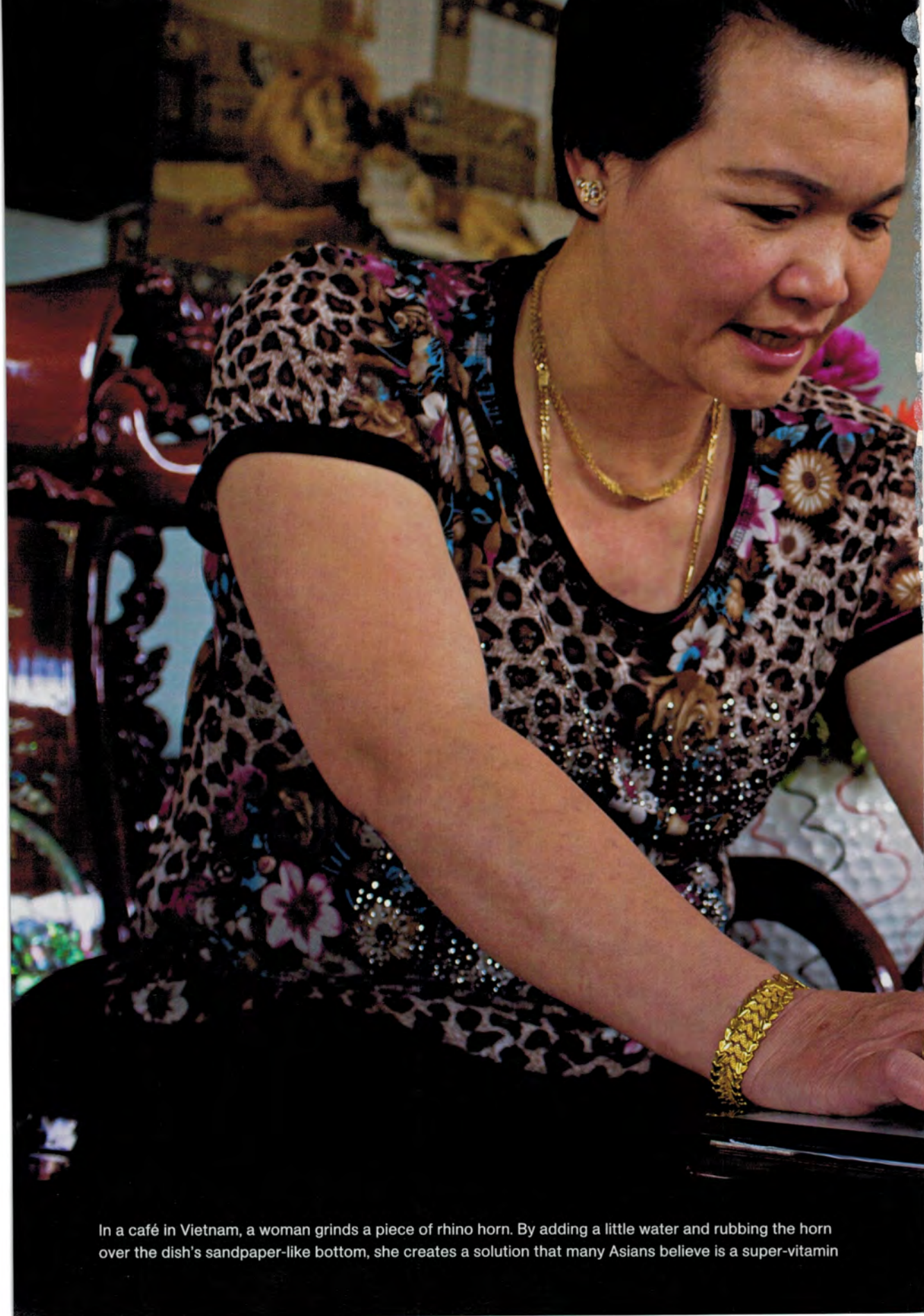


shattered shoulder couldn't support its weight. In the past six years poachers have killed more than a thousand African rhinos for their horns, which are smuggled to Asia for use in traditional medicines.



GREEN RENAISSANCE/WWF

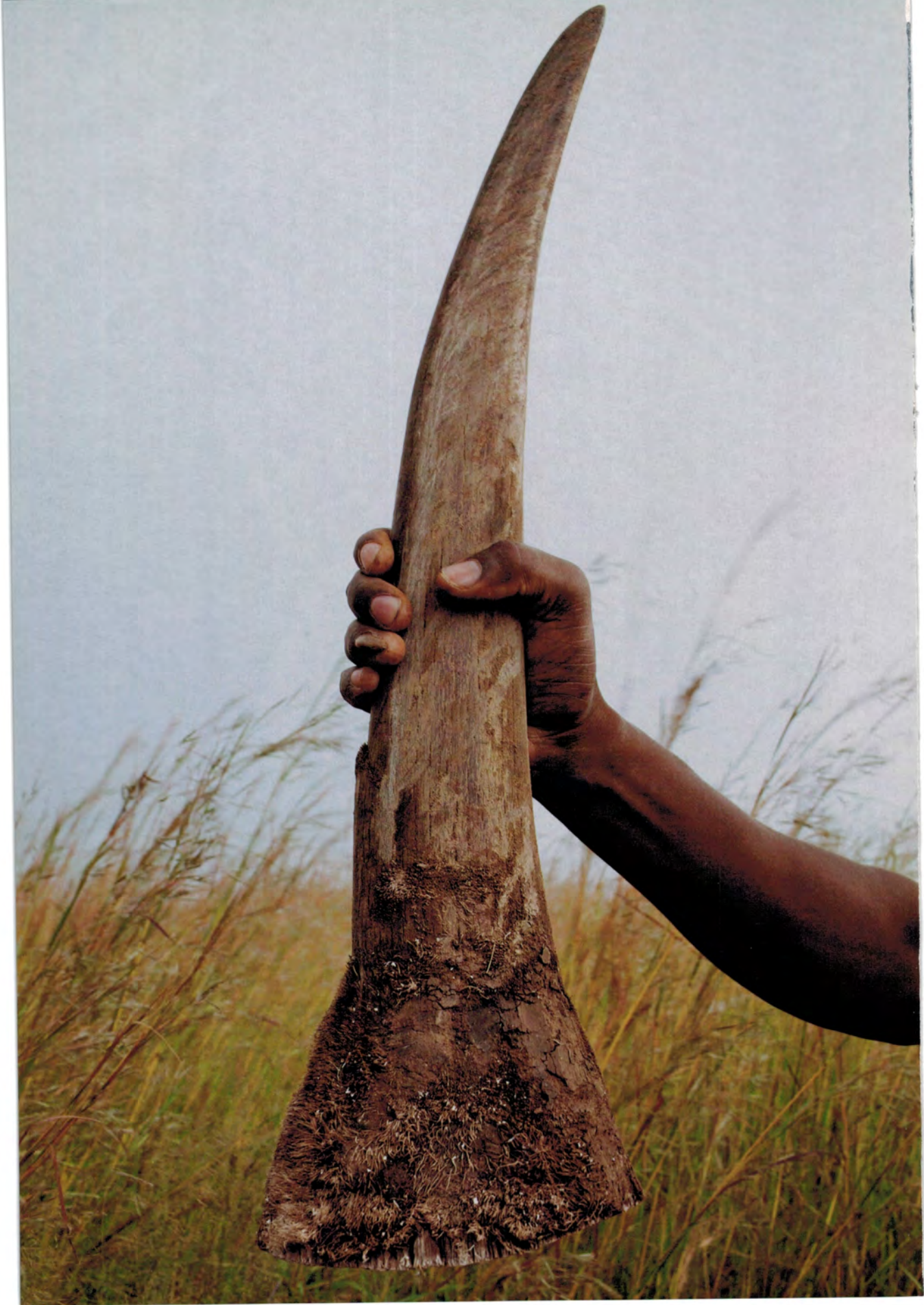
Designed to extricate the animals gently from difficult terrain, the airlifts are part of an effort to relocate endangered black rhinos to areas better suited to increasing their numbers as well as their range.



