

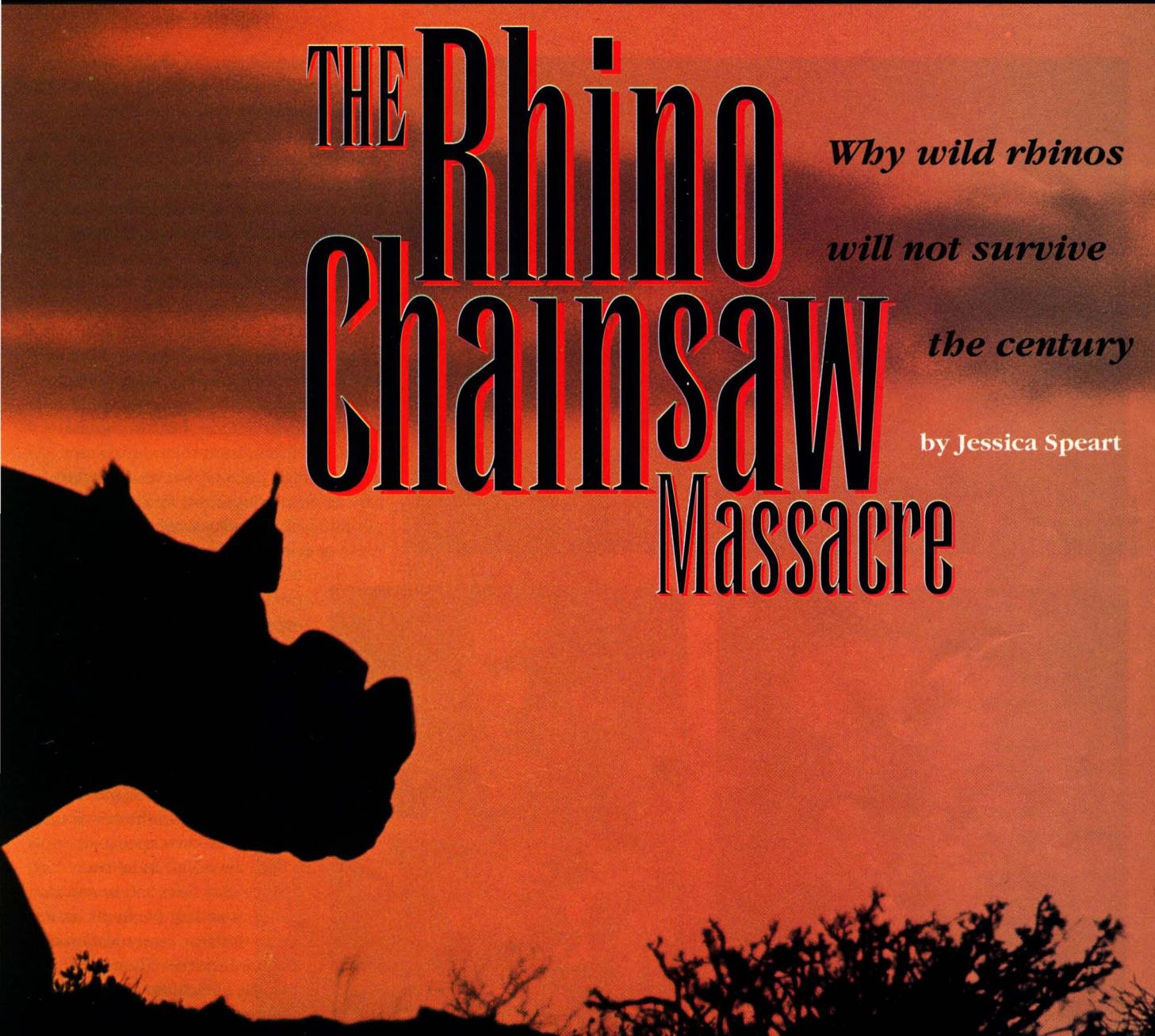


The sun sets on the rhino.
A once spectacular image of wild Africa is reduced to a pitiful scene as a female rhino, her horns cut off by desperate conservationists, her calf lost to opportunistic hyenas, walks alone and vulnerable in the Namibian bush.

The roar of a chainsaw rips through the air of an otherwise placid morning. Shot by a dart gun, the rhinoceros lies in a drug-induced daze as the seven men from Zimbabwe's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWLM) hover around him. The men are here to carry out a

policy they hope will save the lives of the animals. Without their horns, which are considered more precious than gold, rhinos would no longer be the target of poachers. The steel teeth of the saw slice into horn, sending a shower of shreds in all directions. Nearby, two game scouts kneel and, licking their

fingers, carefully pick up the shavings from the dust, discreetly pocketing them. With another rhino dehorned, the men pack to leave, taking the horns with them. These are two more horns that the government got before the poachers did. Two more horns to be added to Zimbabwe's growing stockpile.



