

## POACHING IN NAMIBIA: AN OPEN LETTER FROM THE SAVE THE RHINO TRUST



During a recent poaching case involving the stoning to death of a six-month-old black rhino bull calf in Damaraland, Namibia, the two men found guilty of the crime were sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment, 15 of which were suspended. This light sentence elicited condemnation from several Namibian newspapers.

In an open letter to the press and ministries involved, the Save the Rhino Trust (S.R.T.) endorsed the newspapers' view. The Trust, which operates in Damaraland, pointed out several factors that should be taken into account when considering rhino poaching.

- (a) The minimum market value of one live black rhino in Natal, South Africa, is R250 000 no matter what age. In Namibia, there is a market for live black rhino; prices are presently under discussion and it would appear that a considerably higher price will be agreed upon for the Namibian subspecies. If a sale is achieved this will bring quite considerable foreign income to the country. With this in mind, poaching should be regarded as theft from the State and the people of the country. After all, armed robbery is considered a very grave offence.
- (b) In Damaraland there is at present an alarming incidence of harassment and intimidation of witnesses and officials investigating poaching cases. This is carried out by family and friends of the accused. Several cases of alleged witchcraft and severe psychological stress have occurred recently, with debilitating results for some of the men involved. Those most severely affected are the men who are attempting to protect

the rhino which belong to the people of this country.

- (c) The men who were found guilty of killing the baby rhino were not fined but were given a sentence of only 30 months, 15 of which were suspended. They then retaliated by laying a counter-charge of assault against the young game guards who did nothing more than slap one of the guilty parties with an open hand. We are by no means condoning violence directed at poachers; however, the frustration and anger at finding the carcass of an animal which all the guards recognised as one they have personally followed and monitored on a regular basis, is understandable. One should keep in mind that suspected poachers in Zimbabwe are often shot without question if they are found armed in an area where there are rhino.
- (d) In other cases, witnesses and their families have had to go into hiding to avoid possible injury from alleged poachers out on bail. Threats to our trackers and game guards are taken seriously. We value them and their well-being for the outstanding work which they are doing for their country.
- (e) With help from the S.R.T., officials often protect witnesses from intimidation and interference by moving them to safe places and feeding them, supplying sleeping gear and clothing. The court cases sometimes stretch on for months and it becomes a very costly operation. Most of this is paid for privately, not by the government.
- (f) To those who work with unstinting dedication to curb poaching, and attempt to conserve the remaining black rhino and elephant for the people of Namibia, it seems that they receive very little assistance from the authorities. Small wonder then that we must ask: "Why are we putting so much effort into protecting our rhino, when we seem to get so little support from some of the courts?"
- The legal system in Namibia provides for maximum sentences of 20 years and/or R200 000 for such offences. We strongly appeal to magistrates to make full use of the law by imposing heavier penalties to help bring this destructive thuggery to an end. ■

## I&J MARINE DAY POSTER COMPETITION

The 1991 I&J National Marine Day poster competition is to be presented for the fourth consecutive year in conjunction with conservation and education authorities throughout South Africa. The poster competition is aimed at creating an awareness of National Marine Day which falls on 6 December 1991. The theme for this year's competition is "Sea and Surf: The Meeting Place" — in other words the intertidal zone.

The Department of Environment Affairs, the Natal Parks Board, the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources and the conservation authorities of the Cape, Transvaal and Orange Free State are co-ordinating the competition which is open to all high, primary and junior primary schoolchildren. The competition is sponsored by Irvin & Johnson to the value of R30 000.

The closing date for this year's competition is 31 October 1991. The national prize-giving will take place in January 1992. Further details of this competition can be obtained from Miss Belinda Lloyd at the Natal Parks Board. Tel.: (0331) 47-1961. ■

## NATAL GAME AUCTION — 1991

Nearly 500 animals, including 32 white rhinos and five black rhinos, were sold to South African and international buyers at the 1991 Natal Game Auction held at Hluhluwe on 17 June 1991. The rare oribi antelope fetched R3 500 each and blue duiker sold for R1 800 each, both prices being South African records.

"We are delighted with the success of and interest in this year's auction. We pride ourselves on the condition of the animals, the high standard of our holding pens and the high success rate in translocating the animals," said Mr. C. Dering Stainbank, Chairman of the Natal Parks Board. The auction realised R3.2-million which will be ploughed back into conserving Natal's wildlife riches. ■