In a café in Vietnam, a woman grinds a piece of rhino horn. By adding a little water and rubbing the horn over the dish's sandpaper-like bottom, she creates a solution that many Asians believe is a super-vitamin



and a cure for various maladies. Few scientific studies have been conducted on rhino horn's medicinal benefits, and the results have been inconclusive. Since taking it, she says, "I don't feel my kidney stones."



BY PETER GWIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT STIRTON

The rifle shot boomed through the darkening forest just as Damien Mander arrived at his campfire after a long day training game ranger recruits in western Zimbabwe's Nakavango game reserve. His thoughts flew to Basta, a pregnant black rhinoceros, and her two-year-old calf. That afternoon one of his rangers had discovered human footprints following the pair's tracks as Basta sought cover in deep bush to deliver the newest member of her threatened species.

Damien, a hard-muscled former Australian Special Forces sniper with an imposing menagerie of tattoos, including "Seek & Destroy" in gothic lettering across his chest, swiveled his head, trying to place the direction of the shot. "There, near the eastern boundary," he pointed into the blackness. "Sounded like a .223," he said, identifying the position and caliber, a habit left over from 12 tours in Iraq. He and his rangers grabbed shotguns, radios, and medical kits and piled into two Land Cruisers. They roared into the night, hoping to cut off the shooter. The rangers rolled down their windows and listened for a second shot, which would likely signal Basta's calf was taken as well.

It was an ideal poacher's setup: half-moon, almost no wind. The human tracks were especially ominous. Poaching crews often pay trackers to find the rhinos, follow them until dusk, then radio their position to a shooter with a high-powered rifle. After the animal is down, the two horns on its snout are hacked off in minutes, and the massive carcass is left to hyenas and vultures. Nearly always the horns are fenced to an Asian buyer; an enterprising crew might also cut out Basta's fetus and the eyes of the mother and calf to sell to black magic or *muti* practitioners. If

An eight-pound rhino horn like this one can reap up to \$360,000 on the black market.

this gang was well organized, a group of heavily armed men would be covering the escape route, ready to ambush the rangers.

As the Land Cruiser bucked over rutted tracks, Damien did a quick calculation—between his vehicles he had two antiquated shotguns with about a dozen shells. Based on the sound of the shot, the poachers held an advantage in firepower. If the rangers did pick up a trail and followed on foot, they would have to contend with lions, leopards, and hyenas out hunting in the dark.

In the backseat of one of the speeding Land Cruisers, Benzene, a Zimbabwean ranger who had spent nearly a year watching over Basta and her calf and knew the pair intimately, loaded three shells into his shotgun, flicked on the safety, and chambered a round. As we bounced into the night, he said, "It is better for the poachers if they meet a lion than if they meet us."

AND SO GOES A NIGHT on the front lines of southern Africa's ruthless and murky rhino war, which since 2006 has seen more than a thousand rhinos slaughtered, some 22 poachers gunned down and more than 200 arrested last year in South Africa alone. At the bloody heart of this conflict is the rhino's horn, a prized ingredient in traditional Asian medicines. Though black market prices

THE EMBATTLED RHINO

The five species of rhino are facing threats from poachers and habitat loss in Africa and Asia. Two subspecies were declared extinct in 2011.

WHITE

In the wild: 20,160

Near
threatened



Down to 20 in 1885, white rhinos have rebounded to more than 20,000 and as a result are the main target of poachers.

BLACK

4,880

Critically
endangered



Black rhinos once inhabited much of sub-Saharan Africa. In 2011 the western black rhino subspecies was declared extinct.

GREATER ONE-HORNED

2,700

Vulnerable



Growing from about 200 in the early 1900s, greater one-horned rhinos are now protected in parks in northern India and Nepal.

SUMATRAN

150 to 250

Critically
endangered



Decimated by poaching, Sumatran rhinos roam in small groups in Indonesia and Malaysia with limited protection.

JAVAN

at least 30

Critically
endangered



Around 30 survive in western Java, Indonesia, but the last wild Javan rhino in Vietnam was shot by poachers in 2010.

JOHN TOMANIO, NGM STAFF; SHELLEY SPERRY
SOURCES: INTERNATIONAL RHINO FOUNDATION; ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF LIFE; IUCN SSC, AFRICAN AND ASIAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUPS

vary widely, as of last fall dealers in Vietnam quoted prices ranging from \$33 to \$133 a gram, which at the top end is double the price of gold and can exceed the price of cocaine.

Although the range of the two African species—the white rhino and its smaller cousin, the black rhino—has been reduced primarily to southern Africa and Kenya, their populations had shown encouraging improvement. In 2007 white rhinos numbered 17,470, while blacks had nearly doubled to 4,230 since the mid '90s.