THE Rhino Chainsaw Massacre

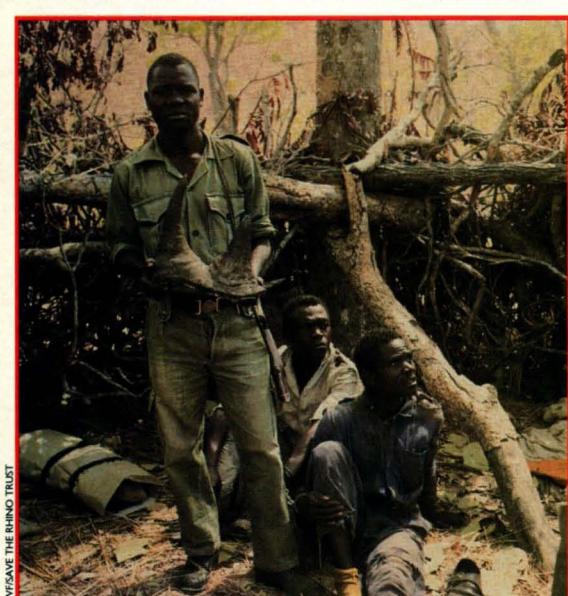
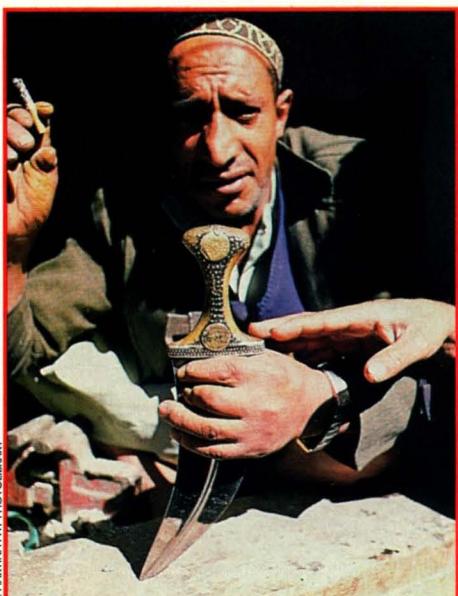
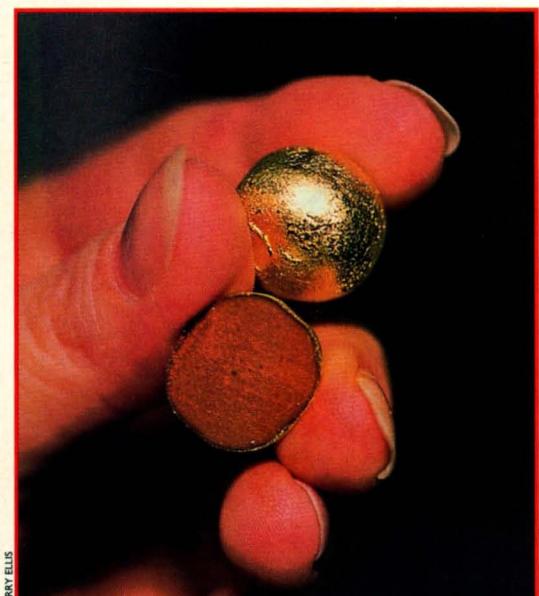
*Why wild rhinos
will not survive
the century*

by Jessica Speart

For four days, Pirri has been tracking through the bush for rhino, but lately it has taken him longer to find the beasts. With the sun already up in the deep blue African sky, the heat is intense. Dry grass crackles beneath his feet as his thoughts turn to home, across the river in Zambia, where his wife and two children wait to

be fed. Reaching the water hole, Pirri's heart beats faster as he spots fresh spore. Following the spore, he catches sight of the animal just ahead, with a large white number painted on its rump, placed there by park officials as a warning that no horn will be found. Pirri lifts the AK-47 and takes aim. He has been assured that he will be paid

for the rhino's death, even if it has no horn. The men he works for want *all* rhinos killed, to make the horn more valuable than ever. All that is needed as proof of the deed are two ears and the tail. Pirri pulls the trigger, and the bullet tears into the animal's brain. There is one less rhino to search for in Zimbabwe.



Trail of the rhino horn. A rhino killed by poachers lies dead in Kenya (top), a bloody stump showing where the horn was removed. A Yemeni man (above right) in Sanaa displays his jambia, or dagger, with its handle made of rhino horn. More precious than gold, the demand in Asia for traditional medicines made from rhino horn, such as rhino horn tea balls (above left), finances the poaching trade. Rhino poachers arrested at their camp in Zambia (left). Poachers are usually killed under Zimbabwe's "shoot to kill" policy, which gives government officials permission to shoot if poachers try to escape. About 160 to 200 poachers have been killed in the last few years. If convicted of poaching, their sentences vary greatly.

In a spectacular free fall, the 65,000 black rhinos that roamed Africa's plains in 1970 now number no more than 2,000. But they are not the only rhinos in trouble.

Among the first species to be placed under the protection of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Appendix I, which bans international trade in endangered species, the black rhino was listed alongside the Indian, Javan, Sumatran and white rhino. After 20 years of CITES protection, all five species hover closer to extinction than ever before.

Considered an essential ingredient of Asian traditional medicine, particularly as a proven fever reducer, but also occasionally as an aphrodisiac, rhino horn commands a high price on the black market. African horn brings in as much as \$3,000 per kilo (2.2 pounds), while horns from Asian species, which are rarer and smaller,

can command 12 times that price. But the assault on rhinos comes from other fronts as well: The horn is often used for ornate dagger handles in Yemen because it is easy to carve and because of its significance to the Yemeni culture, whose men wear daggers out of pride and as a reminder of their tribal heritage. The African rhino is also a pawn on its own continent, where the horn has helped finance civil wars and unrest. These mounting pressures have led to the near extermination of an entire species. They have also left a fractured conservation community, producing more opinions than protected rhinos.

