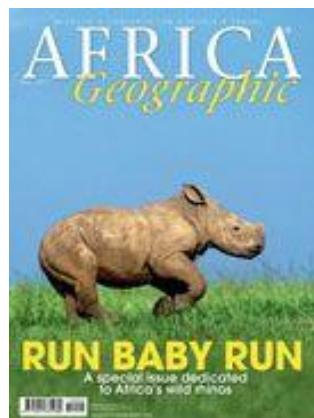


AFRICA GEOGRAPHIC

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April 2012: All about rhinos

Special issue - rhinos & the poaching crisis

80 and counting...

That's the number of rhinos killed in South Africa in the first two months of 2012. We dedicate this entire issue to finding out about rhinos and their precious horn, establishing exactly what is driving the poaching onslaught and examining the pros and cons of suggested solutions.

features

All about rhinos

Find out what we know about Africa's rhino species – how many there are and where they live – and about their horns, the unique evolutionary attribute that arguably makes them the most controversial and written-about animals of our time.

A chequered past

Prior to colonial times, Africa's rhino population across all species is thought to have numbered in the hundreds of thousands, possibly over a million. From the 1800s to the present, our summary tells their story. Rhino numbers, however, remained guesswork until the 1960s – and even today there is an element of uncertainty that is compounded by secrecy for security reasons.



The crisis

Crisis? What crisis? After all, rhino numbers for both species in southern Africa are actually increasing. It sounds crazy given a poaching scenario that is seemingly so out of hand, but it is true. It doesn't mean that rhinos in the wild aren't in trouble though – they are. We unpick the inner workings of the poaching syndicates and look at what we know about the Vietnamese and Chinese consumers who are driving the demand.



The solutions

We know rhinos are in trouble. We know we want to save them. But how do we do this, in the face of such seemingly overwhelming odds? The proposed solutions are as hotly debated as they are numerous. Do we increase security and penalties, should we stop legal trophy hunting or focus our efforts on changing mindsets in Asia? We evaluate every one, including the hottest potato of them all: calls to legalise the trade in horn.

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Peter Borchert
Founder

We chose our engaging little model for the cover of this issue for two reasons: relief from the brutal images that inevitably accompany so many stories about rhinos these days, and as a message of encouragement: for as long as there are rhinos being born that will grow up in the wildest of possible circumstances, there is hope for the species. Our exhortation 'RUN BABY RUN' is, therefore, as much a call for our baby pachyderm to be the essence of what it is, as it is a call to run for its very life.

THE LAST RHINOS

On 2 March 2012, conservationist and bestselling author Lawrence Anthony suffered a heart attack and died in his sleep. Best known as the Elephant Whisperer and saviour of Baghdad Zoo, Lawrence was appreciated for his courage and quiet doggedness, and for doing things that no-one else thought possible. He will be sorely missed. It is in honour of his memory, then, that we bring you a sneak preview of Chapter 1 of his brand-new book, *The Last Rhinos*.

It was barely light when the radio first crackled into life. 'Code red! Code red! Come in, Lawrence, come in. Over.' 'Standing by.'

'Bad morning.' The caller paused. 'We have a dead rhino at Hlaza Hill. A female. Over.'

Dread froze my blood. I looked up at the sky above the distant Hlaza Hill, the highest point on the new community game reserve that abuts Thula Thula, my own reserve and my home in

Zululand, South Africa. There were no vultures and no gunshots had been reported, a sound that echoes like a thunderbolt across the African wilderness when the wind is right.

'Cause of death?' I asked, fearing the worst.

'Poachers. Both horns are gone. There's blood all over the place. Professional job. Looks like they used an AK-47, or maybe an old military-issue R1.'

I could feel my fists clenching. Rhino poachers – the disease of the wild that was now becoming a pandemic.

'How long has she been dead?' I asked.

'Can't be more than a few hours. They probably took it around midnight. There was plenty of moon to help them.'

'OK, I'll be there now. Out.'

I glanced at the pump-action shotgun leaning against the passenger seat of my Land Rover, reached for the ammunition box and stuffed my pockets with handfuls of SG cartridges. I hoped against hope that the poachers were still on the reserve.