For conservationists these numbers represented a triumph. In the 1970s and '80s, poaching had devastated the two species. Then China banned rhino horn from traditional medicine, and Yemen forbade its use for ceremonial dagger handles. All signs seemed to point to better days. But in 2008 the number of poached rhinos in South Africa shot up to 83, from just 13 in 2007. By 2010 the figure had soared to 333, followed by over 400 last year. Traffic, a wildlife trade monitoring network, found most of the horn trade now leads to Vietnam, a shift that coincided with a swell of rumors that a high-ranking Vietnamese official used rhino horn to cure his cancer.

Meanwhile in South Africa, attracted by spiraling prices—and profits—crime syndicates began adding rhino poaching to their portfolios.

GIDEON VAN DEVENTER KNOWS the exact spot—six inches behind the eye and two inches in front of the ear—to put a 300-grain bullet so that it pierces the rhino's brain, causing the animal to collapse on its chest. He approximates the spot on his own head, tapping a callused index finger just behind his cheekbone. "You have to hit it right there. They have a tiny brain," he says. "But they're nearly blind, so you can move in close. They can smell you, so you stay downwind. And they've got good hearing, so you watch their ears. If one of those ears flicks toward you, trouble's coming." He also knows a technique that investigators say is the sign of an expert: slice a penknife around the seam at the horn's base and you can pry it off with little effort: "You don't need a saw. It's quick, and the entire horn comes off clean, just like a bottle cap."

FROM POACHER TO BLACK MARKET

Since 2006, 95 percent of poached rhinos have come from South Africa and Zimbabwe. Though smuggling routes are always changing, most horns end up in medicinal markets in Vietnam and China, where demand far exceeds that in Yemen; there the horns are used for dagger handles.

SAHARA
AFRICA



0 mi 600
0 km 600
SCALE AT THE EQUATOR

VIRGINIA W. MASON, NGM STAFF; SHELLEY SPERRY
SOURCES: IUCN SPECIES SURVIVAL COMMISSION (SSC); AFRICAN AND ASIAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUPS; TRAFFIC; WWF; WILDLIFE PROTECTION SOCIETY OF INDIA; EDUCATION FOR NATURE—VIETNAM; ESMOND MARTIN; LUCY VIGNE; ENVIRONMENTAL INVESTIGATION AGENCY

ASIA



- Trade route
- Country or region of concern for rhino horn supply or transit
- Country with demand for rhino horn
- Country with declining involvement in trade

* BASED ON SEIZED WEIGHT AND REPORTED ESTIMATED VALUE IN VIETNAMESE BLACK MARKETS

I'm receiving this poaching tutorial at Kroonstad prison, about two hours south of Johannesburg, and van Deventer, 42, who goes by Deon, is an especially qualified teacher. By his own admission he's killed 22 rhinos, a number that makes him South Africa's, and possibly the world's, most prolific convicted rhino poacher. A five-foot-seven knot of sinew and nervous energy, he sits ramrod straight in an orange prison jumpsuit and heavy black work boots. His weathered face, thinning ginger hair, and ice blue eyes give him a passing resemblance to the actor Ed Harris.

Deon's father moved to South Africa from Kenya, where he had been a police officer during the Mau Mau uprising in the 1950s and a big game hunter. He settled in the Transvaal, not far from the Botswana border, an area still largely wild. Deon and his two brothers practically lived in the bush; by age eight he was skipping school to track game for hunters. "I came

to know animals better than people," he says.

Eventually, he became a professional big game hunter, or "PH" in local vernacular. "Preparation and tracking, that was my thing," he says. On one hunt, he guided an elderly American hunter through a Mozambique swamp, following a herd of African buffalo. "I knew there was a small island where the buffalo graze in the late afternoon sun. We camouflaged ourselves with clumps of papyrus and got within 30 meters of them." He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth as if the memory were making him salivate. "We could hear the bull chuffing and snorting as he grazed." He mimicked the sound. "Bru, that old man will never forget that hunt. And neither will I." He paused for a moment, lost briefly in the memory.

Staff writer Peter Gwin and Brent Stirton, a photographer for *Reportage* by Getty Images, reported on the Tuareg in the September issue.

"Now they drive up and shoot the animal from the back of a truck," he said, his blue eyes suddenly fierce. "That's shooting, not hunting."

In 2005 Deon's brother Andre, who worked for a prominent safari operator named Gert Saaiman, asked if he was interested in taking down a rhino. Deon had never hunted rhinos before and began researching the animal. "To track them, you have to find their toilet," he says. Male white rhinos stamp around in their own manure to spread their scent and mark their territory, he explained. "It makes them easy to track."

Limiting the sound of the kills was crucial, so he experimented with compound bows and crossbows. Even a perfect shot to the lungs with weighted arrows wouldn't always bring down a rhino. So he built a silencer out of a metal pipe with washers soldered inside and fitted it on the barrel of a .30-06 rifle. "It makes the sound of an air gun—*phooop*," he says. "I've shot a male, and a female standing two meters away didn't flinch before I shot her too."

The brothers traveled the breadth of South Africa, taking rhinos from national parks and private reserves. Due to successful breeding programs, rhinos were plentiful, and security was lax or easy to evade. After a kill, they would pass the horns to others to sell. "But I only made small money," he says, noting that he, Andre, and a couple others would split about \$11,000 for a pair of horns weighing 13 pounds. In the end Deon's discontent with his cut led to his arrest. He killed a rhino on his own and was caught selling it.

Now Deon is the one being hunted. Police have pressured him to testify against Saaiman and others. He is clearly fearful of the prospect. Just a few days after Deon's arrest, Saaiman's wife was shot in the throat in her driveway and died in front of her children. Six months ago, Deon's ex-wife was raped in their home. She and their four children have since gone into witness protection. Not long after, men claiming to be private investigators visited Deon in prison and offered him a new truck, \$100,000, and a job as a PH not to testify.

He hasn't decided if he will cooperate with police when he is released in four months. "They can

find me even if they go to jail," Deon says of his accomplices. "And I am sure they will kill me."

Visiting time ends, and a guard calls to him when he lingers. "Rhino, it's time." He looks at me and grins. "My nickname in here is 'Rhino.'"

NO MATTER HOW GREAT a tracker Deon van Deventer may be, he could never find a wild rhino in Vietnam. Javan rhinos once proliferated in the Vietnamese forests and floodplains, but in 2010 poachers killed the nation's last wild rhino.