With black rhinos reduced to small isolated pockets in Kenya, Tanzania, Namibia and South Africa, Zimbabwe has long been considered the black rhino's last stronghold. In 1992, Zimbabwe committed itself to a full-scale dehorning operation of all its rhinos, of which black rhinos numbered 1,500. A little more than one year later, that black rhino population has dropped to 296 animals. According to a DNPWLM document, at the present rate of killing, black rhinos in Zimbabwe are unlikely to survive past 1994.

While much of the poaching in Zimbabwe is done by gangs that slip over the border from Zambia, many of the dead dehorned rhinos appear to have been killed by a more local source. In 1992, the Zimbabwe government moved 14 rhinos onto a private ranch for better protection. Within eight months, all were found dead.

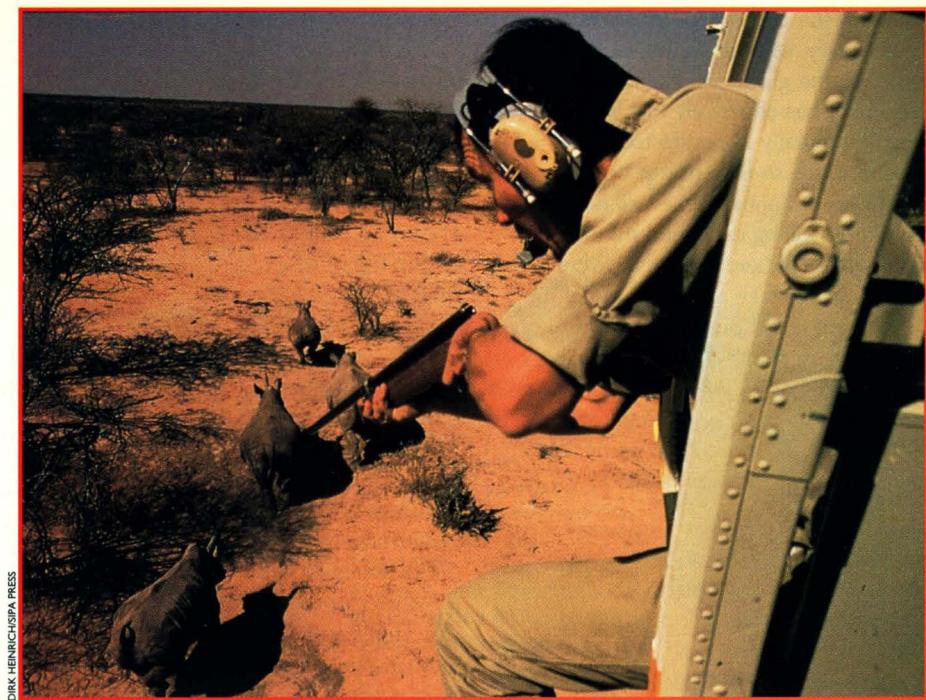
Evidence points to the rancher's scouts, who were paid to guard the rhinos. At Midlands Conservancy in Zimbabwe, two rhinos were recently found dead, shot with a .303 caliber rifle, the standard issue of local Zimbabwe police and military. Last September, 90 white rhinos were found slaughtered inside Hwange National Park; 84 of the rhinos had been dehorned. What has gone wrong?

In December 1992, DNPWLM was forced to surrender its remaining budget for the fiscal year to the government. Left completely broke, all anti-poaching patrols were brought to a halt for the first five months of 1993, and 261 game scouts were let go. Zimbabwe's rhinos were free for the taking to any poacher with a gun.

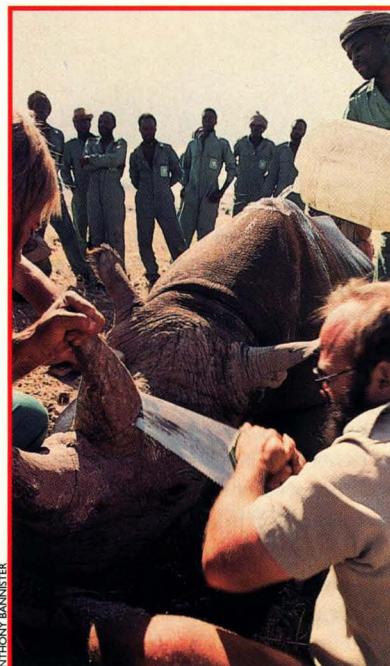
But dehorning operations continued, financed mainly by outside sources. Containing all the elements of high drama, dehorning was able to garner vast amounts of free publicity along with major dollars from conservation groups, making Zimbabwe more than happy to continue with the operation, whether it proved to be working or not. As to why dehorned rhinos are being slaughtered, explanations vary from frustration on the poachers' part, to the possibility that poachers shoot from the rear and don't see that the horn is missing, to the fact that enough nub of horn is left on a dehorned rhino to make killing the animal worthwhile. But the most intriguing theory is based on the speculation that traders and entrepreneurs from Asia and Africa are

banking on the extinction of a species. "If I were a businessman, and I had a stockpile of rhino horns, it might behoove me to see that all rhinos were killed because it would cause the price of horns to rise," says Dr. Bill Morrill of Safari Club International, a pro-hunting conservation group based in Herndon, Virginia. It is a theory many agree with as the wave of poaching works its way over the continent.

