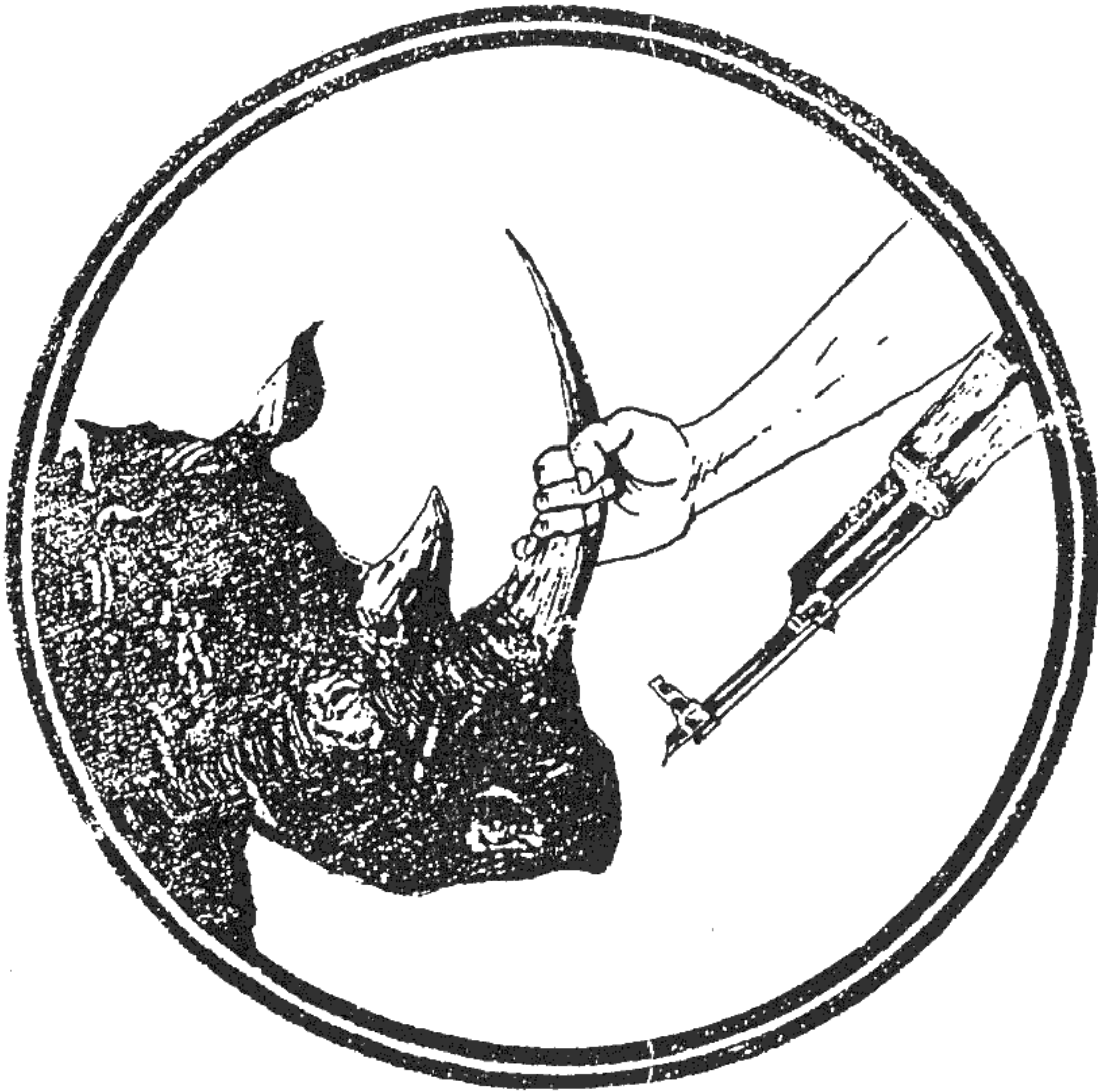


Save African  
Endangered Wildlife  
Foundation  
(Australia)  
20 Onslow Road  
Shenton Park 6008  
Western Australia  
Ph: (09) 382 4040  
Fax: (09) 481 4834 (Att. Jo Lindo)



