

LEWA CAUGHT ON THE HORNS OF A CONSERVATION DILEMMA

RHINOTEK, NYOTA, SERIAN AND JAZZ: four black rhinos that visitors to Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in northern Kenya won't be seeing again.

A gang of armed poachers struck early on December 1st, shooting Rhinotek, an 11-year-old female, in the stomach. They picked off Nyota and Serian the following night.

What remained of Jazz was found later that day. The following week a fifth black rhino was slaughtered and left to bleed to death, its horn set hacked out, just a mile from human habitation.

ANNE JOHNSTONE
Columnist and Chief Leader Writer on The Herald, Glasgow from which this article is reprinted with permission

In the old days, a lot of rhino horn found its way to Yemen, where it was carved into dagger handles, but that was before the rise of a burgeoning middle class in China and Vietnam who, fed on centuries of superstition and medical mumbo jumbo, believe the horn possesses the power to cure everything from cancer to hangovers.

That's why today, pound for pound, rhino horn is worth more than gold. Paradoxically, these patients would do themselves just as much good chewing their own fingernails, as the horn is made of nothing more than keratin, the same substance.

Unless they are made to understand the real cost of this useless practice, both the black and the southern white rhino will be extinct within a decade. The world's rhino population has declined by 90% in 40 years.

This story is partly about habitat loss but 745 have been poached in 2012 alone in Africa, up from just 32 in 2007. Then it looked as if the war against the poachers was being won and numbers of both species were rising.

The biggest slaughter – more than 200 in 2012 – has been in the gargantuan Kruger National Park in South Africa, where the most recent locations of rhinos no longer feature on information boards for safari visitors.

Yesterday, I phoned Mike Watson, CEO at Lewa, where years ago our family succumbed to the charms of a hand-reared orphaned baby rhino that took a shine to my other half's suede desert boots. Mike was in a sombre mood after a meeting with senior Kenyan government officials to discuss how to tackle the crisis:

"We're determined to get on top of it but rhinos have died and probably more will die before we do."

If it can happen there, it can happen anywhere. Lewa is reckoned to be an African model for wildlife conservation, especially of black rhino, which have bred so successfully that a number have been translocated to reserves where they had been



poached out. Lewa's rolling scrub and muddy swamp are ideal for rhino and the entire 62,000-acre site is fenced. Profits from upmarket safaris are shared with local communities to teach them the value of keeping wildlife alive. One of the most highly trained security teams in the country patrols the place constantly. People used to say: 'Even the trees have guns at Lewa.' But today's poachers are no longer hungry Somalis hoping to make a quick buck but heavily armed and trained Kenyan criminal gangs that are also caught up in drug dealing and human trafficking and whose profits

THE POACHERS MUST NOT WIN OR ELSE THE BLACK AND SOUTHERN WHITE RHINO WILL BE EXTINCT WITHIN A DECADE.

arm militias intent on destabilising this fragile democracy.

Last week a Lewa security guard was arrested for taking bribes for information on the routes of nocturnal patrols. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

Mike is seriously considering dehorning Lewa's 130 surviving rhinos, despite the possible social impact and the risk to their metabolism of repeated tranquillisations for subsequent dehorning when the horns grow back.

He has just taken delivery of an American turbine helicopter to use as their spy-in-the-sky and

is also thinking about employing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drone aircraft to help. Despite the threat of revenge attacks if poachers are caught, he says his guards are ready for a showdown. If the greedy poachers represent everything wretched about man's relationship with nature, these brave men personify the selfless care shown by others. And they have some powerful allies.

Hillary Clinton raised the issue in Phnom Penh earlier this year and The Duke of Cambridge, patron of the African conservation charity, Tusk, recently stressed this battle is as much about educating Asians as Africans.

He is right. The poachers must not win.



We are all too familiar with endangered species at Artemis, thanks to our work looking after and nurturing Profits. So we're delighted to continue supporting Tusk Trust as a corporate sponsor. To find out more about Artemis, contact your financial adviser or call 0800 092 2051.



The value of an investment, and any income from it, can fall as well as rise as a result of market and currency fluctuations and you may not get back the amount originally invested. Please remember that past performance is not a guide to the future.

Issued by Artemis Fund Managers Ltd which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Services Authority (www.fsa.gov.uk), 25 The North Colonnade, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HS.