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Dedicated to the People and Wildlife of Africa

## The War On Rhinos

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During August a flurry of blogs, webpostings and newspaper reports focused on the worsening rhino crisis in Southern Africa. I attempted to summarize the information in this article, adding some comments and thoughts of my own.



Photo credit: John Van Den Berg

On August 18<sup>th</sup> one male white rhino was killed with one shot to the head by poachers armed with an AK-47 assault rifle close to Masinda Camp in the iMfolozi Game Reserve - a place that is world famous for its successful restoration and conservation of the white rhino. Later the same day, a 40 years old rhino cow with a horn measuring 93 cm was shot dead presumably with an R5 assault rifle near Roedtan in Limpopo province; the animal was found with hamstrings and horns chopped with an axe. On August 23<sup>rd</sup> an armed gang of ten men held up two farm workers before proceeding to shoot and kill two rhinos on a farm between Modimolle and Vaalwater in South Africa's Limpopo province. The brazen daylight attack near Modimolle was unusual, in that most reports of the 300 rhinos believed to have been poached in South Africa since the beginning of last year suggest the attacks were done stealthily and mostly at night.

The highly organized poaching syndicates, probably steered by Asian mafia-like structures are using state of the art technical equipment like night-vision technique, global positioning systems from the air and ground, all kind of aircraft like microlights, helicopters and small fixed wings, high-tech air guns and cross bows delivering darts with efficient veterinary drugs and high-powered hunting rifles. Invariably they are heavily armed and ruthlessly willing to open fire on anyone who gets in

their way. They are working with top-of-the range communication gear and surveillance/spotting and action teams; they are also not shy to use substantial bribes to make some security and conservation officials look the other way or collude in the killings; they pay high fees to induce people smuggling horns across international borders – and so on.

End of July 2010, the chief executive of South African National Parks (SANParks), David Mabunda said in a statement that "Perhaps it is no longer appropriate to refer to [the] illegal killing of rhinos as poaching given the levels of sophistication, violence, precision and the money behind it. We are dealing with unprecedented high levels of organized crime which the Police and all security agencies are helping to defeat." [Wildlife Ranching South Africa](#) (WRSA), a nonprofit association established in 2005, said in a recent press release that "over 180 rhino have

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## Rhino Darting In South Africa

### PHASA Communication

PHASA received the following notification from the Department of Environmental Affairs during the last week of July 2010,

The Veterinary Council proposed amendments to their legislation that will have an impact on the darting of rhinos by foreign clients. Herewith is a summary of the information:

1. According to the proposed amendments only veterinary professionals, or persons authorized by the Veterinary Council and under the supervision of a veterinary professional, will be permitted to administer Schedule 5 or 6 medicines with the purpose to tranquilize or anaesthetize an animal.
2. These amendments have not been published for implementation yet. However, the Veterinary Council will probably forward these proposals to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) next week, for DAFF to obtain approval from the Minister to publish the amendments in the Gazette for implementation. The implementation will then be with immediate effect.
3. The rules will be published in terms of Section 30 of the Veterinary and Para-Veterinary Professions Act, Act 19 of 1982. (Act)
4. The Veterinary Council went through the consultation process, but did not extend this to the professional hunting industry.
5. According to the policy of the Veterinary Council, it would officially be unethical for veterinarians to be involved in darting safaris from 1 June 2010. As a result of the industry not being informed of the time frame of the implementation, there are Hunting Outfitters who have permits to conduct these safaris, and safaris have already been booked. There would thus be an interim period from 1 June 2010 until publication of the amendments, that Outfitters would have problems with existing contracts. The Veterinary Council was therefore requested if it would be possible for them to honor existing permits. The Registrar of the Council undertook to forward our request to the Executive Committee for approval.
6. In the mean time, it is recommended that provinces do not issue new permits for applications for darting safaris. Further, it is requested that all provinces must indicate to us how many permits they have issued of which the safaris still need to take place. The reason is so that we can indicate to the Council how many permit holders will be affected by the interim period (my proposal was that the Council regard this period until publication, as an official phase out period for permits).
7. DEA will have to amend the TOPS Regulations to make provision that only veterinary professionals or persons authorized by the Council, may dart animals. Therefore, written approval from the Council will be a prerequisite for a person other than a veterinary professional, to obtain a darting permit.

In the meantime PHASA communicated with the Department of Environmental Affairs receiving the following information on the Veterinary Council's decision taken at their meeting of 30 July:

"Decision taken by Council that the conduct of any veterinarians involved in green hunts i.r.o. permits issued after 30 June 2010 will be investigated. Permits issued prior to 30 June 2010 not affected."

This means that darting safaris for existing TOPS permits may continue, but no new TOPS permits should be issued for foreign clients to do the darting, as veterinarians may not be involved in those safaris. The above provision only affects the 5 outstanding permits issued by MTPA. All other provinces indicated that they have no outstanding permits (permits that have already been issued, of which the safaris still need to take place). We will amend the TOPS Regulations accordingly to give effect to the decision of the South African Veterinary Council.

For more details please contact PHASA [phasa@phasa.co.za](mailto:phasa@phasa.co.za) [www.phasa.co.za](http://www.phasa.co.za)

## Uganda Suspends Trophy Hunting

Barbara Crown – [The Hunting Report](#)

The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) has suspended sport hunting in Uganda until further notice. The agency distributed a letter to safari operators, signed by UWA Executive Director Moses Mapesa, in the last week of July which said that "*sport hunting is suspended with immediate effect save for any clients who may already be in Uganda and on safari.*" Hunting Report Editor Barbara Crown called the UWA and was told a nationwide suspension is indeed in effect.

Crown also contacted several safari operators, all of whom confirmed receiving such a letter or hearing about it. Some were actually in the field conducting safaris and had been unable to follow up with UWA. The letter raised more questions among operators than it provided answers. Operators specifically question whether a blanket suspension can be issued in the middle of the hunting season and in spite of their contracts. They pointed out the new Board of Trustees may not be aware of the far-reaching complications of a suspension in the middle of the safari season.

The reasons for the suspension include concerns about illegal hunting, the need for agreed upon scientific criteria for quota setting and "*equitable benefit sharing from the sport hunting activity.*" However, when Crown spoke with a UWA representative, he insisted the only reason was the need for a better method to set quotas. He could not say when the suspension might be lifted. The letter also said that a number of concerns had been raised by the public and stakeholders in the wildlife and tourism sector about sport hunting, causing the Board of Trustees of UWA to examine the matter and resolve that sport hunting be temporarily suspended.

Look for hot-of-the-press updates at [The Hunting Report](#).

