

Dehorning Rhinos

The first country that tried to reduce the problem of poaching through dehorning was Namibia in the 1990s. Rhinos that were dehorned were not poached. In Kenya, the last surviving white rhino was dehorned and is now being protected by armed guards. The rhino's horn was removed to protect it from poachers. The rhino is also fitted with a radio transmitter so the park can keep track of its movements.

Although dehorning appears to be a solution in some parts of Africa, some conservationists claim it does not help to protect the animals from poachers. In Zimbabwe, a dehorning program resulted in failure because all the rhinos that were dehorned were killed 12-18 months later. Park officials believe that the reason these rhinos were killed is that the dehorning left a stub or a small piece of the horn. If a horn is not cut properly, the remaining part is still taken by poachers.

Another issue with dehorning is that it appears that horns grow back. In fact, recent studies claim that a horn re-grows on a dehorned rhino faster than normal horn growth. Because of this, experts recommend that rhinos need to be dehorned every 12-24 months in order to be effective. However, dehorning is costly: about US \$600-\$1,000 a rhino. If it has to be done more than once, this would create financial problems for many National Parks.

Another reason that the dehorned rhinos may have been killed is that the poachers shot them from a distance and were not aware that the rhinos had been dehorned. It is for this reason that some conservationists are against the dehorning method as a solution to poaching.

Poaching

Definition: Poaching means illegally hunting, killing, or capturing wild animals.

Oxford English Dictionary (2012) Oxford: Oxford University Press



VALUE OF RHINO HORN

(Per ounce)



SOURCE: United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Poaching Problems in South Africa

Rhinos were once abundant throughout Africa and Asia with a worldwide population of approximately half a million in the early 20th century. However, despite intensive conservation efforts, poaching or illegal hunting is dramatically increasing, pushing the remaining rhinos closer and closer towards extinction. It is also important to remember that it is not only rhinos that are affected by the rhino-poaching crisis. The savannah grasslands, where they live, are also affected. New research published in the Journal of Ecology details some of the negative impact on the ecosystem. It found that other animals which rely on the savannah for their food are also suffering.

There are about 20,400 southern white rhinos in Africa. South Africa, which has by far the largest population of rhinos in the world, is also an important country for rhino conservation. However, rhino poaching has reached a crisis point, and if the killing continues at this rate, rhino deaths may exceed rhino births in the next two years. This means that the rhinos could be extinct in the very near future.

Poaching is the result of the illegal trade in rhino horn. Globalisation and economic growth has made it easier to establish illegal trading routes. The current poaching crisis is due to the growing demand for rhino horn in Asian countries, mainly Vietnam and China. Vietnam has been identified as the largest user country of rhino horn. Although rhino horn has no scientific medical benefits, it is highly valued in traditional Chinese medicine and so consumers use it to treat a wide range of conditions, from cancer to thyroid conditions.

As the price for the horns has increased, international criminal gangs are now becoming involved in poaching. They are using high-tech equipment to track down and kill the rhinos. Often they use a

tranquilliser gun to bring the rhino down and cut off its horn. This does not kill the rhino, but knocks it out, thus leaving it to wake up and bleed to death very painfully and slowly. Poachers are also often armed with guns making them very dangerous for the anti-poaching teams who are trying to protect the rhinos.

Scientists and conservation groups are looking at several solutions to save the rhino from extinction. One solution to the poaching problem is to 'dehorn' the rhinos. This involves cutting the horn from the rhino so the rhino would be useless to poachers. However, rhinos use their horns to protect their young from other animals and to defend their territory. As a result, there is concern that dehorning can leave rhinos unable to protect themselves in the wild.

FROM RHINO TO MARKET IN 48 HOURS



Davis, B. (2013). *Rhino Poaching*. Abingdon: Routledge.

High Tech Solutions

In a small airstrip near Skukuza, South Africa the latest in drone technology is being tested out to help rangers win the battle against rhino poachers. The National Parks are looking to using drones as a way to stop poaching activity in the vast savannah grasslands. The idea is to use these drones to help monitor the very large areas of land which often provide plenty of places for the poachers to hide.

Drones have already been tested in the neighbouring province of KwaZulu-Natal. They proved to be a success: when drones were used in known poaching areas, no rhinos were found killed. However, once the drones were moved, poaching activity restarted. Although they did not physically catch poachers, the drones did reduce the amount of poaching being carried out.