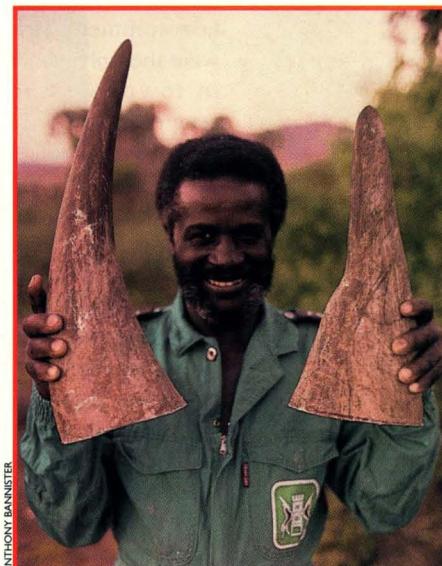
"There's no clean way to say that dehorning per se hasn't worked," says Joel Berger of the University of Nevada, who has been involved in a study on the effects of dehorning. "The goal of dehorning is to diminish the value of rhinos, to devalue



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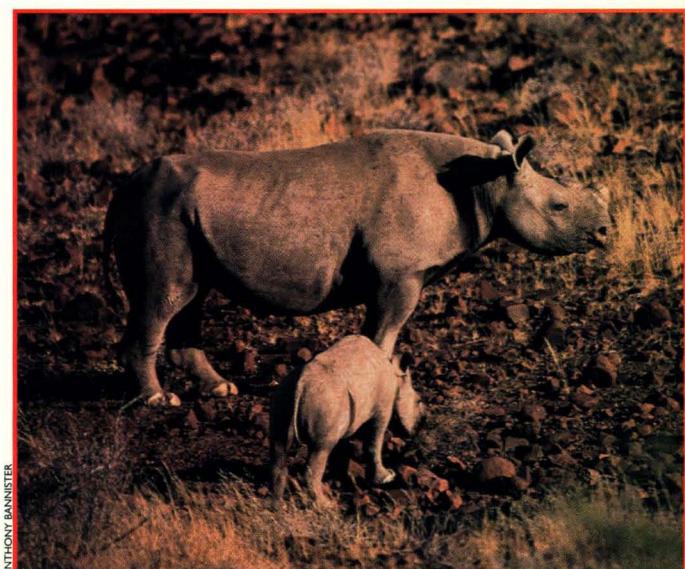
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Sometimes a great notion . . . the dehorning process is costly and complicated, and its effectiveness is debated. In Namibia, a wildlife agent aims a tranquilizer gun (above) from a helicopter at a group of rhinos. A drugged rhino has its horn sawn off (far left) in a dehorning experiment in Namibia. A Namibian wildlife official (left) displays horns removed by conservationists rather than poachers.

Several African countries now sit on millions of dollars worth of confiscated or dehorned horn, and there is mounting pressure to lift the ban on international trade. A dehorned rhino and her calf (right). Without her horn, the mother rhino has difficulty protecting her calf from predators such as hyenas and lions.



ANTHONY BANNISTER

rhinos in the eyes of the poacher."

However, without an anti-poaching squad on the ground to back it up, dehorning has effectively lost whatever benefit it initially hoped to have. When poachers face so little risk of being caught, as in Zimbabwe, even the smaller rewards of killing dehorned rhinos are worthwhile. "Where before we were actually arguing to take the horns off so the department could put itself in control of the rhinos, in fact the opposite has happened: You have almost increased the risk for these animals," claims Jorgen Thomsen of the wildlife conservation group Traffic International (a division of World Wildlife

What can you do to help preserve rhinos?

- Donate money to conservation organizations that are involved in rhino conservation and species survival programs.

These organizations include the Animal Survival Center/Virginia Zoological Society, 3500 Granby St., Norfolk, VA 23504; International Rhino Foundation, 85 E. Gay St., Ste. 603, Columbus, OH 43215, (614) 228-0402; World Wildlife Fund, 1250 24th St. NW, Washington, DC 20037, (202) 293-4800; Traffic USA (a division of WWF), 1250 24th St. NW, Washington, DC 20037, (202) 778-9699; Traffic International, 219c Huntingdon Rd., Cambridge CB3 ODL, England, (011) 44 223 277 427; African Wildlife Foundation, 1717 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Ste. 602, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 265-8393; Wildlife Conservation Society, 185th St. and Southern Blvd., Bronx, NY 10460, (718) 220-5197.

- Use the political system to influence countries that trade in rhino horn and rhino products. Contact your congressperson and/or senators and the President, and ask them to continue pressuring countries to stop the trade in rhino horn. Conducting letter-writing or telephone campaigns is one of the most effective ways to get your message to the people who have the power to change the current situation.

- Support zoos participating in Species Survival Programs. There are 69 zoos in the US that house rhinos; since 1982, all zoos must agree to participate in a Species Survival Program if they want to have rhinos.

Fund) based in Cambridge, England.

"Nobody expected dehorning to work by itself," Berger comments. "It needs to be combined with effective anti-poaching protection. Dehorning was a last-ditch solution . . . and a short-term solution for areas where it is too expensive to protect rhinos. There was little to lose by dehorning."

