

# *African* WILDLIFE & ENVIRONMENT

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**The uMzimkhulu  
OUR LAST FREE FLOWING RIVER**

**Rhino Poaching  
THE NEGOTIATION**

**An Ecological Perspective on Locusts  
CURSE OR BLESSING?**

THE MAGAZINE OF THE WILDLIFE AND  
ENVIRONMENT SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA



**WESSA**

PEOPLE CARING FOR THE EARTH



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**Rhino poaching - the negotiation**



**Marula stories**



**Pig's Ears - a no-nonsense plant**



**Kruger National Park, Satara Camp**



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**Cover photograph: John Wesson**



# EDITORIAL

**In this issue of your magazine we examine the state of South Africa's last free-flowing river, touch on rhino poaching, learn a lot about marula trees, locusts, private game reserves, and the Pig's Ears plants for your garden. We visit Satara Camp in the Kruger National Park, learn about the Southern White-faced Owl, then zip across into Mozambique to meet our world-famous Eco Hero who was astounded by the biodiversity of the Gorongosa National Park and the work being done to restore it after years of civil war. We read about the remarkable Dr Ken Tinley, who studied Gorongosa for five years, then put together a ground-breaking DSc thesis that explains in great detail how the kaleidoscope of geology, vegetation, climate and animals come together to create the amazing ecosystems of the park. Finally, in Kid's Corner, we revisit some of the wonderful educational material from past issues of WESSA's publications that are still very relevant today.**

The slaughter of our rhinos continues unabated, and veteran conservationist John Varty makes the thought-provoking suggestion that we need some kind of mediation between the warring parties, brokered by one or more of our NGOs. This would be amazing if it could happen, but I have little hope of that. This is because the prime villains in the rhino war are the criminal syndicates that control the poaching business, as well as other activities around the country's national parks and nature reserves.

These syndicates will never reveal their true identities. Not only are they guilty of numerous crimes, but they also know the government officials that participate in this whole sordid business. The corrupt state employees in the protected areas themselves, the police who turn a blind eye in return for money, and people in high government positions would be exposed, and this would not do at all. The state security department must know exactly who is involved in the rhino poaching syndicates. One day the truth will come out – probably too late for the rhinos. It is a dreadful situation. Dr Ian Player must be turning in his grave.

We are truly fortunate to have Professor Anthony Turton as a regular contributor to our magazine. His wide knowledge and communication skills bring new understanding of complex topics to our readers. In this issue he tells us about the threats to the uMzimkhulu, our last free-flowing river. It is a tale of

**Dr John Ledger**

bad decisions, lack of understanding of how hydraulic systems work, and illegal activities such as sand-mining. We can but hope that his article will be read by some of those responsible for decision-making in this matter.

The Marula is a well-loved and commercially important tree in southern Africa. Professor Eugene Moll gives us a full lecture on this iconic member of the Mango family. Sandy Roberts adds some medicinal uses for marula bark, and a recipe for marula syrup, which sounds delicious! Eugene comes back to our pages with insights on the ecological role of locusts, which should give many readers some pause for thought.

We accompany John Wesson to the Kruger National Park, to stay at Satara Camp and explore the surrounding areas. John is a talented photographer, and it is wonderful to have him as the leader of the editorial team, because when we need a particular image, John is sure to provide one.

Our Eco Hero is the late Professor Edward O Wilson, world-famous entomologist, prolific author and renowned academic from Harvard University, who was captivated by the Gorongosa National Park in Mozambique and did field work there as well as inspiring and mentoring students.

When Greg Carr secured a 20-year contract with the Mozambique government for the restoration of Gorongosa, he came across Dr Ken Tinley's seminal study of the park. This thesis contained astonishing details of the 'framework of the Gorongosa ecosystem', and is regarded as one of the most important studies of its kind. Tinley's thesis has now been published as a beautifully illustrated book, an electronic version of which is generously available as a free download.

On page 67 of your magazine is a poignant photograph of the 86 year-old Dr Ken Tinley sharing his knowledge and experience with Dominique Gonçalves, a young Mozambican woman who is the manager of elephant ecology in Gorongosa. 'Passing the baton' does not get much better than this!

**Dr John Ledger**

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# Rhino Poaching

## THE NEGOTIATION

John Varty

A long time ago when I was at Wits University, I was introduced to the work of a guy called Edward de Bono. He was hired by governments and multi-nationals to solve problems and negotiate settlements. However, de Bono had an unusual way of going about things. He was very much an 'out of the box' type of thinker, referred to as 'Lateral Thinking'. I became fascinated by the problem-solving methods of Edward de Bono. Unfortunately he has passed on, so he is unable to chair my proposed negotiation meeting. Therefore I have taken license, and this is my interpretation of what de Bono might have said, should he still have been here...



Edward de Bono

- The rhino poaching phenomenon is a war and must be dealt with as such.
- My mandate is to seek a cease fire between the warring factions.
- The warring factions are between the Anti-Poaching Forces of the South African National Parks and the Private Reserves and the Syndicates who hire and pay the poachers. They will be known as the 'APU' and 'The Syndicates' and the 'Private Reserves'.
- Among the conservationists are two schools of thought; those who believe that the horn should be traded and those who believe that it should be illegal to trade the horn. They will be known as the 'Traders' and the 'Non Traders',

- John Hume, a private businessman has a herd of 2,000 rhino and produces 200 rhino calves a year. He has removed the horns from his rhino and he would like to trade his horn. He will be known as 'The Breeder'
- The buyers of rhino horn are businessmen who trade in rhino horn, ivory, drugs and an array of wild life products. They are from Asia, The Yemen, India, Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal, China and others. They are called 'The Buyers'
- Barbara Creecy the Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and the Environment, has just made a law which makes the trade in rhino horn illegal. Previously the South African Government was pro rhino horn trade, now they are anti the trade. They will be known as the 'The Government'.

