

ROBIN DES BOIS

ON the TRAIL

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ON_{the} TRAIL

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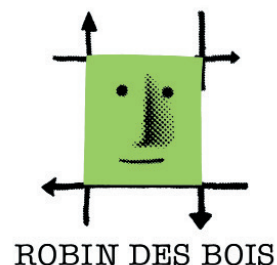
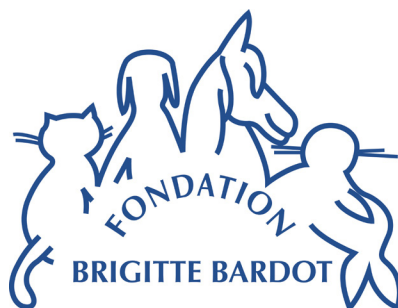
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MAMMOTHS AND WOOLLY RHINOCEROSES

EUROPE

RUSSIA

Mid-November 2023

Blagoveshchensk, Amur Oblast, Russia. Border with China.

A woman of "foreign origin," whose Chinese nationality is not in doubt, concealed under her winter clothes a woolly rhinoceros (*Coelodonta antiquitatis*) horn (3.2 kg) at least 13,000 years old, with a financial value estimated by the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry at 1.7 million roubles (18,330 US\$).¹

November 24, 2023

Zabaykalsk, Zabaykalsky District, Trans-Baikal Krai, Russia. Border with China.

Seizure of 2 fragments of mammoth tusk, 1.7 kg in all, from a Chinese national returning to his country. He had intended to give them to his daughter as a wedding present, and protested that he had done so in good faith.²

Mid-December 2023

Kaliningrad, Kaliningrad Oblast, Russia



A woolly rhinoceros (*Coelodonta antiquitatis*) skull (13 kg, 80 cm long) was seized from a parcel bound for the United States from the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia). Estimated value: 125,000 roubles (1,405 US\$). It was handed over by customs to the Kaliningrad Natural History Museum.

The price of a woolly rhinoceros skull varies depending on its state of preservation, the size of the horn and the presence of teeth: first prices can be found for as little as 1,000 US\$, but for a quality skull you generally have to expect to pay at least 25,000 US\$, if not much more.³

Mammoth, see also page 122 ref. 39 and page 124, ref. 47.

RHINOCEROSES



"Hatari!", US movie from 1962

The white rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum* and black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* ranging in Africa are listed in Appendix I, except for the white rhinoceros populations of Eswatini and South Africa which are listed in Appendix II for trade of live animals and hunting trophies.

The 3 Asian rhinoceros species are in Appendix I: the Indian rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis*, the Sumatran rhinoceros *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*, and the Javan rhinoceros *Rhinoceros sondaicus*.

EASTERN AFRICA

KENYA

December 17, 2023

Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, Tsavo West National Park, Taita Taveta County, Kenya

Discovery of a decomposing female rhino carcass. She was carrying a male rhinoceros foetus aged between 9 and 12 months. The average gestation period lasts 16 months. The corpse had been stripped of her horns and ears. Four rifle bullets were located. They entered through the neck and lodged in the lungs and heart.¹

SOUTHERN AFRICA

SOUTH AFRICA

November 7, 2023

Stolznek Section, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa

Arrest by rangers and the canine brigade of 3 suspects spotted by an aerial patrol. The 3 men, who had taken refuge in thickets, were flushed out. They were carrying a shotgun with a silencer, ammunition, and other tools and accessories indicative of imminent poaching intent.

In the first 6 months of the year (181 days), 231 rhinos were killed in South Africa.²

November 13, 2023

Makhanda, Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

During the hearings of Kenneth Chigaweni, Thomas Joao Machele, and Amos Ncube, Shona and Tswa translators were on hand to assist the defendants from Zimbabwe and Mozambique, 2 of whom were undocumented immigrants. The 2 police officers in charge of the roadblock and Captain Mornay Viljoen, head of the Jeffreys-Bay-based stock theft and endangered species unit, confirm that the 3 men had a common goal: to kill rhinos and steal their horns. They were in possession of a .375 calibre gun with a silencer, corresponding ammunition, a knife, a saw, an axe, a flashlight, 2 rolls of tin foil, and several backpacks to transport the horns. They were not used. Ages 26, 44, and 53, they were subject to the Riotous Assemblies Act and the National Environmental Management Act. They had planned a rhino poaching expedition in the Ezulu Reserve between Bedford and Makhanda.³

November 17, 2023

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



Ten years in prison for the ranger from the Nwanetsi section of the Kruger who in February 2020 poached a rhino with his service weapon. Oscar Mthimkhulu, executive director of the Kruger, welcomes the Skukuza court's verdict. "I hope our colleagues will learn from this case that, regardless of your position, the law will catch up with you."⁴

December 4, 2023

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



Santos Ngoveni had been arrested in the Stolznek section of Kruger in 2017 in possession of a 458 caliber, ammunition and an axe. Released on bail (with an accomplice), he didn't attend court summonses and an arrest warrant was issued against him. He was arrested in 2023 and has just been sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment for trespassing in a national park, 6 years' imprisonment for possession of a prohibited illegal firearm, 4 years' imprisonment for conspiracy to commit a crime, 2 years' imprisonment for possession of unlicensed ammunition and one year's imprisonment for possession of a dangerous weapon (the axe). As some sentences run concurrently, he will spend 10 years in prison instead of 15.⁵

December 8, 2023

Skukuza, Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga Province, South Africa