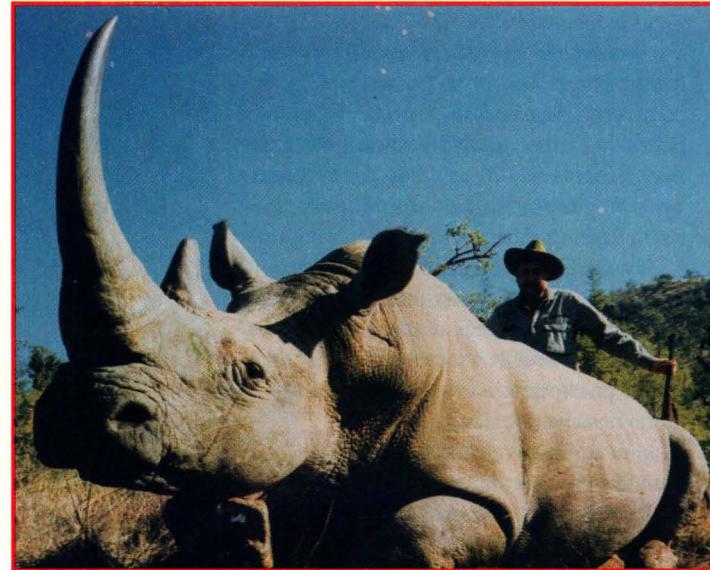
But dehorning has had other repercussions as well. With a dehorning program in place since 1989, Namibia's rhino population suffered a heavy loss this past summer. Without their horns, female rhinos are at a disadvantage when it comes to protecting their young. Though rhino calves have always been a target for hyenas, last summer they were the only game in town. With a severe drought, all other game animals normally available to hyenas virtually disappeared. While the female rhinos that still had not been dehorned were able to protect their calves from attacks by hyenas, those that had been dehorned lost every one of their young.

The other drawback to dehorning is that it is not a one-time act. With an annual growth rate of nine centimeters for both horns together, it is only a matter of two years before the horn is once again big enough to promise a significant financial incentive for poachers. To keep the reward of rhino poaching low, the dehorning process would have to be continually repeated. It has yet to be calculated what the exact cost would be to continue dehorning wild rhinos across Africa, but according to data maintained by Traffic International, basic operational costs, excluding salaries, could exceed \$2 million per year.

As to other ways in which the animal is affected by the loss of its horn, the jury is still out, and a study is in progress. "The fact that the horn has sustained 60 million years of evolution is pretty fair evidence that it has selective advantage for the animal," says Dr. Joseph C. Daniel, Professor of Biological Science at Old Dominion University in Virginia, who is involved in

a research program on white rhinos.

On September 10, 1993, Zimbabwe's minister of the environment, Herbert Murerwa, admitted the government's dehorning operation had failed to stop poaching. The remaining rhinos were now to be moved into small areas known as Intensive Protective Zones, where they would be more heavily guarded, an approach that



In South Africa, a trophy hunter stands by his prize. With more than 5,000 white rhinos, South Africa allows hunters to pay around \$12,000 to kill a rhino. The government says the program provides money for rhino conservation, and that only older rhinos are targeted.

has worked well in Kenya. But Zimbabwe is also continuing its dehorning operation. While dehorning

doesn't guarantee that a rhino will be protected, it does guarantee that the government will get the horns before poachers do. In a country that is fighting to lift the CITES ban on trade in rhino horn, millions of dollars worth of horns are being added to Zimbabwe's voluminous stockpile, estimated to be close to three tons.

More disturbing is the revelation that a number of Zimbabwean locals have turned to poaching, forming a pipeline in conjunction with poachers from Zambia. Receiving \$100 to \$360 per horn has proved to be more than enough incentive to poachers in countries such as Zambia, where the average income is less than \$290 a year. "If you can't pay your staff well enough, they get involved with poaching themselves. And in Zimbabwe, it's pretty much open season, isn't it?" says one South African official. "There's lots of corruption in the Zimbabwean government. There's corruption in the Department of National Parks. People who know about it are terrified to speak up, because they'll either be bumped off or thrown out of their jobs. It's as bad as that."

But cases are known and talked about. The Minister of Parliament from Zengeza, Zimbabwe, was convicted, along with six others, in January 1993 for illegal possession of two rhino horns. In July 1992, four members of the Zimbabwe Central Intelligence Organization, which has direct ties to the President's office, were caught in Harare with two rhino horns. During 1987 and 1988, Gonarezhou National Park's rhino population plunged at the hands of the Zimbabwean army. Also involved in the poaching were officials within DNPWLM, who have yet to be charged or investigated, including those still in decision-making positions. Cover-up after cover-up continues, including ones for murder. One captain in the Zimbabwean army stumbled onto a poaching ring within his own unit. When he tried to expose it, his murder was covered over as a suicide. In two separate instances, diplomats from North Korea were discovered with rhino horns stashed in diplomatic pouches.

Zambia has long been known as a springboard for poachers into Zimbabwe. Weapons found in Zimbabwe have been traced to officials highly placed in former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda's United National Independence Party, some of whom still hold office in Zambia. And South Africa's military was previously involved in using the elephant ivory and rhino horn trade to fund insurgent groups Unita and Renamo in Angola and Mozambique.

