

## Dehorning bid to save rhinos from poachers

**T**HE DIRECTORATE of Nature Conservation in Namibia last week authorised the dehorning of several black rhino in a remote corner of the country in a bid to make the animal, on the brink of extinction, unattractive to poachers. This is the first time that such a measure has been tried, and it has divided leading conservationists in the region. In the past 15 years, poachers, armed today with powerful weapons, have killed more than 65 000 black rhino in Africa, reducing their numbers to just 3500 in the entire continent.

In Namibia, 16 black rhino have been killed this year. Rhino horns—which may each sell for up to £50 000—are traded mainly in Yemen, where they are prized as a material for dagger handles, and in the Far East, where they are ground up and used in medicine and aphrodisiacs. In the Namibian experiment, conservationists shot the animals from a helicopter with darts that were tipped with an immobilising drug, called V99, and a drug to counter stress. The



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*Conservationists wage the battle for little big horn*

workers then sawed off the horn and administered an antidote that restored the animals to consciousness. Polla Swart, Namibia's chief of nature conservation, said that the measure deprives the rhino of its only means of defence against predators. She explained that the experiment was only being tried in Damaraland, a semi-arid area "where the rhino has few natural enemies." 33□