Many wildlife experts claim that drones alone cannot stop poaching. One reason is the cost. Drones need to be lightweight but strong enough to be able to cope with the difficult African landscapes. The technical part of a drone is light, weighing about 100 grams, but the batteries needed to power it for long duration are very heavy. Small cheaper drones have a battery life of 30 to 90 minutes. This is not enough if the drone needs to cover a large area. Many National Parks and reserves would need drones that can fly for 6-8 hours. Drones that are able to cover such distances over longer time frames are more expensive, costing US\$250,000. This high price limits the number of parks that can afford such technology. Another problem is the amount of poaching activity to be monitored. Sometimes there about 8-12 different gangs operating in one area so it is difficult to track a lot of activity at once. For this reason, experts believe that technology can offer some help but it cannot be the only solution.

Hinks, B. (2014) *Technology in the Wild. The American Journal of Inspirational Technology*, 20(2), 247-248.

Rhinos Could Become Extinct in a Decade

Rhino poaching has increased in recent years and it is being driven by the demand for rhino horn in Asian countries, particularly Vietnam. It is used in traditional Chinese medicine but more and more it is now used as a status symbol to display someone's success and wealth. As South Africa is home to the majority of rhinos in the world, it is increasingly under attack by poachers. Last year, according to official statistics, 1,215 rhinos were killed in South Africa by poachers. This number equates to one rhino being killed every 8 hours.

As rhino populations decrease because of illegal hunting, it pushes the price and demand for rhino horn higher and higher. Rhino horn has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for hundreds of years. It is ground into a powder and dissolved in boiling water and consumed by the patient. Although scientists have shown that rhino horn has no medicinal benefit at all, it does not stop millions of people using it to try to cure their conditions. As more people rely on traditional medicine, the demand for rhino horn continues to grow. Criminal gangs that sell rhino horn can get up to US \$60,000 per kilogram.

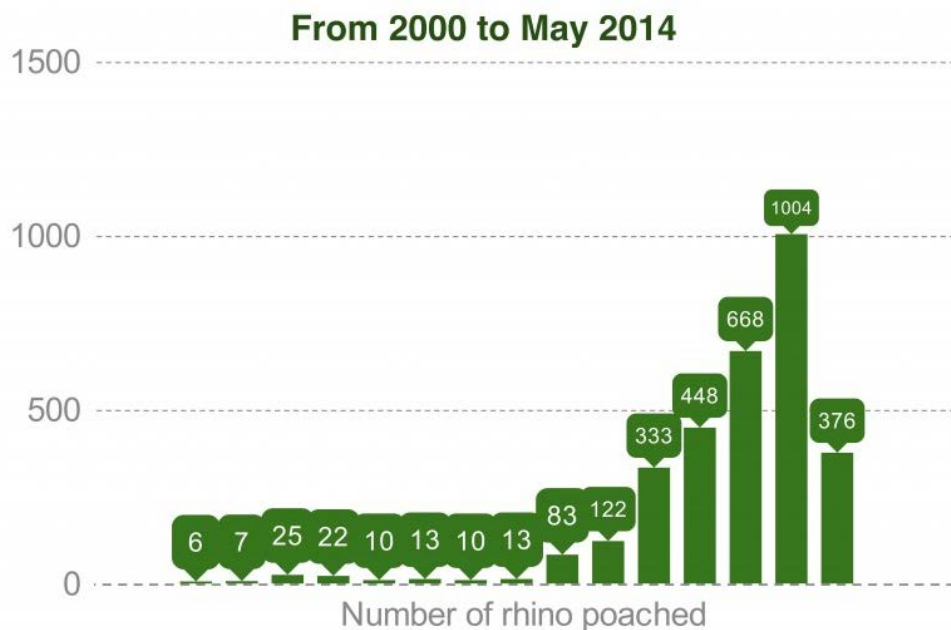
As the illegal trade increases so does the number of gangs operating in Africa. These international gangs are becoming more and more sophisticated. Some gangs are now using former soldiers to help them kill rhinos. Many of these soldiers carry heavy weapons and are not afraid to kill anyone trying to stop them. Rangers from South Africa's Kruger Park have been shot at while they attempted to stop illegal hunting. In recent years several rangers have been killed this way. The other problem the rangers face is the vast area they have to protect. Kruger National Park is 20,000 square kilometers and it loses an average of three rhinos a day to poaching. Although the park spends over US \$1

million a year to stop poaching, the large investment is not enough to save the rhinos.

Poaching is now a threat in all countries with rhino populations, forcing governments and conservation organizations to invest in anti-poaching programs. One of these programs involves dehorning the rhinos. The hope is that by removing the horns, poachers will not be interested in killing the rhinos. A more hi-tech approach being tested is using drones to track the rhinos and spot when they are threatened by poachers.



Rhino Poaching in South Africa



Species Under Threat. Retrieved June 14th, 2014, from: www.euractive.com