With a population of only 1,900 Indian rhinos, rhinos in Asia are equally hard-hit by poaching. Gangs in Kaziranga National Park in northeast India cut high tension lines, letting them drop to a height of two to three feet above rhino paths, so that the animals are electrocuted. It was here that between 1979 and 1989, 500 Indian rhinos were poached. In 1992, 48 rhinos in India were killed, and a total of 46 had been killed in 1993, as of October. In 1992 in Chitwan National Park in Nepal, 11 rhinos were killed for their horns. The accuracy of such figures, however, is questionable at best; for every carcass found, at least two others are never discovered, according to DNPWLM in Zimbabwe. In a bizarre case last September, a Bhutanese princess attempted to smuggle 22 rhino horns into Taiwan to raise cash for a bottling company she owns. The princess' factory is located near Manas National Park, home to the second-largest population of the decimated Indian rhino.

"It's the middlemen who drive the trade

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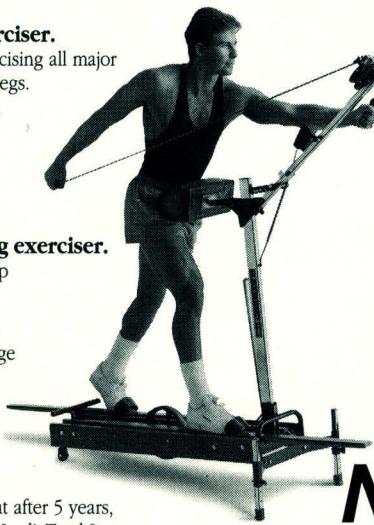
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The Rhino Chainsaw Massacre

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and who are dealing in rhino horn, as a commodity, just like diamonds or drugs or arms and ammunition. They are often senior government officials and, until we have the guts to face this in the open, the trade will go on," declares Dr. John Hanks of the South African Nature Foundation. But when questioned about a mysterious trader by the name of Pong, Dr. Hanks abruptly changed the subject—as did nearly everyone else. Known as the Asian Godfather, Pong has long been reputed to be the biggest dealer in South Africa and one of the men who control the trade. Because Pong has ties with the South African military, his high-level connections make him untouchable. It is believed by some that South Africa is where much of the horn from Zimbabwe ends up.

In June 1993, eight African countries met and created what has become known as the Lusaka Agreement, a proposal to form an international task force that would cross borders from one country to another in pursuit of wildlife poachers. Zimbabwe refused to attend the meeting. Zimbabwe has also actively opposed any future action that might be taken by the US to embargo wildlife products from China and Taiwan, the two biggest consumer countries that continue to illegally trade in rhino horn.

While the conservation community has given millions of dollars to purchase anti-poaching equipment for Africa, until now very little effort—and even less money—has been spent on attempts to stem the demand. Although Taiwan has five to six tons of horn and China has amassed 8.5 tons, Zimbabwe and South Africa are also sitting on stockpiles worth millions of dollars. At

the CITES meeting in Kyoto, Japan, in 1992, both Zimbabwe and South Africa argued that lifting the ban would lower the price of rhino horn, thereby undermining the black market and supplying countries with needed money for rhino protection. But, according to a report by Traffic International, such a low value-priced scheme would generate minimal revenue and might even need government subsidies in order to function.

"Many of us are very skeptical over the whole argument of legalization," contends Mike Sutton of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). "You've got 3 billion Asians and no more than a couple of thousand black rhinos left, if that. I'm not going to take odds about who would outlast who in that case."

Another way to devalue rhino horn—

More than 600,000 foreign visitors bring tourist dollars into Zimbabwe each year, and according to a recent report by the Humane Society of the US, Zimbabwe earned \$83 million from wildlife viewing in 1992. In fiscal year 1993-1994, the DNPWLM was allocated \$5.7 million, less than \$1 million of which will be spent on wildlife protection. The remaining bulk of money earned through tourism vanishes into Zimbabwe's Central Treasury. According to an Emergency Draft released by DNPWLM, the department will once again find itself without funds in the first six months of 1994. Exceedingly poor pay and corruption high within its own ranks has led to low morale within the department.

But other circumstances leave those who work in the field equally frustrated.

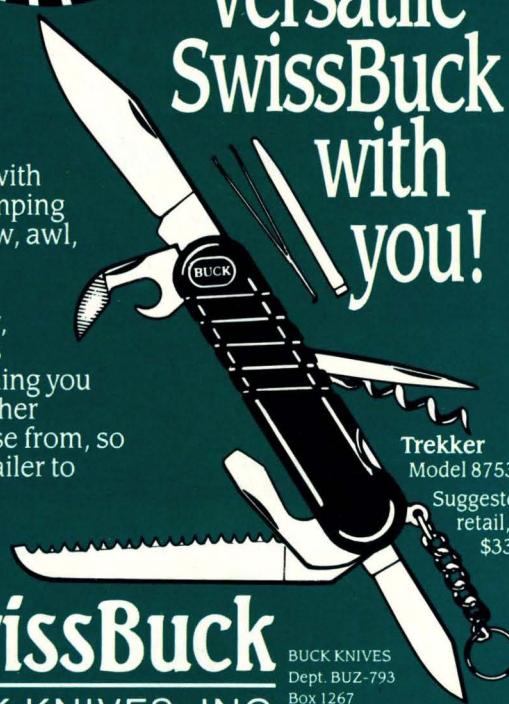
"There have been a number of unique cir-

cumstances that have happened to wildlife personnel where airplanes don't function when they're supposed to. We're left to wonder if it's an inside job," claims one western source. Other problems include a donated \$300,000 Cessna 206 aircraft that sat on a runway for seven months before finally being cleared by Customs. And more times than not, a jeep is not on hand when needed. Taken away from the men in the field who need the jeeps for patrol, the vehicles are left sitting at the head office for use by higher officials. Perhaps most indicative of the problem is that a

