

Jan van der Walt

Mr van der Walt wrote in the Comment Column of the SA Game & Hunt magazine (Jan - March 1997) that SAGO (South African Game Organisation) supports the proposal that the present restrictions on trade be lifted. Not only because many game ranchers already own rhinos in South Africa (20% white rhinos in SA, 1477 out of 7370, are privately owned), but also because many of the principle of sustainable utilization of wildlife which receives so much prominence in the ongoing rhino debate.

It is a simple biological fact that game breed and that their numbers have to be limited in accordance with available food sources. The majority of rational people don't need any further clarification than that. The same principle is involved in cattle or sheep farming. Judicious culling of game is best done by hunting. In this way the habitat will not be over exploited and further production can take place in a sustainable manner. The proof is there already. Today there are more game, including scarce species, on private land than 100 years ago. So much so, that the white rhino can be hunted in South Africa. What an achievement!



Hluhluwe and Umfolozi Parks: *Rhinos are breeding well*

A British newspaper reported last year that 800 rhino had "gone missing" from the Hluhluwe/Umfolozi complex.

The Natal Parks Board denied, however, that this announcement was true and stated that the rhinos have bred well during the past two years. No rhinos have been killed by poachers and only 60 deaths have been reported during this time. NPB head of Scientific Services Dr Martin Brooks said: "We have removed 213 rhinos since 1994 for management reasons and this would account for a slight reduction in numbers. The average decrease of 28 percent in other species counted (except zebra) supports the view that count variability is the major factor involved".

In an article, *The Citizen* newspaper reported that a biennial game count in the parks during September and October showed figures which were generally lower than those in 1994. The NPB scientific staff confirmed that the differences (between the 1994 and 1996 game counts) were well within the norms for statistical interpretation of game count data. Comparing the white rhino count of 1 800 in 1994 with the figure of 1320 in 1996 did not suggest a decline. Dr Brooks said that the estimates are not precise figures and that there is no indication that anything untoward has happened.

Rhino horn dealers fined

There may be discussions and proposals at CITES to lift the ban on trading in rhino products, but in the meantime rhino horn dealers are still being severely punished for their illegal crimes.

The Daily News reported that four people convicted of dealing in a rhino horn and an elephant tusk were ordered to pay fines totalling R117 000 or face imprisonment. The Durban Regional Court Magistrate, Mr Theo Reed, ordered that the guilty parties, Ms Ngubane, Ms Mbongwa and Mr Mkhize pay a fine of R25 000 each for the possession of the rhino horn and if they were in default of payment they would be jailed for 1 000 days. They were given a further R10 000 fine or 400 days for dealing in an elephant tusk.

Another guilty party, Mr Mpanza was fined R10 000 or 400 days on the rhino horn charge and R2 000 or 100 days on the charge involving the elephant tusk.

Mr Reed said that it must be clear to people who do the actual illegal hunting that the court will not find it difficult to imprison them. He said that what counted against each accused was that each acted in terms of greed and not need.

He ordered that the rhino horn and elephant tusk be handed to the Natal Parks Board.