



REF NEWS

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FROM THE REF DESK...

We have kept our promise and are happy to send you, this the third and last issue of REF News for 1992. The REF journal is in production and will be with you shortly. Enclosed please find two inserts—the REF regalia order form (think of Christmas!) and an exciting offer of limited edition sets of the 'Magnificent Seven' in verditte.

With economic problems facing most South Africans, contributions are on the decline to organisations such as REF. However, we are delighted to say that there are still a great number of people supporting the Foundation and we are very grateful for their concern. The elephant and especially the black rhino, deserve all our attention in southern Africa.

In the battle for the rhino, the poachers are winning. Time is



A Rhino awaiting shipment to Australia.

running out. On a recent trip to Zimbabwe I came across the carcass of a 5 year-old black rhino which was one of the first dehorned ones in Matusadona National Park on the southern shore of Lake Kariba. The rhino had been killed within days of its horn being cut off. There are only 15 black rhinos left in Matusadona from a population

estimated at more than 150 two years ago. In spite of Zimbabwe's aggressive conservation measures to dehorn all endangered rhinos, poachers are slaughtering rhino at a rate that could wipe out one of the largest concentrations in Africa in two years. Even if sawing off the rhino's horn saves them eventually from the poachers, it may be too late to save them from extinction—due to their loss of biological viability. In the meantime, numerous rhino are being shipped to breeding centres in Australia and the USA to produce progeny over the next decade in order to return them to Africa later.

Incidences in Natal where rhinos are still plentiful indicate that there is no room for complacency in South Africa as desperate people will be turning down south for the horn of both the black and white rhino which is still fetching incredible prices in the Far East.

Hopefully we are not fighting a losing battle in the future.

JANET RACHLOW—THE RHINO LADY



In October, 1991, the dehorning programme in Zimbabwe left 59 white rhinos roaming hornless in Hwange National Park. Janet Rachlow, a young research scientist from Nevada University,

whose risky job it is to monitor rhinos at night when poachers are active, too, is optimistic dehorned rhino will deter future poachers. White rhino are especially vulnerable to poachers because they tend to occur in groups and are often found in relatively open areas. Her project objective is to evaluate potential biological effects of horn removal on white rhino.

Dehorning has been controversial for three main reasons: while horns are regrowing, the form and rates of regrowth remain unknown so far and impossible yet to determine when horn removal will be needed

again; effects of horn removal on the behaviour and breeding of rhino are unclear; and the young of "hornless" females may be more vulnerable to predation.

A special night vision device, supplied by REF, is invaluable for identification of individual rhinos. A small number of dehorned and "horned" rhinos have been fitted with radio collars which come into use should rhinos be invisible at the chosen location.

Life definitely is not dull for Janet and we haven't heard the last from this "rhino lady", expecting a personal account of her observations and preliminary conclusions from this project in the REF Journal next year.



"If all the beasts were gone, man will surely die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beasts also happens to the man. All things are connected." Chief Seattle of the Nez Perce, 1885.