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cloning—is being researched by Dr. Daniel. According to Dr. Daniel, cells at the base of the rhino horn trigger the keratin growth that forms the horn; if these cells can be duplicated, a material could be made with identical characteristics of natural horn, perhaps providing a substitute for illegal horn in the black market. At this point, however, this work is theoretical.

document recommending the creation of Intensive Protective Zones languished with the Ministry of the Environment for two years. In a report released by Traffic International, blame is put on Zimbabwe's shoulders for not turning to this solution sooner, suggesting this has been the country's greatest failure where the safety of their rhinos is concerned.

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easier by determining connections between sensory inputs and rhino mating. One of the areas being studied is infrasound (sound too low to be heard by humans, but which certain large mammals like rhinos and elephants may use to communicate). Dr. Daniel theorizes that if rhinos "talk to each other" before mating, a recording of such infrasonic wooing might be used to illicit breeding behavior in captive animals. There are, however, still many technical problems in recording and identifying behavioral infrasound and practical application could be years away.

Further complicating embryo transfer is the fact that, so far, Dr. Dresser has not had any rhinos to work with because the facilities that house the animals have been unwilling to loan them out. In theory, the technique would, by introducing new blood lines, provide the genetic diversity for populations too small to reproduce in the wild.

Conservationists argue that a safety net needs to be maintained in the event that rhinos are wiped out in the wild—whether it be through captive breeding or, in the future, through embryo transplant.

The greatest number of black rhinos sent to the US are not found in zoos, but on private wildlife ranches in an area of Texas that has come to be known as Lil' Africa. Many of the wealthy Texan ranch owners are members of Game Conservation International, or Game Coin, an organization of hunters dedicated to the conservation and utilization of wildlife. Many are also members of Safari Club International. The Texas connection began more than 20 years ago when Harry Tennison, board chair of Game Coin, began lobbying African governments to allow exportation of rhino to the

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There has been some limited success in protecting certain populations of rhinos in several countries by making the animals virtually unattainable to poachers. Rhino expert Esmond Bradley Martin of WWF/Kenya attributes the success of South Africa, Kenya and parts of Asia in maintaining their rhinos to the fact that the animals are kept in small, guarded sanctuaries. Nepal has managed to keep its population of Indian rhinos relatively stable in Chitwan National Park, while Sumatran rhinos, which number 500 to 900, are well-guarded in the Taman Negara and Endau Rompin National Parks in Malaysia. The 50 to 70 Javan rhinos remaining in existence reside mainly in a largely inaccessible area of Java, in Ujung Kulon National Park.

In a desperate attempt to conserve the species, scientists have removed a number of rhinos from the wild to be bred in captivity. This practice is just one of the controversies that divide the conservation community into two distinct camps. Those working in the breeding program view it as a reservoir for establishing an additional gene pool, with the ultimate goal of one day restocking Africa with rhinos. The opposition believes the project is a waste of money that could be better spent keeping rhinos safe in the wild.

In 1989, a coalition of zoos, wildlife ranches and conservationists banded together as the International Rhino Foundation and arranged for black rhinos to be shipped out of Zimbabwe. Ten rhinos went to the US and ten went to Australia. In exchange, Zimbabwe received a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter (worth \$500,000) for

dehorning activities, spare parts and a promise to cover operating expenses up to \$300,000, plus further support down the road. Both male rhinos in the Australian group died, as did three rhinos sent to the US. Though the number of births has been good—around 11—one scientist says progress has been slow (with an increase of only one or two calves per year) when calculated against the high mortality rate, due to health problems arising in captivity. Captive Sumatran rhinos also have not fared well, with nine out of 27 dead, and no births to date. However, both the Indian and the white rhinos have responded well to captive breeding.

One possible technique for captive breeding of rhinos is frozen embryo transfer, a technique commonly used with domesticated animals. A female is injected with hormones that will enable her to produce up to 30 eggs. The animal is then artificially inseminated. Once the embryos drop into the uterus, they are collected and frozen, and then implanted into a surrogate mother, who carries the embryo to term.

Dr. Betsy Dresser, a reproductive physiologist and director of research at the Cincinnati Zoo's Center for Reproduction of Endangered Wildlife, has successfully used this process on eland antelope. Rhinos, however, are another matter. With a 15-month gestation period, rhinos are generally pregnant only once every four years, limiting the number of possible births. Before the process can begin, the species' estrus cycle must be determined. "We're light-years away," says Dr. Edward Maruska, executive director of the Cincinnati Zoo. "We can't even determine biochemically when a rhino is in heat."

Dr. Daniel is involved in a study of rhinos that might make captive breeding

US. The group received its first five rhinos for captive breeding from Zimbabwe in 1984. Now Tennison sits on the board of the International Rhino Foundation. There is concern among some conservation groups that the Texans' motive is to breed enough black rhinos to hunt on these same ranches one day. When questioned as to whether this might be a possibility in the future, Dr. Bill Morrill, Conservation Director of Safari Club International, says, "We would support hunting as a means of saving the rhinos—hunting can be what powers the boat of conservation. Rowan Martin [deputy director of the Wildlife Department in Zimbabwe] says if you have even one male that's surplus, that's enough—trophy hunting on that one male will generate income for all the other rhinos."