### The Conference

*Edward de Bona opens the conference and welcomes all attendees.*

My name is Edward de Bono. I am neither a conservationist, scientist or activist. I have no investment in rhino or rhino horn. I am a deal-maker and my mandate is to bring an end to the 'Rhino War'. Never in the history of the Rhino War have all the role players been assembled in one place. In the audience are conservationists, scientists, activists, traders, breeders, syndicate bosses and other interested parties. The Honourable Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment has graced us with her presence.

Ladies and gentlemen, my research went back to the time when Jacob Zuma came to power in South Africa. It was at this time that rhino poaching began to escalate.



At its peak during Zuma's term of office, more than 1,000 rhinos a year were being lost to poaching. To date some 6,500 rhinos have been lost in South Africa. I'm sure you will all agree that this is a staggering amount of rhino. When I began my research for this assignment, I was able to find many arguments for rhino trade and many papers arguing against rhino trade.

While you have spent considerable time and energy debating the pros and cons of the rhino trade, I came to the conclusion that none of you really know if trade or non-trade will help the rhino. You are shooting in the dark so to speak! I ask the Traders and the Non Traders to keep an open mind. There will be times when you need to trade rhino horn and there will be times when no trade is advised. It is not cut and dried!

My research into The Breeder revealed that a herd of 2,000 rhino is maintained in captivity and some 200 calves are produced a year. This is a substantial number of rhino. I sense a huge opportunity for rhino conservation here!

Therefore it is disappointing indeed that John Hume and the Government should be wasting valuable time and money on court cases. Surely the Government should be assisting John Hume to get a return on his investment, while at the same time benefiting the rhino? My research into the South African Government is that previously the Department of Environment and Tourism supported a trade in rhino horn, and then changed their stance and reverted to no trade in rhino horn.

Honourable Minister, my research shows that there is no easy answer to trade or not to trade. Perhaps you need to assess each project on its merits and then decide to trade or not to trade the rhino horn.

However, Honourable Minister, you will accept that you are in a war. Foreign nationals are entering your country and killing and stealing your national assets. To win this war you have to provide leadership. You have to be decisive. There is a great deal of confusion in your industry.

Honourable Minister, I respectfully suggest there is no leadership. To win this war you need to put qualified leadership in place and you need to do it quickly! Being a woman, I think you will relate to the history of the Falklands War. When the Argentineans invaded the Falklands, Margaret Thatcher dealt with it very quickly and very decisively!

My research into the Anti-Poaching Units revealed that the troops on the ground are understaffed, underpaid, overworked and demoralized. These are men putting their lives on the line daily for the rhino. However, the signs are that you are losing the war and will lose it, if you don't change your strategy.

In all my research I could not find one instance where you have sat down at the negotiating table with the enemy. Do you know what the Syndicate Bosses want? Do you know what their aspirations are?

The Syndicate Bosses live in the same ecosystem as you do. You live inside the Kruger National Park; they live outside the park. They are fathers, they have families to feed and school fees to pay. I was unable to find any information on the Syndicates for the simple reason that their activities are illegal. However, from personal interviews, I was able to ascertain the following about Syndicates operating in the Hazyview, Bushbuckridge and Acornhock areas.

- The Syndicates control the police and the courts. The Syndicates recently attempted to close the Magistrates Court at Skukuza.
- The Syndicates control the taxis, the bottle stores, the butcheries and many of the taverns in the area.
- The Syndicates control subsistence poaching in the area of Kruger National Park and the Private Reserves.
- The Syndicates' modus operandi is to hire local men, provide them with guns and ammunition and pay them to hunt the rhino in the Parks.
- The Syndicates have contacts in Pretoria, Durban and Mossel Bay which will move the rhino horn back to China and other countries.

I was unable to gain an interview with any Syndicate Boss, but a statement by a recently assassinated Syndicate Boss, Petros Mabuza is revealing:

"South Africa will soon be a Socialist country. All wildlife will belong to the people. I will soon legally be able to hunt under quota, rhino, buffalo, elephant and hippo. I will be able to legally sell the horn, tusks, skin and meat of the animals I have hunted. For the National Parks to allow 300 hippo which recently died in the drought to rot in the sun while on their boundary are hungry people, is unacceptable".

I am a deal-maker, and my brief is to end the rhino war. I will be seeking to put the leaders of the Anti-Poaching Units and the bosses of the Syndicates together around one negotiating table. I am happy to Chair that meeting. It is imperative that the head



of SAN Parks, the Private Game Reserves and the Honourable Minister sit in that meeting.

My message today to the South African government, the South African National Parks the Private Game Reserves is crystal clear. You cannot end the Rhino War without negotiating with the

Trust, WESSA and other concerned organisations to arrange another conference in 2022. The title of the conference should be *Parks and Neighbours – the Rhino Dilemma*.

The conference would be run on the guidelines listed



Photo: Jaco Marais

Syndicate Bosses. They must be included every step of the way!

Lastly my research into the Buyers of the rhino horn; they are part of a global network which runs the wildlife trade industry. Whether they are dealing in a rhino horn, cocaine, ivory or tiger body parts they are the same people. It is a multi-billion dollar industry!

In the 1980s The Endangered Wildlife Trust launched a conference called *National Parks, Nature Reserves and Neighbours*. It was the first inkling that the future of Game Reserves and National Parks may be tied to the attitude of the surrounding communities. I call on the Endangered Wildlife

above.

See also: KNP in Perspective (Part Two)  
<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2022-01-25-beyond-its-exceptional-beauty-kruger-national-park-is-on-the-ropes-and-hurting/>

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Tread Lightly on the Earth