

# Granny Turned Rhino Activist



By  
Margot Stewart



*"Hands off our rhino and hands off our reserves!"*

### A Note from Margrit Harris with Nikela

I met Margot in the Outraged SA Citizens Against Poaching group on Facebook. I was impressed by her comments, in particular one where she feared that a rhino she'd previously spotted on an ordinary trip to the game reserve was now lost to a poacher's bullet.

I sensed a transformation in this everyday grandmother who now fiercely advocated for the protection of the rhino. She even presented to the South African Parliament in the recent Rhino Hearings. Go! Granny Go!

**445 Rhino killed for their horn in 2011 in South Africa**

**Already over 100 lost in less than 3 months of 2012**

This ebook is the story she told when I asked her about her experience.

***Please note NIKELA does not endorse or condemn the reserves mentioned in this publication. This is solely the experience of the author and presented to illustrate her transformation from everyday mother to wildlife activist.***

Rhino photo by Andrew Cairncross

*You can see more of Andrew's work on Facebook*

<http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=556396829>

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**Nikela** Helping People Saving Wildlife

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I took ownership of my new SUV in April 2011 and then three months later in the July I put her through her paces on a trip to Tembe Game Reserve for my daughter and I. This was my first venture into the exciting world of the 4 X 4 owner!

Previously a destination like Tembe was off limits to me but now, at last, I had the vehicle to tackle the rigours of a trip so far north into the “wilderness” of Northern Natal. On the way up we broke our journey for one night at Hilltop Camp in the Hluhluwe Game Reserve and on the way home we stayed overnight at a B & B in St. Lucia.

We felt a little trepidation at taking the trip on our own and took turns in bolstering each other up. As you will read further on, there was no reason for any fear or doubt.

## **The First Trip:**

All arrangements complete, we set off on a crisp Wednesday morning and hit the N2 north from Durban.

We breezed along and after a bit of confusion found the road to the Hluhluwe / iMfolozi Game Reserve to arrive at Nyalazi Gate. We were anxious to get to Hilltop Camp as soon as possible so drove directly there.

The drive was a huge let down... we saw very little game. A few buck, a zebra or two and a giraffe in the distance. And a rather large baboon on the road near Hilltop gave us a fright!

We settled in to our unit and then rushed to the meeting point for the evening game drive.

It was drizzling and very cold but the ranger in charge took good care of us, providing us with lots of blankets and a tarpaulin. We snuggled in and set off

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full of expectation but again there was very little to see. The highlight of the drive was when we bumped into a herd of buffalo - literally.

The driver switched off the engine and for a few minutes we enjoyed a really close up encounter with them, some even within touching distance. I don't remember seeing much else on that drive, except a few buck and we arrived back, cold, wet and rather disappointed. The ranger apologized for the lack of sightings, blaming the weather. We evicted a small scorpion from the lounge and because it was still raining, we ended up frying our boerewors on the stove.

The next morning after a slow start, and after partaking of the hearty breakfast buffet we hit the road North to Tembe. I was pleasantly surprised to find the going very good. Excellent roads all the way to Tembe gate and easy to find. The only catch being that one cannot drive more than 80 to 100 kms per hour on this highway, due to the local communities living so close to the road. There are many speed bumps and lots of pedestrians and farm animals traversing the route.

## The Contrast:

In contrast to our 3 day visit to Hluhluwe / iMfolozi, Tembe was a revelation. We were allocated a luxury safari tent, the food was good, the game plentiful and the service sublime. Included in the daily rate are 2 game drives, early morning and late afternoon. Our ranger took a personal interest in each one of us and went all out to provide us with amazing, once in a life time, close up experiences with elephant, lion and others. The rhino were shy but we did see them a few times, mostly a view of their bottoms, tails held high as they trotted away from us. You may drive around the park on your own if you have a 4 X 4 and I actually got to engage the Suzi into 4H to maneuver the roads that resemble small sand dunes!

Tembe is the kind of place where on the day you have to depart; you check your credit card limit to see if you can possibly eke out enough to stay a little longer. Unfortunately mine wasn't elastic enough.

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The trip back to Durban also went smoothly and our overnight stay at St. Lucia was a delight. So much so that I decided there and then to book a week in St. Lucia over the Xmas holidays.

## **The Return:**

December saw me back at St. Lucia again, this time camping with my sister and her family from Johannesburg and reunited with my daughter and precious grandchildren just arrived from a freezing England. I could not wait to take the children into the game reserve and the perfect opportunity arrived one overcast and drizzly day. We set off early to spend the maximum time in the park which is about an hour's drive away.

Once again, it was slim pickings. But because this was 5 year old Emily's second only visit to a game reserve and 2 year old Zac's first they were captivated by even the smallest encounter. As we'd done a few months earlier we arrived at the Nyalazi Gate and it we intended to take a slow drive through to Memorial Gate in the east and then back to St Lucia.

It was immensely annoying to drive kilometer after kilometer and not see any game!! Hluhluwe is a hilly park and at times the view stretches away for 10 or more kilometres, and yet there was no game in sight! Just before we got to Hilltop camp I noticed a dirt road that looped off and travelled down to the river before meeting up with the tarred road again just before the gate. Now in possession of a 4 X 4, I decided to take the road less travelled in the hope of producing a few more sightings for the children.

At the lowest point we came across an absolutely huge male giraffe right on the verge, calmly grazing. What a delight it was to wind down the window and allow Zac to gaze for the very first time at this gorgeous animal only 2 metres from us. What a privilege it was for me to show him the wild animals of Africa for the first time.

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## The Rhino:

And then, (delight of delights!) a movement caught my eye a little further up the road and I saw a humongous lone rhino make his way slowly towards the road. A rhino at last! They really do exist.

A few days after I got back from my camping trip to St. Lucia the news broke of the 9 rhino carcasses that were found all on one day in the Kruger National Park. (January 9<sup>th</sup> 2012). I had been aware of scandals revolving around rhino poaching and the pseudo-hunting etc.

## The Activist:

It struck me that something seriously wrong was afoot and that I just had to get involved and try and make a difference. Since then I have educated myself on the subject of rhino poaching and joined various Facebook pages.

Our Rhinos are being decimated by poachings to obtain their horns which are extremely valuable on the black market.

Another lesser known scandal is that something like 200 rhinos have been shipped to China under a cloak of secrecy and are presently being incarcerated in small enclosures and concrete pens which is in direct contravention of CITES regulations.

These rhinos are originally from the National and Provincial Parks of South Africa which are a part of our heritage. In essence they belong to the citizens and/or taxpayers of South Africa and the Government and Parks Boards are their custodians on our behalf.

So when we visit the National & Provincial Parks we expect to see game, not acres and acres of empty veld and then finding out that game is being sold off to private farmers who abuse and murder them or sent overseas for dubious farming experiments.

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## You too can make a difference!

Find out how Margot does it by connecting with her via Facebook

<http://www.facebook.com/messages/691647138#/!margot.stewart1>

Learn about and get involved with **Nikela Rhino Rescue**

You can help **Save the Last Rhinos**

<http://www.nikela.org/portfolio/stop-rhino-poaching>

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