

# SENSELESS SLAUGHTER



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**O**ne of the world's oldest rhinos has been unlawfully killed in despicable circumstances.

Thirty eight year old male black rhino Pushmi bled to death from wounds inflicted by the killers' spears.

Pushmi was born on the 9th October 1973 in Tsavo East National Park, Kenya. Scared by a tourist van, Pushmi's mother ran off abandoning her new calf. Pushmi was taken to the Park HQ where the Warden David Sheldrick and his wife, Daphne, were already known for rearing orphaned wildlife, including another rhino named Stroppie, three years older than Pushmi. Reared

together under strict security, the two rhinos thrived and became totally comfortable with humans.

A change in circumstances for David Sheldrick, who was to be promoted to a new position in Nairobi, prompted a reconsideration of the future for the two rhinos. In 1976, Pushmi and Stroppie were moved to a specially prepared area within Solio Game Reserve. They had to be kept separate from the resident rhino population, who would have been fiercely intolerant of any newcomers to their territory. Indeed the odd attempt over the years to try and integrate the two always ended in an unacceptable



PHOTO BY: BENSON IRUNGU

Pushmi with arrow in ear



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**Top Left:** Horn remains of Pushmi.

**Bottom Left:** Spear hole on Pushmi.

**Top Right:** Pushmi with a spear alive

**Middle & Below Right:** Pushmi with a spear on the side.

level of fighting that they fled back to their paddock and its fenced safety.

Effectively tame, the rhinos became a great favourite with visitors who were able to feed sugar cane to them. And so they lived out their peaceful existence until the middle of 2009 when the African-wide threat from the ever increasing demand for rhino horn struck the Kenyan populations. Attacks on tame rhinos held in similar circumstances to those of Pushmi and Stroppie prompted a national decision

to dehorn all other such rhinos. Despite their advancing age, when the effect of the necessary anaesthetic can be deadly, both survived the operation. Regrettably, 40-year-old Stroppie died of old age in its sleep a few months later.

Pushmi seemed unaffected from being alone and continued to thrive.

But one morning in August 2011, rangers found Pushmi standing in the paddock with an arrow dangling from its right ear. More arrows were found which had fortunately missed their target. Veterinary intervention was needed to remove the arrow and once again this was successful. The intruders had put poison on the tip of the arrows which, had one penetrated a more muscular part of the rhino, would have immobilised the rhino so the horn stubs could be removed. Even these stubs were now of sufficient value to kill for, so the vet removed as much of them as possible.

Despite heavier protection, the gang, although having failed, was not to be deterred. They came again in June 2012 but this time with two iron spears which they threw into the rhino's sides. But Pushmi was a tough rhino and did not succumb to this attack for the intruders to get its horns. They fled before daylight leaving one of the spears hanging out of Pushmi's left flank and a spear wound in its right flank. There was much blood on the grass in the paddock but Pushmi was still standing so the vet was called for. What could not be seen was the damage to the heart and the internal bleeding. Before the vet could intervene, Pushmi died and the post mortem confirmed that the vet could not, in any case, have saved it.

So, after 38 years and 7 months of peaceful existence, the life of one of the world's oldest rhinos ended in tragic circumstances – simply senseless slaughter. ●