

SAVE THE RHINO INTERNATIONAL



Rhino costume tackles the Argus Cycle Tour.

Not a single person watching or competing in this year's Argus Cycle Tour could have failed to see Save the Rhino International's (SRI) eight foot rhino costume going around the 105 km Cape Town course. If this wasn't enough, 70 other riders were wearing T-shirts with "Save the Rhino" emblazoned on their backs. The message was loud and clear and the crowd and fellow competitors responded ecstatically with cries of "Go rhino man" and "Save the rhino" throughout the day.

Concern for the world's devastated rhino populations enhances the importance of securing a future for the remainder of these magnificent creatures and keeping this fact firmly in the public eye. Through the somewhat bizarre rhino costume and its high profile endeavours, SRI is able to ensure

BEN HARBOUR

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that this message reaches an international audience in an entertaining and memorable way.

From an amazing seven London Marathons to eight other international marathons including New York, Los Angeles and Paris, to climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, to astonishing onlookers with a Comrades finish last year and most recently completing the City to Surf race with 70 000 others in Sydney, Australia, the rhino costume has become famous and has reached a huge audience.

Through exposure to the rhino costume, millions of people around the world have been shown that the plight of the rhino is of international concern. Hundreds of individuals have been moved to making a personal contribution by running for the rhino and collecting personal sponsorship for their efforts and SRI is now planning to take runners to over 15 international events each year.

SRI's activities have appealed to a young, dynamic audience and have attracted approaches from people looking to contribute in their own particular way. From the woman who raised funds by sitting in a bath of baked beans outside a supermarket in England, to the team of four who bought and delivered a Landrover to a project in Tanzania, SRI has received invaluable donations. Most recently a young Englishman, Daniel Ling and three friends, raised nearly R60 000 for the Masebe Reserve project in the Waterberg, by cycling from Victoria Falls to Cape Town.

Profile, awareness and grass roots fundraising, focussed on the five remaining species of rhino, are SRI's core objectives. Another crucial objective is to construct a long-term programme of providing consistent funds to dedicated field managers, without whom there would be no future for the rhino. Financial contributions will be channelled into endowment funds for the countries with remaining rhino populations. Throughout the year, the income accrued from the capital fund will be distributed to the field to support the immediate and long-term requirements particular to that country.

The first fund was called the Namibian Black Rhino Fund which has grown to US\$165 000 since 1993, with annual income distributed to the field increasing steadily. When it reaches its target of US\$1 million, over US\$100 000 will be available to the field managers each year and they will be able to

make long term planning decisions with secure funding, crucial to the effectiveness of their work and the security of the rhinos.

Projects in Tanzania, Zaire, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Sumatra and now South Africa have benefited from SRI support over the past seven years. The charity has expanded, adding an office in Cape Town and representation in Australia, Canada and the USA, to the head office in London.

Under the guidance and experience of Clive Walker and the Rhino & Elephant Foundation, the first satellite office in South Africa has enabled the rhino costume to compete in South Africa's high profile endurance events and keep the rhino in the public eye. As South Africa is home to three quarters of the world's rhinos, it is very important to promote the message of rhino conservation in this country. More so, if one realises that in countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe, rhino populations were decimated in only a single generation. In addition, South Africa has some of the most dedicated, professional and successful field managers in the world, from whom there is much to be learned.

The plight of the rhino is one of the most visible examples of the terrible damage that we have inflicted on the environment in an incredibly short time. SRI is a movement of like-minded individuals who are determined to show that it is still possible for the world to provide a home for this magnificent species. The sum of individual actions can have a profound effect on our future and, as long as the rhino costume continues to inspire individuals, there is hope.

SRI is always looking for people to compete in both South African and international events, either in the rhino costume or as part of a team. For further information on these and any other activities, please contact Ben Harbour or Shani Glover at 783-1632 (021).