Yet Vietnam has no shortage of rhino horn. The illegal horn trade once revolved around markets in China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan, and Yemen, but now it centers on Vietnam, with more than a ton of horn likely to have entered the country last year alone. In South Africa several Vietnamese nationals, including diplomats, have been implicated in plots to smuggle horns out of the country.

Not all rhino horns enter Vietnam illegally. South African law, which complies with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), allows a rhino's horns to be exported as trophies. In 2003 a Vietnamese hunter flew to South Africa and killed a rhino on a legal safari. Soon after, dozens of Asian hunters arrived, each paying \$50,000 or more for a hunt through a certified safari outfit. Many of these hunters are believed to work for syndicates. Back in Vietnam, an average pair of horns, weighing 13 pounds, could be cut into pieces and sold on the black market, yielding a profit that could easily top \$200,000 after costs.

The triggers for this gold rush are difficult to pinpoint. Rumors about famous users, rising black market prices, and dwindling numbers of Asian rhinos are all feeding the mania. But behind the hype is a renewed interest in the horn's alleged healing power. For at least 2,000 years, Asian medicine has prescribed rhino horn—ground into powder—to reduce fever and treat a range of maladies. The handful of studies conducted over the past 30 years on its fever-reducing properties have proven inconclusive, yet the 2006 edition of a Vietnamese traditional pharmacopoeia devotes two pages to rhino horn.

The newest and most sensational claim is that it cures cancer. Oncologists say that no research has been published on the horn's efficacy as a cancer treatment. But even if rhino horn possesses dubious medicinal properties, that doesn't mean it has no effect on people who take it, says Mary Hardy, medical director of Simms/Mann UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology and a traditional medicine expert. "Belief in a treatment, especially one that is wildly expensive and hard to get, can have a powerful effect on how a patient feels," she says.

To gain insights into the popularity of rhino horn in Vietnam, I traveled the country with a woman I will call Ms. Thien. A mammogram had revealed a spot on her right breast; a sonogram showed a worrisome shadow on an ovary. The attractive and irrepressible 52-year-old planned to seek modern treatment but also wanted to consult traditional doctors. I asked her if she believed rhino horn might help cure her. "I don't know," she said. "But when you think you might die, it can't hurt to try it."

Our travels took us from cancer hospitals and traditional clinics in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to herbal shops, boutiques selling exotic animal skins, and private homes in small towns. We found rhino horn every place we looked.

Most of the users we met belonged to Vietnam's fast-growing middle class and included Western-trained doctors, a bank executive, a mathematician, a real estate salesman, an engineer, and a high school teacher, among others. Often families would pool money to buy a piece of horn and share it. Some donated it to gravely ill friends who couldn't afford it. Mothers gave it to children with measles. Old people swore it cured poor circulation and prevented strokes. Many considered it a sort of super-vitamin.

Although a number of Vietnamese doctors I spoke with said rhino horn was not an effective cure for anything, let alone cancer, several other respected physicians claimed rhino horn could be part of an effective cancer treatment. Some said they prescribed it in pill form as a palliative for patients receiving chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Others, including Tran

A mammogram had revealed a spot on Ms. Thien's right breast. I asked her if she believed rhino horn might help cure her if it was cancer. "I don't know," she said. "But when you think you might die, it can't hurt to try it."

Quoc Binh, director of the National Hospital of Traditional Medicine, which is part of Vietnam's Ministry of Health, believe that rhino horn can retard the growth of certain kinds of tumors. "First we start with modern medicine: chemotherapy, radiation, surgery," Tran said. "But after that, maybe some cancer cells still exist. So then we use traditional medicine to fight these cells." He said that a mixture of rhino horn, ginseng, and other herbs could actually block the growth of cancer cells, but he could not produce any peer-reviewed studies to support his claims.

One evening in Hanoi, Ms. Thien and I visited a busy lakeside café recommended to her by a friend who knew of her health concerns. She explained her situation to the owner, and he produced a chunk of amber-colored horn about the size of a bar of soap and a ceramic dish with a drawing of a rhino on the side. The dish's bottom was rough, like fine-grit sandpaper. He poured several ounces of water into the dish and began to rub the horn in a circular motion on the bottom. After a few minutes, the horn gave off an acrid odor, and the water turned a milky white. The other patrons paid no notice. As he rubbed, the café owner explained that he and a friend had bought the horn as a health supplement and hangover preventive, paying \$18,000 for about 180 grams. Their interest had been prompted in



Preparing a hunter's kill

After a hunt on a private game farm, a slab of rhino meat hangs in cold storage, while workers cure the white bull's hide with rock salt. Each year South Africa's parks sell off game animals, including rhinos, when populations exceed available resources. The proceeds fund conservation projects, and game farmers breed them for hunters and ecotourism. Conservationists credit the system for expanding rhino numbers during the past 20 years but say in recent years the system has been corrupted by rogue hunters and game farmers involved in the illegal horn trade.

part by one of Ho Chi Minh's former secretaries, a regular at the café, who told them that Ho, a firm believer in traditional medicine, had taken rhino horn every day.

After 20 minutes of rubbing, the man poured the liquid into two shot glasses and handed one to Ms. Thien and the other to me. It had a faintly gritty texture but otherwise was tasteless. Ms. Thien drained her glass and set it on the table. "I hope it works," she said.

JOHN HUME BELIEVES no rhinos need to die to supply all the rhino horn the Vietnamese desire. The 69-year-old entrepreneur, who made a fortune in hotels and taxis before turning to game farming, has amassed one of the largest privately owned rhino herds in the world. Currently he has more than 700 white and black rhinos on

two farms in South Africa and wants more.

"We take wool from sheep, why not horn from rhinos?" he asks one afternoon, sitting in the office of one of his farms as an albino parrot named Sebastian nuzzles his ear. "If you cut the horn about three inches above its base, it will grow back in two years. That means there is a never ending supply of rhino horn if we're smart enough to keep the bloody animals alive."

Nearly once a week Hume's game manager and a veterinarian, observed by a wildlife official, anesthetize one of his rhinos and remove its two horns with a power saw. Twenty minutes later the animal is back grazing, and the horns, implanted with microchips, are on their way to a bank safe. Hume refuses to say how much horn he has accumulated since he began harvesting in 2002, but a conservative estimate would



put its value at tens of millions of dollars.