## CONSERVING THE BLACK RHINOCEROS – THE PROBLEMS AND THE SOLUTIONS

### THE PROBLEMS OF CONSERVATION ARE VARIOUS.

1. **POACHING** – the major cause for the drastic decline in rhino numbers over the last decade has been poaching. The poachers themselves are mostly local tribesmen who are recruited by wealthy 'shadow figures' with the promise of making much money. They are often highly armed with the latest powerful rifles even machine guns. The escalating price per kilo of horn has made poaching a very lucrative business to the extent that locals are prepared to take unreasonable risks while the 'shadow figures' in the background are rarely caught.  
Most of the horn goes to North Yemen where it is fashioned into ceremonial dagger handles. A smaller percentage is exported to Asia for medicinal purposes. Only in the Muslim community of Gujarat in India is the horn used as an aphrodisiac - representing less than 1% of all horn on the world market.
2. **LOSS OF HABITAT** -- in Africa large tracts of land are being cleared for cultivation of crops, to provide grazing for cattle or for firewood. Consequently, the game is forced into small, often isolated pockets with overcrowding becoming a problem. Since these pockets are often surrounded by farmland, straying animals encounter outraged farmers who would rather get rid of the animal than lose their livelihood.
3. **MANAGEMENT** – many of the existing populations are either badly managed or not managed at all. Black rhino have certain habitat requirements which directly affect their survival. For example, having too many elephants might result in the loss of the woodland; a high hyaena population would increase the baby rhino mortality rate to an unacceptable level. Too many rhino in a small area can also be deleterious as the habitat does not have time to regenerate.  
Lack of manpower and equipment play a big part in management of the environment; scattered isolated pockets of animals is very inefficient of manpower.
4. **GENETIC POOL** – latest studies have shown that 1,500 animals is the lowest viable number required to continue the survival of a species without defects arising through interbreeding.  
Each individual animal has a unique set of genes derived from a mixture of genes received from its parents. Because a population consists of interbreeding individuals, it creates a criss-cross of genes known as a genetic pool. It stands to reason the larger this pool the healthier and stronger the species is with greater powers of adaptation to new environments and the greater its chances of long term evolutionary survival.  
Some of the effects of close interbreeding is directly responsible for the demise of a species i.e. low fertility, physical and behavioural abnormalities.

### SOLUTIONS

1. a. **POACHING** – This is only the first link in a three link chain. Effective anti-poaching programs require manpower, equipment (vehicles, two-way radios, etc), good relationships between wildlife staff and the local people, and legislation which enforces suitable punishment. Educating the locals of the value of the wildlife and making sure they obtain tangible benefits from it are extremely important for the long term survival of African wildlife.
- b. The second link concerns the organisation of poaching and smuggling from out of Africa - the middle men. Thankfully most countries concerned have banned the export of rhino products. However, smuggling still carries on, sometimes although legislation exists, it is not enforced. Corruption is no stranger in Africa. Conservation bodies need to continue to put pressure on the governments of non-co-operative countries, and guilty individuals punished as an example, if the rest are to learn.
- c. The third link is the source of the problem – the demand for horn. Many countries have banned the importation of rhino products; however, some don't enforce this and smuggling is very profitable. The amount of horn leaving Africa has decreased because it is now harder to move and sell.  
In North Yemen moves are afoot for legislation to be brought down banning the use of rhino horn for ceremonial dagger handles. The substitution of cattle and buffalo horn are being encouraged to maintain the livelihood of the craftsmen.

2. LOSS OF HABITAT – To maintain suitable habitat for this species, suitable areas should be declared protected areas, alternatives to wood for fuel must be investigated and the habitats must be effectively managed to reduce loss of woodland. The Masai in Kenya are embarking on replanting Acacia seedlings so that lost trees are replaced. Such projects should be initiated elsewhere as well.
3. MANAGEMENT – These are no set rules for managing wild animal populations and their habitats, but there are certain fundamental principles that should be adhered to. Many African countries lack expertise in the field of wildlife management. Possibly more training schemes are needed. Funding is nearly always a problem. Kenya has banned hunting for several years, but hunting can be a useful conservation tool to cull and generate income.
4. To reduce the effects and chances of inbreeding depression, individuals should be periodically relocated to different populations where possible. Combining several smaller populations would also be of great benefit. An overall conservation strategy is needed. This should also involve zoos. About 180 black rhino exist in zoos but their numbers are declining and inbreeding is inevitable. What is needed is a breeding program aimed at maintaining genetic diversity so the entire zoo stock should be initiated into obtaining semen from wild individuals to be used to impregnate captive females, reducing the need to remove individuals from the wild and to boost genetic diversity.

The whole issue is rather involved, but the bottom line is that individuals are being slaughtered daily. What is needed is immediate and direct action against poachers. SAVE enables you to play a direct role in saving this magnificent beast from extinction. REMEMBER – EXTINCTION IS FOREVER.

### THE MAGIC OF MANA by Maureen de la Harpe

It is noon in the Zambezi Valley, and the aged VW has broken down on a dusty road beside a gnarled grey baobab tree. I also have a hangover from a family wedding the night before. The fact that we are in the middle of nowhere, with the chances of another vehicle passing in the next hour or so extremely remote, plus the fact that we are surrounded by freshly-made steaming mounds of elephant droppings, adds a certain spice to what could be a dreary outlook.