The green-black flies were already gathering when I arrived at the hill. The air was metallic with the rank smell of blood. The rhino lay uncharacteristically on her side, legs splayed awkwardly at right angles to her stiff body.

I got out of the Land Rover and walked across to the three rangers standing nearby. Nobody said anything. The shock of the kill, the dominating presence of the huge dead creature, stifled our words.

Rhinos have an ancient, eternal beauty. With their massive bodies, clad in thick folds of prehistoric body armour topped by a magnificent scimitar horn, they fascinate like few other creatures. Weighing up to three and half tons and reaching six feet high, they are the largest land animal in the world after the elephant.

In death, there was no trace of that beauty. The regal horns, viciously hacked off with honed machetes – or *pangas*, as we call them in Africa



– left the noble face crumpled and desecrated. The eyes gazed vacantly. Pools of blood had congealed around the grotesquely disfigured head. Without its horn, the imposing creature looked as vulnerable as a baby.

I could see my own turmoil mirrored in the rangers' faces. In Africa, the war against poachers is intensely personal. There are two types of poacher: the local tribesman looking for something small for the pot; and the heavyweights, the professional killers, who want rhino horn and elephant ivory, who will shoot a ranger then brag about it. Poaching any animal is a crime, but kill-

ing a rhino or elephant is not shooting to feed a hungry family. It's blood money. And it's an intimate, violent invasion of our lives.

'Who found the body?'

Bheki, my most trusted ranger, looked up and pointed at a young Zulu guard, Simelane, standing a little way off. I beckoned for him to come over. 'Sawubona, Simelane,' I greeted him. 'What happened here?'

'Sawubona, Mkhulu. I was on patrol when I saw the dead rhino,' he replied quietly, staring at the ground.

'Who was with you?'

'I was alone.'

'You were on patrol out here all alone?' I asked, surprised. Poaching patrols always consisted of two armed men.

'Yes, I was alone.' He was barely whispering.

I was about to press forward with the questioning when a loud Zulu voice interrupted me.

'Mkhulu, there is too much blood.'

It was Bheki, down on one knee closely examining the rhino's head. 'There is too much blood,' he repeated. 'That means they were in a hurry. They took the horns while she was still alive. Maybe unconscious, but alive.'

For a moment we just stared at Bheki. Then it sank in. These monsters had hacked the horn off a living animal.

'Which way did they go?' I asked Bheki, who had been at my side in several firefights with poachers over the past decade.

He pointed east. 'Four, maybe five hours ago.'

That meant that unless they were in hiding, they would be almost out of the reserve and heading towards the townships, where we would never catch them. However, that didn't mean we wouldn't try. At the very least, it would give us something physical to do to vent our fury.

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHORS

LAWRENCE ANTHONY

with Graham Spence



THE LAST RHINOS

The Powerful Story of One Man's Battle to Save A Species

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THE LAST RHINOS

We have FIVE copies of *The Last Rhinos* by the late Lawrence Anthony to give away. To stand a chance to win your copy of this insightful and moving book from the author of the bestselling *The Elephant Whisperer*, e-mail your name and contact details to sarah@africageographic.com

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reader evenings 100% rhinos

28 March 2012

THE RHINO POACHING CRISIS: A PERSPECTIVE FROM SANPARKS

As the organisation responsible for the largest number of South Africa's rhinos, SANParks' response to the current surge in rhino poaching is of the utmost importance. Conservation services director Hector Magome talks us through what they are up against, and the measures they are taking.

WHERE Cape Union Mart Adventure Centre, Eastgate, Johannesburg
WHEN 18h30 **RSVP** E-mail egac@capeunionmart.co.za

4 April

IS OPENING THE TRADE IN RHINO HORN THE ANSWER?

Much has been made in the popular media about how legalising a controlled trade in rhino horn may be one of the strategies for countering the current rhino poaching crisis. Investigative journalist Ian Michler and environmental economist Michael 't Sas-Rolfes get down to the nitty-gritty and debate the merits - and potential pitfalls - of such a step.

WHERE Cape Union Mart Adventure Centre, Canal Walk, Cape Town
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