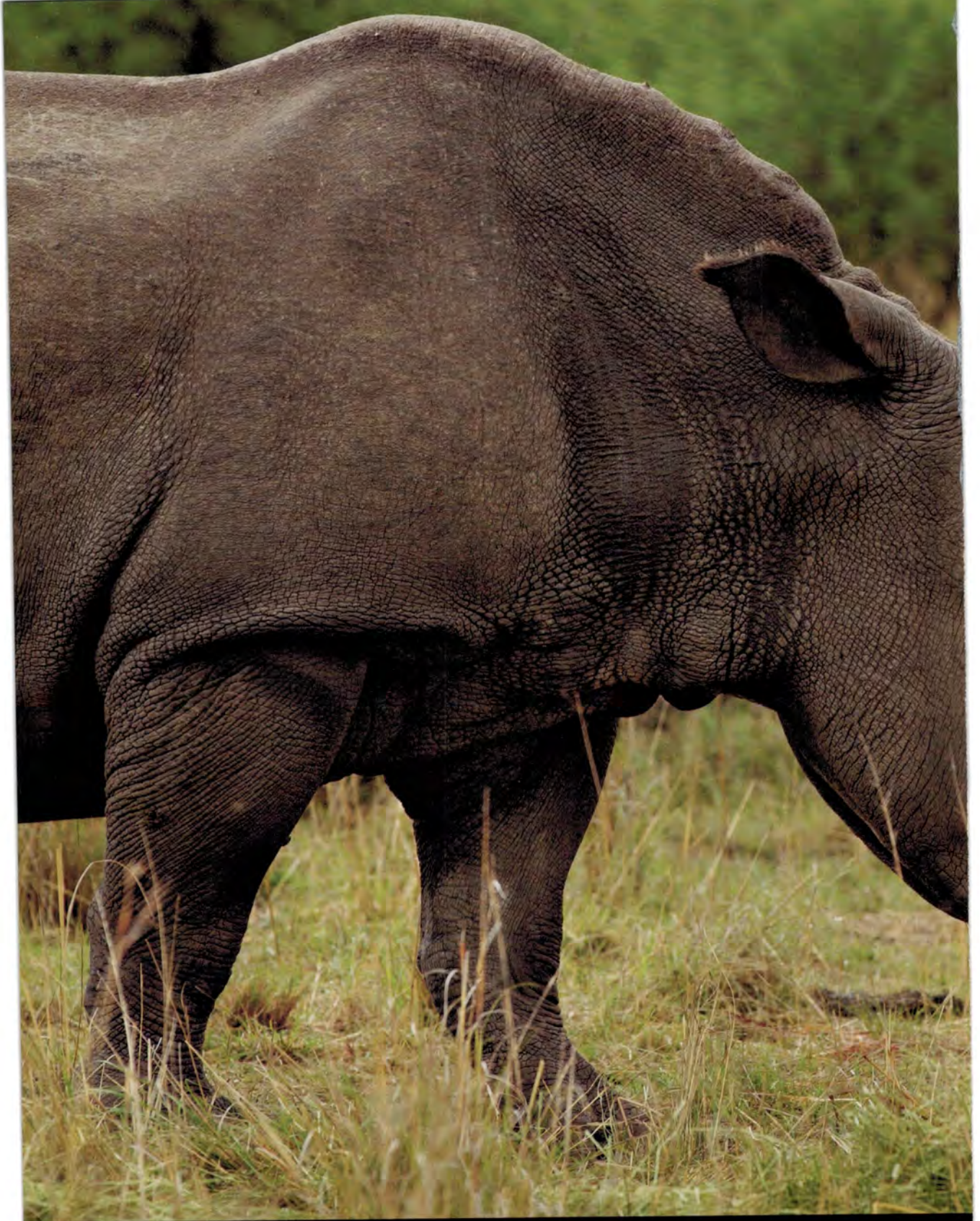
Hume's idea to farm rhino horn on a large scale would appear to be another in a string of innovative wildlife management practices to come from South Africa. In 1961 officials in Natal Province pioneered the transfer of wild rhinos to private land to increase breeding and genetic diversity. In 1986 the Natal Parks Board allowed excess rhinos from the province's reserves to be auctioned off at fair market value, which brought millions of dollars to local conservation efforts and raised the animals' value among game farmers and hunters. Hume suggests harvesting rhino horn is the next sensible step in preserving and valuing the animals.

As our conversation continues, Hume becomes increasingly agitated. A Vietnamese hunter would happily dart the animal, take the horns, and let it

live, he thunders. "But South African law requires the hunter to kill the rhino to export the horn as a trophy." He shakes his head at the illogic.

Among the misconceptions, Hume says, is that ivory and horn are the same. Ivory is an elephant's tooth, while rhino horn is keratin, similar to a horse's hoof. When an elephant's tusk is severed, the nerve inside can become infected, killing the animal. Also, darting an elephant is much more dangerous than darting a rhino, because of its greater size and the protectiveness of its herd.

Conservationists argue that legalizing rhino horn won't change the essential economics of poaching: Poached horn is always going to be cheaper than farmed horn. Hume disagrees: As buyers become confident in the availability of legal horn, prices will fall, which will prompt crime syndicates to leave the business. "The



A white rhino cow (at left) grazes with a bull that has become her companion after a poaching attack in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. Using a helicopter, a gang tracked her and her four-week-old calf,



shot her with a tranquilizer dart, and cut off her horns with a chain saw. Rangers found her a week later, searching for her calf, which had died, probably of starvation and dehydration.



A veterinarian cuts the horns from an anesthetized white rhino cow (left) at a game farm in North-West Province, South Africa, leaving it to wake up in a field (right). The procedure takes about 20 minutes. Composed of keratin—the protein that is the basis for wool, feathers, beaks, and hooves—the two horns

Cutting off the horn to save the rhino



grow back in about two years. Some critics of the practice say it leaves the animals unprotected against natural predators. Dehorning advocates argue that the absence of horns deters poachers and reduces the number of rhinos that die of wounds from fights over territory and mates. "An adult rhino packs such an awesome punch, even with a stub of a horn," says South African game farmer John Hume. "A lion is unlikely to tangle with one, horn or no horn."

fundamental difference is that poachers go after rhino horn for easy short-term profit. Farmers are in it for years of steady returns."

Some of the resistance, he fears, is a cultural disconnect. "We basically are telling the Vietnamese that it is fine to kill an animal because our tradition of cutting a rhino's head off and putting it on a wall as a decoration is acceptable, but your tradition of cutting off its horn to use for medicine is abominable."