He is Ngoveni's accomplice. Joshua Mongwe, 29, was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for trespassing in the Kruger National Park, contravention of Immigration Act, possession of a firearm, possession of a firearm and of ammunition to commit crime, in this case rhino poaching.⁶

December 22, 2023

Gravelotte, Limpopo Province, South Africa

Jan Scheepers, director of the operation, is adamant: "From the helicopter the place looked like a slaughterhouse and everywhere you looked rhinos were lying there dead". "We found 26 carcasses but I can tell you there is bound to be many more". In the early hours of the morning, the Hawks raided Harmony Game Farm, which is run by Derek Lewitton, a 53-year-old American citizen with a doctorate in law from Stanford University, California, and a supporter of the liberalisation of the rhino horn trade. "By dehorning animals safely a well-regulated trade in "ethical" horns to the Far East would help fund the sanctuaries and drive prices down and make poaching less attractive". The paradox is that Lewitton despite his calls for safe dehorning and ethics was not bothered by this at his Harmony Game Farm. Of the 17 horns that were seized from a safe, 10 had no traceability documents. Seven unregistered firearms and hundreds of rounds of ammunition were also seized. Lewitton was arrested after a 16-hour search. In 2016, he bought a private ranch and started breeding black rhinos under the name Harmony Farm. To be continued.⁷



**End of December 2023
Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, KwaZulu-Natal
Province, South Africa**

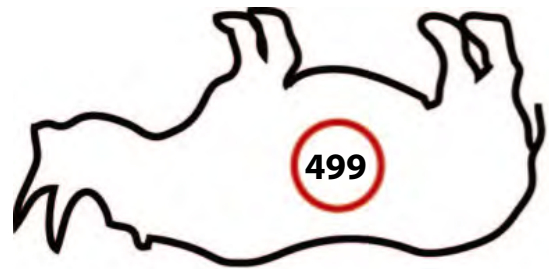


The HiP (Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park) rangers intervened too late (the rhino had just been killed) and at the right time (the poacher had started to saw off the horn). His arrest was "heroic". Amos Khetha Tembe, the official in charge, was injured and taken to hospital, according to the Independent Online. KwaZulu-Natal's Minister of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs stressed that the vigilance of the

rangers, combined with state-of-the-art technology, played a pivotal role in this operation. Faced with a surge in poaching in the province (102 in 2021, 244 in 2022, 325 in 2023), the ministry and the wildlife management agency Ezemvelo have reportedly agreed to grant more resources to the rangers, improve their working conditions and give them the recognition they deserve. Ezemvelo is responsible for 114 protected areas in KwaZulu-Natal (92,000 km²). The province hopes to welcome 800,000 visitors by 2024, including 50,000 from foreign countries. Tourism is estimated to contribute 3.6 billion rand (194 million US\$) to the economy of the province.⁸

**Year 2023
South Africa**

Review of 2023. Official statistics. 499 rhinos poached, 51 more than in 2022. KwaZulu-Natal is the most affected, with 325 poached rhinos, followed by Limpopo (59), the Eastern Cape, victim of a surge in poaching (17 compared with 0 in 2022), and the North-West. The Kruger is reducing the damages (78 rhinos poached in 2023, 46 less than in 2022). The decline in poaching there is attributed to several factors, including the automatic registration of the license plates of the vehicles entering and leaving the park, the real-time detection of intruders on foot, and the ongoing training programme for all rangers on ethics, integrity and resistance to corruption.⁹



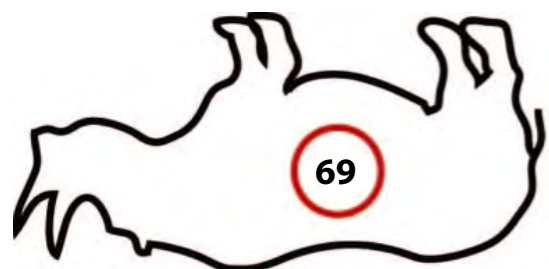
NAMIBIA

**November 2023
Otjituuo, Otjozondjupa Region, Namibia**

Staff at the Eden Farm, famous for its rhino breeding, spot fresh human footprints and alert the police and the Blue Rhino Task Force. Arrest of 2 men who tried to get away. One of the 2 was shot in the buttocks. The police cannot claim to have fired in self-defence.¹⁰

**Year 2023
Namibia**

69 rhinos were poached in 2023, i.e. a 29% reduction in poaching compared to 2022. 83 suspects were arrested. 15 horns were seized.¹¹



SOUTHERN ASIA

INDIA

November 24 and 30, 2023
Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat District,
State of Assam, India



The autopsy report says that the female rhino, aged around 25, died after a spear penetrated her left flank, passing through her ribs and hitting vital organs. This is allegedly a first for the park, which was founded more than a century ago. Naren Saikia from the village of Lokhorakhonia is suspected of having done the dirty trick. The rhino died at the end of her escape in the Kohora forest, on the outskirts of the park.¹²

NEPAL

November 16, 25 and 27, 2023
Chitwan National Park and Rapti
Municipality-3, Chitwan District,
Bagmati Province, Nepal



- Discovery of 2 female rhinos aged around 6 and 18 with their horns amputated in trap pits 3 km from the Chaparchuli guard post. The park administration is concerned about the resurgence of the old methods of capture and their intergenerational transmission.



- Arrest of 2 suspects. 2 horns seized.
- Six new suspects arrested.

There are an estimated 750 rhinos in Nepal, including just under 700 in Chitwan National Park.¹³