
**WHITE RHINOS ON PRIVATE LAND IN
SOUTH AFRICA 1997**

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AFRICAN RHINO OWNERS ASSOCIATION

SURVEY : WHITE RHINOS ON PRIVATE LAND, 1997

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report on the status of the square-lipped rhinoceros, *Ceratotherium simum*, better known as the white rhino, is an update on a similar survey conveyed early in 1996. The period of the survey was from November to December 1997, and covered the two years from January 1996 to the end of 1997.

The goals of the survey were to establish the contribution of private rhino owners to rhino conservation, to gauge the opinion of rhino owners on responsible utilisation of white rhinos, and to provide official nature conservation authorities, the IUCN Rhino Specialist Group and the South African CITES authority, with accurate information.

Two methods were employed. Firstly a postal questionnaire was sent out to all AROA members, after which all members who did not respond, as well as non-members, were contacted telephonically.

2. RESULTS

A total number of 169 people were contacted. They were not necessarily always the owners or managers, and therefore did not always know the exact details of the history or structure of the population, but it was always ascertained that they did give the correct numbers.

The tables referred to in the text are presented at the end of the report.

There were 24 new populations, 8 have become extinct, 5 could not be traced, and two definite populations were estimated because the owners would not co-operate.

Of the populations present in 1996, 136 still exist. Of these, 19 have become smaller, 46 are the same and 71 have grown.

The survey results have been grouped into broad regional categories. The Lowveld includes parts of both Mpumalanga and the Northern Province, the Highveld includes southern Gauteng, and the parts of Mpumalanga and Northwestern Province that are located in the vicinity of the Vaal River, eg Standerton and Christiana. The western and northern regions of the Northern Province, North-West, as well as northern Gauteng are treated as one region.

Table I shows the regional numbers of white rhino on private land at the start of 1996 and 1998, as well as the percentage growth over the two year period. A minimum total of 1494 white rhino are in private possession, which is an increase of 20.19% over 1995. The number of populations has only increased by 8% to 162.

The rhinos in the private nature reserves which have removed the fences between themselves and the Kruger National Park (KNP), have also increased to 248. This brings the minimum number of white rhino under private management to 1742.

The sex/age structure (excluding the reserves which form part of the Greater KNP) was as follows:

| | Males | Females | Unknown sex |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Adult (older than 5 years) | 300 | 479 | 423 |
| Young (less than 5 years) | 76 | 63 | 153 |

Where only a population total was given, i.e. the person spoken to did not know the exact composition of the population, all animals were recorded as adults of unknown sex. The real number of adults will thus be less, and the number of young higher.

A summary of the known additions and losses to white rhino populations (excluding the reserves which form part of the Greater KNP) is given in **Table II**. At least 165 calves

were born, which represents 13.27% of the 1995 population.

The known number of rhinos brought onto ranches was 219, whereas the rhinos leaving ranches alive numbered 89, which gives a balance of 130. Of the known 165 calves born, 13 died, giving an increase of 152 animals from natural reproduction. These figures add up to 282. When other deaths (91) are subtracted, an increase of 191 is calculated, which is 60 less than the increase of 251 recorded. This discrepancy is pointed out just to show that it is not an easy task to get accurate records on births, deaths, sales and movements between farms. Therefore, the figures used in this report must be regarded as the minimum number of white rhinos on private land, and that some populations have not been recorded.

Deaths were caused by other rhinos (18), either through fights or when the calf got in the way when the mother came in heat and a bull wanted to mate with her, a worrying 18 died during, or shortly after, transportation, and 22 deaths were either natural (i.e. old age, drownings, falling of cliffs, etc.), or the cause could not be determined. Thirty one white rhino were hunted, while two young animals (on different ranches) died from bullet wounds. A third young rhino was also shot with a small caliber fire arm, but recovered. No horns were removed, and it is suspected that they were shot for "fun", and not for the horns.

3. SECURITY AND TRAINING

A sample of 30 ranches indicated that 11 had no game guards or rangers at all, 69 guards (10 ranches) were trained by the owner or manager, and 92 (on only 9 ranches) had been trained by either provincial agencies or private security companies (**Table III**). It thus seems that most owners (70%) do not see poaching as a serious threat which requires specialised security personnel.

4. UTILISATION

Only 6 out of 38 owners/managers were opposed to a legal trade in rhino products. Their main concern was that it would pave the way for an increase in poaching and illegal trade. The remainder of the people questioned were very much in favour of removing the reservations laid down by CITES. See **Table IV**.