AFTER PATROLLING ALL NIGHT with no sign of the poachers, Damien organized a search for the rhinos. A cold rain fell, and mist filled the forests and valleys as the rangers walked in lines looking for blood or a carcass in the undergrowth. As of midday, Basta and her calf were still missing.

As Damien drove to check the rhinos' preferred

feeding areas, he described how his days in Iraq protecting UN convoys gave him special insight into what animals face from poachers. "We got hit by IEDs a few times, and I lost some mates," he said quietly. "I know what it's like to be hunted by humans."

Once he left the military, he was looking for a new life and realized his experience training Iraqi police recruits to take control of their chaotic country matched perfectly with Zimbabwe's chaotic wilderness areas, where game rangers are often ill equipped, poorly paid, and bribed by poachers. He used money saved from his tours in Iraq to found the International Anti Poaching Foundation, which trains, equips, and places game rangers in public and private reserves in Zimbabwe for free. He recruits candidates from the poorest communities because that is where



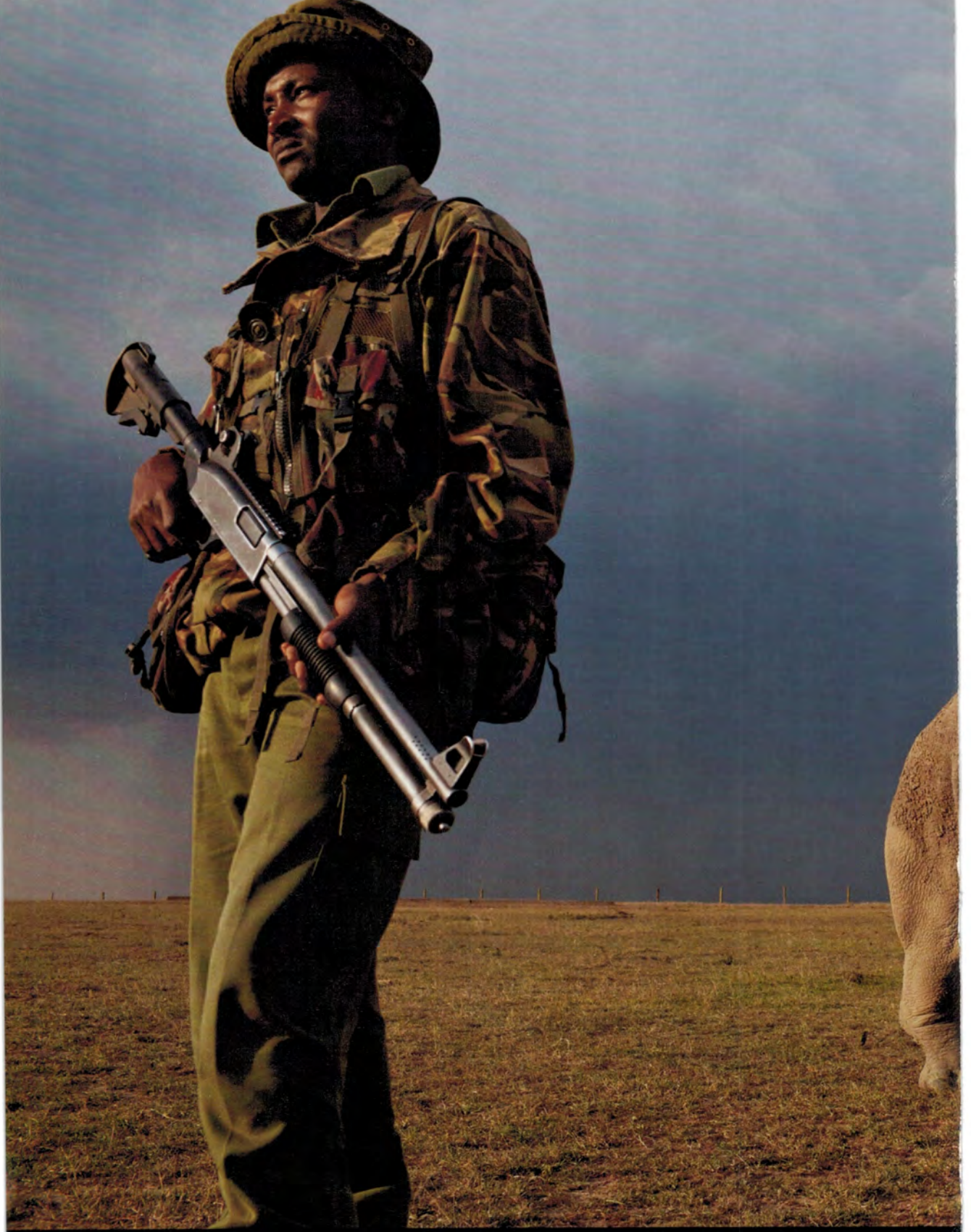
many poachers are from—and where the idea that wildlife is more valuable alive than dead needs to take root. Won't such ideals pale against the allure of big money from poaching? “People said Iraq would never get better, and that’s happening,” he said. “I am taking the long view here too.”

FOUR MONTHS after I interviewed Deon, he was released from prison. He told police he wouldn't testify against his accomplices. Charges were later dropped against Gert Saaman. Meanwhile, poachers have killed four white rhinos at John Hume's farms. Ms. Thien's doctors determined the spots on her breast and ovary are cysts. She is treating them with a mix of Western and Asian medicine, including rhino horn.

