

Clue

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KENYA

Trying to save endangered black rhinos

By David K. Willis
Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

Amboseli National Park, Kenya
Two tons of hide as solid as an armored truck . . . two long curved horns on a lowered swinging snout . . . almost six feet tall at its massive front shoulder . . . known to charge with deceptive speed.

There is something about a black African rhinoceros that commands respect — especially when one of the creatures confronts an open safari minibus in the middle of the road.

Such a meeting took place here recently when a large rhino swung around to face the driver and me, giving us a too-close-for-comfort view of its two great horns before vanishing into a cluster of low trees.

The black rhino is the symbol of Kenya's wildlife in the national park system here, its silhouette appearing on park gates and in advertising. It is one of the big game animals that last year helped attract 360,000 tourists, mainly from West Germany, Britain, and the United States.

Yet this magnificent remnant of prehistoric days, which does not hunt other animals, is headed toward possible extinction in East Africa in general and in Kenya in particular, unless quick action is taken.

"The situation is bad — it's critical," says Daniel M. Sindiyo, director of the Kenyan government's Wildlife Conservation and Management Department.

In an interview, Mr. Sindiyo described a high-priority government campaign, helped by the New York Zoological Society and other groups, to create seven sanctuaries for the black rhino so it can breed and browse in peace — and keep on pulling in the tourists who are now Kenya's third-largest source of foreign exchange (after coffee and tea.)

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R. NORMAN MATHREY — STAFF

Protected black rhinos in Tanzania

markets exist elsewhere on the Arabian peninsula along with a belief that ground rhino horn is an aphrodisiac.

Two decades ago, Kenya had some 20,000 black rhinos. Today the figure is generally put between 500 and 600 — and falling.

In Amboseli Park, under the shadow of Mt. Kilimanjaro across the Tanzanian border, a mere seven black rhino remain.

Part of the Amboseli problem dates back to the 1970s when local Masai warriors speared hundreds of rhinos in protest against the government using their land as a game reserve.

Nairobi National Park now has 17 black rhinos brought in from other less protected areas.

"Unless . . . national conservation plans are formulated immediately in the east and central African countries," the International Union for Conservation of Nature reported recently, "most of Africa's remaining rhinos could be poached within the next

gather thinly scattered rhinos together behind fences and guns. The government already has an anti-poaching unit, set up in 1978 with help from the world bank, but much more help is needed.

The trouble is, Sindiyo says, that "the belief about rhino horns spreads like wildfire, while our appeals for help don't spread nearly as fast."

The male black rhino is a solitary animal, but numbers are so reduced here that males now have difficulty locating mates.

Two private citizens have recently been in the news with protection efforts. Mrs. Anna Mertz has paid for an eight-foot high, electrified fence around a 5,000-acre reserve in northern Kenya to keep poachers out and rhinos in. By late 1984, with Sindiyo's support, the reserve contained four males and two females brought in from elsewhere.

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The adult black rhino has no animal enemies, but it is relentlessly hunted by man for its two horns — which are actually made up of thickly matted hair.

The poaching of rhinos in Kenya (hunting has been illegal since 1977) serves a thriving market in North Yemen, where virtually all men wear daggers with rhino-horn handles. Similar

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"Unless . . . national conservation plans are formulated immediately in the east and central African countries," the International Union for Conservation of Nature reported recently, "most of Africa's remaining rhinos could be poached within the next five years."

Daniel Sindiyo is indignant.

"We are looking for help to save the rhino, and we are working hard," he remarked. "No one eats the rhino, but we are being exploited by the demand for daggers and for magic."

The answer, he thinks, is to

gather thinly scattered rhinos together behind fences and guns. The government already has an anti-poaching unit, set up in 1978 with help from the world bank, but much more help is needed.

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Security supervisor Michael Werikhe of Mombasa has just walked 1,200 miles through Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya to raise money — his target is \$50,000 — for rhino sanctuaries.

He told me on his arrival back in Mombasa that an intense public awareness campaign was needed to alert Africans to the value of wildlife in general.



Members of Kenya's Anti-Poaching Unit (left); game warden inspects black rhino carcass (middle), its two horns removed

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AFRICA

Lure of horns takes heavy toll
on Africa's remaining rhinos

By Jan Raath
Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Harare, Zimbabwe

A new kind of battle is being waged on a 185 mile-long stretch of flood plain in Zimbabwe's Zambezi Valley.

The battle is between specialized government troops and Zambian poachers plundering in one of Africa's important black rhinoceros sanctuaries.

In early 1984, three rhino carcasses were discovered on the valley floor, their huge leathery muzzles defaced by having had their horns hacked off. It was a clear warning that the international rhino horn trade had shifted its operations to Zimbabwe.

Rhino horn commands top dollar. In Singapore, the traditional hub of the trade, a kilogram of horn can fetch up to \$1,000. Sold in its final form to the public in apothecaries throughout the Far East, a kilogram can ultimately be worth up to \$10,000.

Zimbabwe's black rhino population is now regarded by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as being the most important on the African continent.

Numbering about 1,500, the powerfully muscled animals have lived in the Zambezi Valley undisturbed for centuries, prospering off the dense vegetation and ample water supply, and protected by the hostile environment, the area's remoteness and, in the last 30 years, by an efficient network of game ranges.

But in the first three months of the year, poachers crossing the river from Zambia killed 22 rhinos. Patrols by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management proved inadequate and the situation was worsened by lack of cooperation from Zambian authorities.

In late March, however, the problem came to the attention of Zimbabwean Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, an ardent convert to the cause of conservation. In April, troops of the

have been surprised in ambushes and court appearances scheduled for those arrested.

"The situation has changed dramatically," said an official of the department of national parks. "The poaching is now being contained."

Still of serious concern is the fact that official approaches to Zambian authorities have had little effect.

The last 15 years have been the worst for the continent's black rhino population. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reports its numbers to have been reduced from about 80,000 to about 9,000 since 1970. In Uganda, the last five were hunted down this year. Most of Kenya's remaining 550 are held in enclosures with electric fences and guarded constantly by armed game rangers.

Of 3,000 rhinos in the Central African Republic in 1980, there are only 170 today. In Zambia's Luangwa Valley the rhino population has dropped from 8,000 to about 1,200 and continues to be decimated by poachers armed with high caliber automatic rifles with infrared sights.

One reason for the rapid escalation in price, according to Dr. Esmond Bradley Martin, special rhino consultant to the IUCN and the World Wildlife Fund, is the oil wealth that rapidly accrued to the gulf state of Yemen over the last two decades.

As a mark of manhood, young Yemeni males carry curved daggers. Handles made of rhino horn add status. Previously within reach only of the aristocracy, the country's new wealth has made rhino-horn handled daggers accessible to all.

Martin estimates that now about half of the trade in rhino horn is conducted in the souks of Yemen. The country last year became a signatory to CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species), and thus agreed not to deal in rhino horn. But an examination in September by Dr. Martin of



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In April, troops of the Zimbabwean Special Forces, a unit trained for anti-insurgency bush warfare and attached to Mugabe's Central Intelligence Organization, were deployed in the area, as were men of Zimbabwe's police.

The new measures took almost immediate effect. Gangs

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The high prices being obtained in the Yemen have had a spinoff effect, and prices for the horn in the east, where it is used as a cure-all for fevers, colds, and headaches, rose similarly.



Game warden inspects black rhino carcass (middle), its two horns removed by poachers; rhino horns (right) fetch up to \$1,000 per kilo