With regards to bow hunting of white rhino, 26 respondents were strongly opposed to the idea. The 12 who had no moral objections, almost all stated that it should only take place with a back-up professional hunter with a heavy caliber rifle to prevent animals managing to get away after being wounded with the arrow.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Unfortunately the estimates of white rhino on land other than private reserves and ranches, i.e. national and provincial parks, defence force land and municipal reserves will only be collated by the African Rhino Specialist Group in March 1998. They felt it to be unwise to provide a guestimate, and rightly so, because the numbers might actually be lower than expected, which would provide the animal rights groups with new ammunition to tackle South Africa on the "missing" rhino issue. It was therefore not possible to calculate the percentage of the white rhino in private custodianship in South Africa at this stage

The increase of 20.19% in numbers on private land is once again an indication of the important role played by the private rhino owner in rhino conservation. Also, if the reported number of rhinos hunted over the last two years is calculated as a percentage of the total at the end of 1995, it is found that this represents only 2.5% of the population, which shows that the resource is used very responsibly.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Rhino & Elephant Foundation co-ordinated the fund raising and through their office provided administrative assistance. WWF South Africa sponsored a part of the funding.

On behalf of AROA and myself, I would finally like to thank the rhino owners, both AROA members and non-members, as well as their managers for their cooperation during the 1997 survey. Without their valuable assistance and willingness to provide confidential and sensitive information, this report would not have been possible.

Table I : Numbers of white rhino on private land 1997.

| REGION | 1996 | | 1998 | | % GROWTH |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| | RHINOS | RANCHES | RHINOS | RANCHES | |
| EASTERN CAPE | 20 | 4 | 25 | 6 | 25.00 |
| NORTHERN CAPE | 23 | 5 | 68 | 6 | 195.65 |
| FREE STATE | 47 | 9 | 59 | 10 | 25.53 |
| KWAZULU-NATAL | 160 | 17 | 194 | 20 | 21.25 |
| LOWVELD | 264 | 38 | 345 | 41 | 30.68 |
| NORTH & NORTH-WEST | 665 | 68 | 731 | 69 | 9.92 |
| HIGHVELD | 64 | 9 | 72 | 10 | 12.50 |
| | 1243 | 150 | 1494 | 162 | 20.19 |

| PRIVATE RESERVES PART OF THE GREATER KRUGER NATIONAL PARK | RHINOS | RESERVES | RHINOS | RESERVES | % GROWTH |
|--|------------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| | 202 ¹ | 4 | 248 | 3 | 22.77 |
| TOTAL UNDER PRIVATE MANAGMENT | 1445 | 154 | 1742 | 165 | 20.55 |

¹ This figure represents the actual count, whereas the 1996 report used an adjusted figure of 234.

Table II : Summary of white rhino statistics 1996 - 1997.

| | | TOTALS | |
|--|------------------|--------|-----|
| RHINOS INTRODUCED (BOUGHT OR MOVED FROM OTHER RANCHES) | MALES | 48 | 219 |
| | FEMALES | 77 | |
| | SUBADULT MALES | 8 | |
| | SUBADULT FEMALES | 11 | |
| | SEX UNKNOWN | 75 | |
| CALVES BORN | MALE | 21 | 165 |
| | FEMALE | 20 | |
| | SEX UNKNOWN | 124 | |
| DEATHS AT OR SHORTLY AFTER BIRTH | SEX UNKNOWN | 13 | 13 |
| RHINOS HUNTED | MALE | 26 | 31 |
| | FEMALE | 2 | |
| | SEX UNKNOWN | 3 | |
| RHINOS SOLD OR MOVED ALIVE | MALES | 23 | 89 |
| | FEMALES | 28 | |
| | SUBADULT MALES | 6 | |
| | SUBADULT FEMALES | 9 | |
| | SEX UNKNOWN | 23 | |
| POACHED | SUBADULT | 2 | 2 |
| KILLED BY OTHER RHINOS | MALES | 1 | 18 |
| | FEMALES | 4 | |
| | SUBADULT MALES | 7 | |
| | SUBADULT FEMALES | 4 | |
| | SEX UNKNOWN | 2 | |
| DEATHS DURING OR AFTER TRANSPORT | MALES | 1 | 18 |
| | FEMALES | 8 | |
| | SUBADULT MALES | 1 | |
| | SUBADULT FEMALES | 1 | |
| | SEX UNKNOWN | 7 | |
| OTHER AND UNKNOWN CAUSES OF DEATH | MALES | 4 | 22 |
| | FEMALES | 13 | |
| | SUBADULT MALES | 2 | |
| | SUBADULT FEMALES | 1 | |
| | SEX UNKNOWN | 2 | |

Table III : Number and training of game guards on 30 ranches 1997.

| NUMBER OF GAME GUARDS | NUMBER OF RANCHES | TRAINING |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 44 | 4 | MPUMALUNGA PARKS BOARD |
| 16 | 2 | NATAL PARKS BOARD |
| 31 | 2 | PRIVATE COMPANIES |
| 69 | 10 | OWN TRAINING |
| 1 | 1 | ZIMBABWE PARKS |
| 0 | 11 | |
| 161 | 30 | TOTALS |

Table IV : Opinions of rhino owners on utilisation of white rhinos.

| | SUPPORT | (%) | AGAINST | (%) | n |
|--------------------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|------------|----------|
| LEGAL TRADE IN PRODUCTS | 32 | 84.21 | 6 | 15.79 | 38 |
| BOW HUNTING OF RHINO | 12 | 31.58 | 26 | 68.42 | 38 |

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