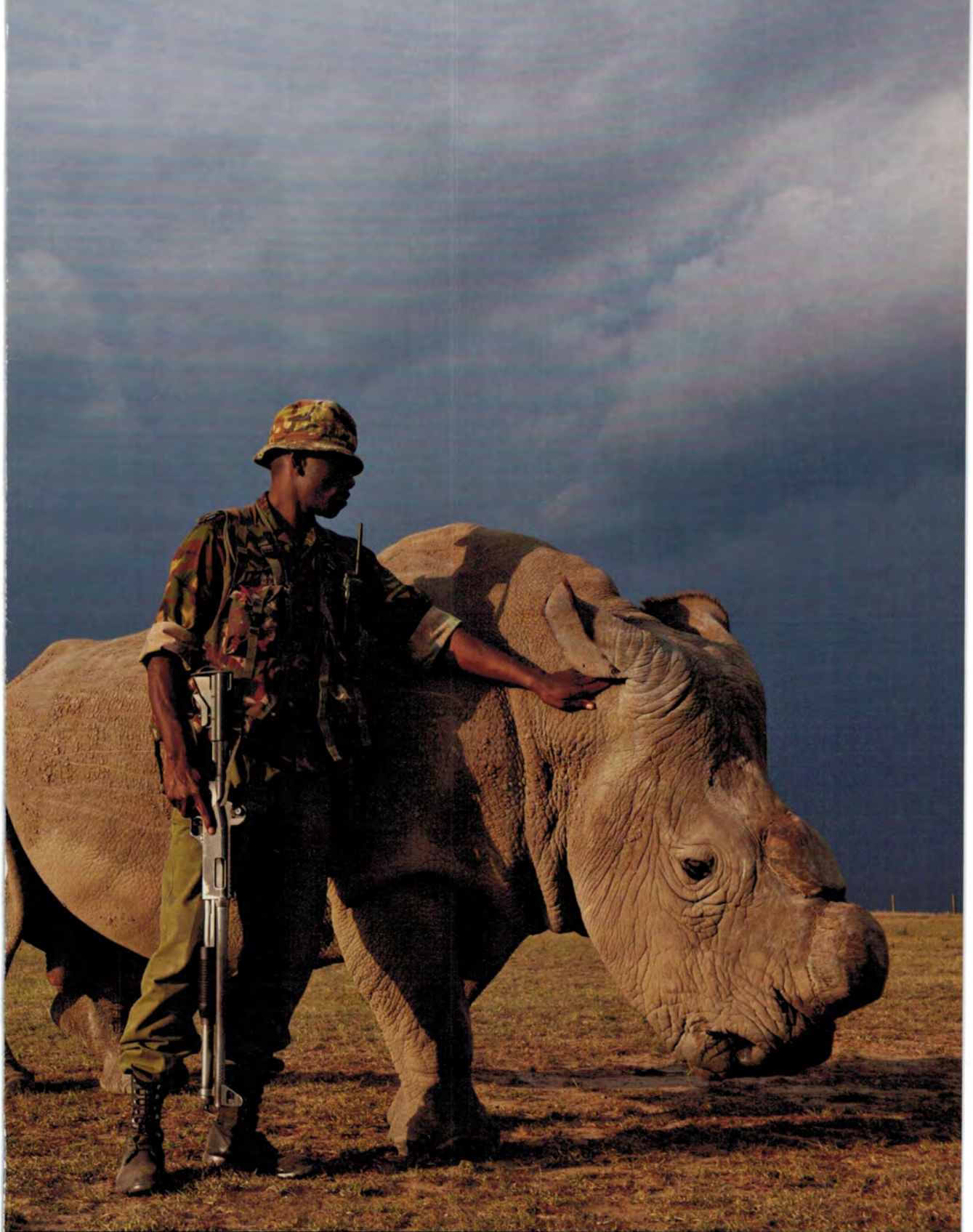
Before I left Zimbabwe, I went back to see Damien. He and Benzene led me to a spot deep

in the bush where Basta, quietly nibbled leaves from a mopani tree. She stood over her new calf, its wrinkly skin bunched around its neck and knees, resembling oversize gray pajamas. It had a slight bump where a first horn would eventually emerge, just as it had on the snouts of its ancestors for 40 million years. Listening to songbirds trilling in the afternoon sun, we marveled at the little rhino's wobbly attempts to follow its lumbering mother in the high yellow grass.

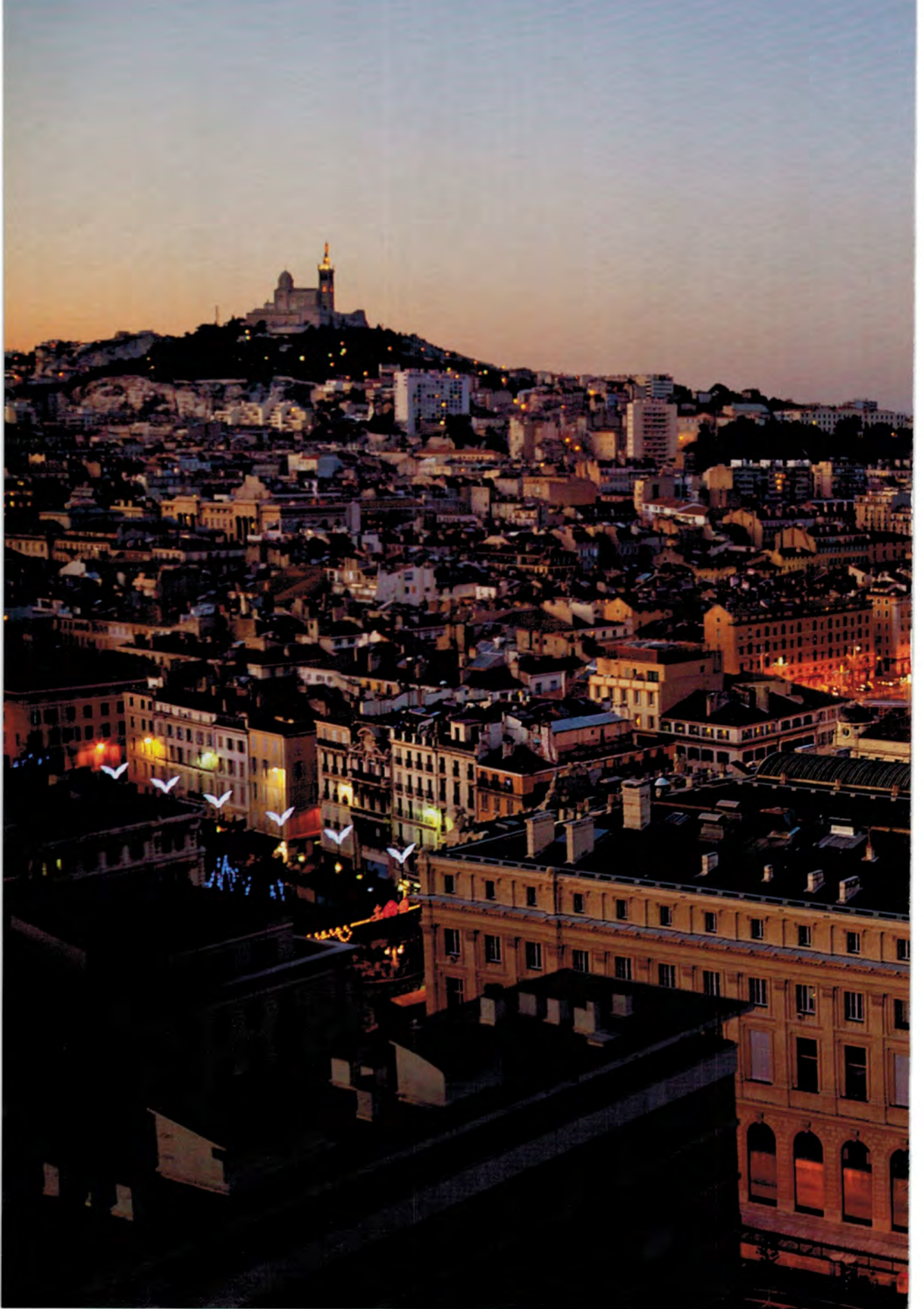
Damien shook his head. “It's amazing to see that little guy and think someone wants to kill him for that tiny nub, no matter how much magic it supposedly contains.” I told him that if his new life's work was to protect rhinos, his “Seek & Destroy” tattoo should read, “Seek & Save.” He laughed. “Yeah, mate, I might have to get that changed.” □