The car belongs to my son Derek, and is not renowned for its reliability. The breakdown itself, like the car and its owner, is not without its humorous side – if one can see the funny side of driving along a bush road when your teenage daughter suddenly shrieks “My seat’s on fire!”

We all disembarked hurriedly, though Derek feigned a nonchalance I’m sure he wasn’t feeling. As he removed the back seat and uncovered a smoking battery underneath, Lara stared in horror: “No way am I going to sit on an exploding battery!”

“You would prefer to hitch a ride?” came Derek’s muffled comment as he tinkered with a tangle of wires, emerging finally to smile airily. “No problem really, just the wiring. But Lara, you’ll have to sit still and not wriggle around or you’ll cause problems. OK? Now, come and give me a push – or do you want to stay here and wait for a lift?”

We pushed. Clouds of white dust enveloped us, mopani flies buzzed around our eyes, but the VW coughed, jerked and then wheezed into uncertain life. Lara perched gingerly on the edge of the back seat, testing the temperature every couple of minutes as we chugged towards our destination.

An hour later the parched bush gave way to softer green vegetation and bigger shadier trees. Moving through the shadows we glimpsed herds of dainty impala, a waterbuck lifting its regal head, wildebeeste tossing their comical beards as they galloped after their companions, the zebra, stocky and trim as stuffed toys.

We had arrived at Mana Pools Games Reserve on the banks of the Zambeze River in the far north of Zimbabwe. Magical Mana – a game sanctuary in a remote untouched corner of the world, one of the few reserves in which the animal inhabitants have so little fear of man that campers are able to get out of their vehicles and walk through the bush. Jealously watched over by the National Parks rangers, Mana Pools is open only between May and October, and visitor numbers are restricted.

Mana – now the sanctuary of the largest remaining herd of black rhino in the world, target of poachers from across the river in Zambia, who come in canoes in search of that most prized of trophies – rhino horn.

We drove to our campsite and unloaded our gear beneath a spreading tree overlooking the shining river, anxious to waste no time in setting off the look for wildlife.

\*\*\*\*\*

We had a visitor that night. Sitting around the fire, watching the moon rise in the wide African sky and the steaks sizzle in the flames we were sipping Lion ale and listening to the comforting sound of hippo grunting contentedly in the shallows, when we noticed movement from just beyond the circle of light from the gas lamp.

A neat black and white shape was sniffing at the succulent smell of steak emanating from the fire. It was a honey badger, its smooth black fur coat in striking contrast to the white band that ran from the top of its head to its tail.

It was very shy, so Derek put a small piece of meat on the ground some distance away, and we watched it creep cautiously forward until it was able to snatch up the morsel and melt away into the night.

Each night the creature grew a little bolder until, on our last night it came and took food from a tin two metres from our chairs. It also got into the habit of waking us at night as it sipped water in the plastic bath we used for washing the dishes. It always looked as smooth and suave as a gentleman on his way to the opera, and we felt quite honoured at entertaining so distinguished a guest.

\*\*\*\*\*

After a rewarding viewing on Day 2, during which we saw a herd of elephant enjoying a dust bath, watched magnificent buffalo grazing in a shady glade, laughed at a family of warthogs, and caught a glimpse of black rhino, we were in our sleeping bags early.

We slept in a neat row on stretchers, heads towards the river, feet facing south, sheltered by a tarpaulin strung between two trees. My feet always seemed a long way from my head and consequently very vulnerable – a tempting target for a passing hyena.

We lay and listened to the night sounds – rustles, soft thuds, padding noises, the whistle of a bird, the bark of a jackal, splashes and grunts from the river and the spine-tingling full-throated roar of lion in the distance.

I woke very suddenly about midnight to what sounded like the entire Zimbabwean Army demolishing the camp. Crashing branches, foliage ripped by giant hands, the thump of heavy footsteps and the trampling of long grass – the sounds came from close by, and I saw Lara’s head jerk up out of her sleeping bag: “What’s that?”

“Elephants in the camp,” came Derek’s immediate whisper. “Shush, don’t make a sound.”

We couldn’t actually, though I did open and close my mouth several times. Lara and I clutched hands and lay frozen, listening to the terrifying sounds.

“Would it be a good idea,” I whispered hoarsely, “to go into the shower block until they’ve gone?” I was thinking yearningly of the solid concrete walls as I looked up at the flimsy canvas overhead.

“Wait! I’ll go and have a look,” and Derek melted into the dark while we held our breath.

He was back very soon. “No, you can’t. They’re all around the shower block.”

“How many?”

*Continued back page. . .*

