

# RHINO POACHING - THE WAR ESCALATES

We reported in the last TUSK newsletter on the devastating effect poaching was having on the Black Rhino population in Zimbabwe. A staggering 87% of the country's Black Rhino has been wiped out in the last two years, with numbers now estimated to be less than 250 in the whole of Zimbabwe.



## De-horning not a Deterrent

The first battle was to embark on a de-horning exercise as quickly as possible - but this alone no longer guarantees protection in the wild. The war has taken an alarming new twist - rhinos which are kept in conservancies and which have already been de-horned, have recently been victims of attacks by poachers.

A startling example of this occurred on 29 November 1993, when two poachers, armed with AK-47 rifles and axes, opened fire on two de-horned rhino being protected on the Mhondoro Wilderness game park. As the 5 year old male called 'Chopper' and a 7

year old female named 'Chewore' ran off into the park gravely wounded, the poachers led the guard away at gun-point to a resettlement area. The park's manager, Tony Mitchell says of the incident, "they sent a message through my guard that they would shoot the rhino and then shoot me. They said they knew where all the

rhino in Zimbabwe are and (that) they are going to shoot them all".

## Second Attack

The two rhino were found 48 hours later. But despite overnight surveillance by three armed soldiers, the poachers managed to creep upto the pen and opened fire on the rhinos again.

This time, the female took six bullets in the head, stomach and spine and died 12 hours later. During the 15 seconds of gunfire, one of the soldiers was hit and had to have his leg amputated the following day. Although the male rhino, 'Chopper', amazingly survived this second attack, he was put down 12 days later - his spinal cord had been completely shattered by an AK-47 bullet.

Behind this bizarre and brutal murder, lies the hidden and deeply disturbing motive of the poachers - quite simply to kill as many rhino as possible, thereby increasing the value of their existing stocks of rhino horn. Equally disturbingly is, of course, the constant fear now felt by Tony Mitchell, his family and his staff.

Clearly the poachers cannot be allowed to win this war, whatever sinister tactics they are being forced to employ against our ever tougher conservation programmes. We do need your help to save these rhinos from this concerted effort to eliminate them altogether, as well as protecting those people on the front line.

## TAKE-OFF IN TANZANIA

In Tanzania, TUSK recently purchased sophisticated new altimeter equipment for an aeroplane, which the charity bought for the Ruaha National Park in 1990. The plane has been an invaluable asset for the remote park and conducts both anti-poaching patrols and game counts - see below.