Dehorned to deter poachers, a tame northern white rhino, one of only seven of the subspecies known to survive, grazes under the watch of rangers from Kenya's Ol Pejeta Conservancy. Transferred along with



three other northern whites from a zoo in the Czech Republic, the rhinos, which had not produced offspring in captivity, were brought to the wild in a last-ditch effort to breed them back from the brink of extinction.





Show Horns Centuries-old vessels made of narwhal tusk (from left), rhinoceros horn, and a stony stomach accretion called a bezoar were among Austria's treasures—part of Nazi caches stashed across that country—touring world museums after World War II. Notes from Washington, D.C.'s National Gallery of Art, where 875,173 people viewed the exhibit in the winter of 1949, say the works “were lent by the Austrian Government in gratitude to the American people for the rescue of works of art from the salt mines in Upper Austria.” Today these vessels reside in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum, where they're slated to go on display this December. —Margaret G. Zackowitz

👉 **Flashback Archive** Find all the photos at ngm.com.

PHOTO: NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC STOCK

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Stone Love Confetti sifts onto sand around Plymouth Rock following that Massachusetts town's annual pre-Thanksgiving parade. Though no one really knows whether the *Mayflower's* passengers set foot on it—no mention is made in their accounts of their arrival—the glacial erratic sits enshrined in a harborside pavilion, from which some million and a half visitors gaze down upon it every year. Even if the Pilgrims did know the stone, they might not recognize it today. Broken during moves and chipped at by souvenir hunters before it was protected, it may be half the size it was in 1620. —Margaret G. Zackowitz



BEHIND THE LENS

What got you interested in these big rocks?

FH: I live in New England, and one thing I love is the terrain. You have these really beautiful exposed outcrops, these boulders that seem so misplaced. In winter, when the leaves are gone, you can drive along the road and see them sitting there mysteriously in the middle of a stand of trees. Growing up in Seattle, I always associated that feeling about nature with large trees and lush undergrowth, but

the eastern part of the country feels very old with its glacial boulders exposed all over the landscape.

How did you go about shooting Plymouth Rock?

I climbed right down there with it. It sits

on the beach under a portico. Visitors have to view it from above, on the street level. I was with the rock for quite a while, waiting for interesting people to look down. When you're a photographer, you kind of want to fade into the background. But

everybody who came by saw me waiting to get a picture. I heard two things over and over. When people saw the rock, they'd say, "That's it? I expected it to be bigger!" And when they saw me: "What's that guy doing down there?"

FEATURES

38 **Wayfaring Apostles**

They spread a new faith across thousands of miles—and still inspire pilgrims.

By Andrew Todhunter
Photographs by Lynn Johnson

66 **Arabian Seas**

Ancient poets sang their praises. Modern environmentalists try to preserve them.

By Kennedy Warne
Photographs by Thomas P. Peschak

90 **Rocks on a Roll**

Glaciers carried boulders hundreds of miles and left them in some unlikely spots.

By Hannah Holmes
Photographs by Fritz Hoffmann

106 **Rhino Wars**

Poachers want its horn—and kill to get it. But there is an unexpected solution.

By Peter Gwin
Photographs by Brent Stirton

126 **Marseille Miracle**

Immigrants from just about everywhere seem to get along. Can the harmony last?

By Christopher Dickey
Photographs by Ed Kashi

148 **Bound for Europe**

Foreign workers are driving population growth. Where are they coming from?

On the Cover

In a detail from Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper," Jesus speaks with three Apostles.
Photo by Haltadefinizione Image Bank, Novara, Italy; courtesy Ministry of Culture, Superintendency of Milan



38

DEPARTMENTS

Editor's Note
Letters
National Geographic on TV

VISIONS

Your Shot
Photo Journal

NOW

- American as Cheese
- Saving Aussie Bats
- LOL = ha3 = mdr
- How to Remember
- Coconut Messages

NEXT

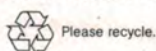
- New Spin on Germ Warfare
- Redirecting Flight Paths
- Monumental Repairs

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A black rhino flees ropers in eastern Kenya in 1968. Its capture was part of a relocation effort.

Unless poaching is stopped, their future looks bleak.

Horns of a Dilemma

It would have been difficult to convince the black rhino being pursued by our helicopter that the plight of rhinos in South Africa had taken a turn for the better. Clearly annoyed by our aircraft, she was blasting through the bushveld at a remarkable pace, her calf right behind. Suddenly, the massive rhino spun around and faced us head-on. She looked up and shook her head, her horns swinging in an arc. Enough was enough. It was time to stand her ground and call our bluff. I marveled at her defiance.

That was in 1995, when rhinos—especially white rhinos—in southern Africa were rebounding to such a degree that our helicopter flight was part of a population survey for an upcoming Natal Parks Board game auction. The animals were to be auctioned off to parks, reserves, and hunting lodges. The work of dedicated conservationists and private game farmers had paid off, but that was then. Today things are not as promising.

This month Peter Gwin and photographer Brent Stirton take us to the front lines of the recent poaching crisis in “Rhino Wars.” Peter writes that the optimism of the 1990s has suffered a reverse. In 2008, 83 rhinos were poached in South Africa alone. In 2011 the figure was more than 400. Unless poaching is stopped, their future looks bleak. Rhinos may not be as attractive and charismatic as tigers or elephants—the species we see in typical conservation campaigns—but the mother I saw 17 years ago was indisputably wild and beautiful in her defiance.