

A Price on Their Head

Chester Zoo is involved in an initiative to prevent the number of black rhinos *Diceros bicornis* in Africa plummeting as a result of a dramatic surge in illegal poaching.

A global increase in demand for rhino horn to supply the traditional Asian medicine market - where it is wrongly believed to be a cure for everything from nightmares to dysentery - has intensified the situation in recent times.

Emerging markets in Vietnam and an upsurge in the supply of arms used to hunt rhino have further added to the problem.

Chester Zoo is attempting to combat this by paying 'informers'. It is essentially rewarding anyone who can 'shop a rhino poacher'.



For those who supply concrete information leading to the recovery of rhino horn, the reward is 20,000 Kenyan shillings, the equivalent to £138. Intelligence that leads to the arrest of dealers is worth KSh 30,000 (£207).

Scott Wilson, Chester Zoo's conservation officer, said: "To underscore the importance of intelligence gathering - one decent piece of intelligence can potentially be more vital than a month's worth of 24/7 patrolling."

The scheme - which is being trialled in the Laikipia district of Kenya - has the approval of the Kenyan Wildlife Service (KWS) who see it as critical for rhino protection.

After the black rhino population fell dramatically at the hands of indiscriminate poaching in the 1980s, the Kenyan government adopted a principle of strict protection to safeguard the surviving rhino.

And so, they teamed up with private land owners to create huge, heavily guarded, rhino sanctuaries. The Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries (APLRS) was formed which, mandated by KWS, helps with the conservation of rhinos on private land.

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