"The rhinos have to develop economic value for the local people. This has been impeded by the protectionist philosophies," explains Tom Foose of the International Rhino Foundation. Conservationist John Hanks says, "The question that has not been answered is: How are we going to pay for field protection, if we don't go down the route of sustainable utilization?" Dr. Morrill flatly states, "I don't see any incentive for Zimbabwe to save the rhino. I mean, what's the purpose?" The idea of making wildlife pay its own way in order to be saved is a spark threatening to ignite into a conflagration. It raises two questions: What is a rhino worth, and is putting a monetary value on an endangered species a way to increase its chances of survival?

In a bid for foreign currency, Zimbabwe has come up with an action plan, part of which requires a change in the way the conservation community views endangered species. Because the plan calls for trade in rhino horn stockpiles, farmed horn, sport hunting and the sale of live animals, most conservation groups are not embracing it with open arms. "You can't talk sustainable utilization of endangered species very easily," says Mike Sutton of WWF. "You might try first on mud eels in Korea, which are plentiful, rather than experiment with an animal that's got its back against the wall."

"With so little time left and so few animals, experimenting is a very dangerous thing to do," agrees Jorgen Thomsen of Traffic International. In South Africa, sustainable utilization appears to be working in the form of trophy hunting, which has been permitted in the country since the early 1970s. With a white rhino

population that numbers around 5,000, the South African government feels that controlled hunting will not threaten the animals' survival. Although hunters were charged \$35,000 for a trophy hunt two years ago, the cost today is only \$12,000. Dave Wills, vice president of investigations for the Humane Society of the US, attributes the drop in fee to a lack of hunters willing to pay the high price. But Zimbabwe hopes the trophy fee for a *black* rhino would be at least \$100,000 and possibly as high as \$250,000, making it the most valuable trophy in Africa. The fear among Western conservationists is the message this would send, for while it might be a revenue bonanza in the short term, it also indicates to poachers that this is an animal worth risking your life for.

In late 1992, at the behest of Zimbabwe, John Jackson of Safari Club International applied to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for a permit to import the horns from a black rhino (the horns would be removed during a dehorning safari, during which Jackson would dart a rhino). No decision has yet been made by the agency, but few oppose the idea, viewing it as a "green" activity that raises revenue. Others fear that instead of merely bringing home a photograph of his triumphant hunt, Jackson has invented another way to bring in a trophy from an endangered species, eroding the US stand against China and Taiwan and making it all the more difficult to stop illegal trade.

Dr. Bill Morrill of Safari Club International laments this view: "What the West has done to Africa is very cruel. We've been trying to impose our will on how they should manage their resources." In response, David Wills of the Humane Society of the US tells a story about his recent trip to Zimbabwe. "Someone high up in the Parks Department said to me, 'You know, one of the things we don't like about you Americans is that you come over here and tell us what to do with our wildlife. What gives you that right?' I replied, 'Our money.'"

With the rhino slipping closer to extinction each day, it can only be hoped that more common ground will be found on all sides. Otherwise, no rhinos will be left to argue over, and only a stockpile of horns will remain, a hollow reminder that at one time, such a magnificent creature did exist. 

Jessica Speart is a New York-based writer who covers environmental and wildlife topics.

REPAIRING TO THE MOUNTAINS

Continued from page 68

We haven't seen a soul up here for three days. The clouds have been tearing around, occasionally opening up a bit of blue sky to remind us it's still there, or to let us take a peek at part of the sunset through the golden entrails of a cumulus. Spring may be a gradual warming process in lower climes, but in the high country it comes and goes and reverses itself any time it damn well pleases.



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God," says Greta from outside the cabin. "The map was right." She is standing in the snow, eating her cereal and staring south. The clouds have cleared and the Sneffels Range towers over us. Other mountains are clumpy. The San Juans stand up. They are like people with funny hats, or the prows of huge idle ships. We sit on stumps in the snow and look at the ungodly angle of the snowfields above us, at the rock buttresses, the dozens of avalanches and the dervishes of snow that dance along castle-like ridges against a blaring blue sky. These peaks are relatively young—30 million years ago, volcanoes spewed thousands of feet of lava over the reddish sedimentary rock that still characterizes the canyons and edges of San Juan country. The aftermath gives us vertigo. To the north, the foothills below us give way to the wide valley of the Uncompahgre River, where the snow has melted and the cattle graze on brown fields.

The strong sun works wonders on our prone, grateful bodies. When we finally put on our skis, we decide to go our separate ways. "You want to go down," says Greta. "I know you." "You want to go up," I say. "I know you." I take a couple of runs down the glade and stop, feeling the breeze. I must have stood there for a long time. "Liiiiis!" I hear from the top of the ridge. I see a dark figure skiing toward me. I think, I am grateful for the few things that feel familiar. Skiing is familiar. So is Colorado. And if the shape of my sister coming down through the pines is all the reassurance life can give me, then it's a good life after all. 

Contact: San Juan Hut Systems, Box 1663, Telluride, CO 81435, (303) 728-6935. The huts are more spartan, the terrain is more challenging, and the likelihood of seeing other skiers is slimmer than in Colorado's better-known hut systems, such as the 10th Mountain Division Hut Association.