

The working groups of the Endangered Wildlife Trust are the wheels on which the vehicle moves forward. Their work is essential to the EWT and its mission, the conservation of the diversity of species in southern Africa.

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# EWT AT WORK



## The Wildlife Breeding Resource Centre



*The WBRC goes rhino hunting! Darting Safaris are an innovative way of providing a service for wildlife management and at the same time raising funds for projects of the Endangered Wildlife Trust. Dr Paul Bartels, head of the WBRC, reports.*

Early man's survival depended on hunting with spears and bows and arrows. Today, there is another challenge: hunting with a dart gun. "Darting Safaris" represent not only a challenge for modern man, but also a way of ensuring the survival of endangered species.

The sun has yet to rise, but the aroma of hot coffee drifts across to the hunting party as they rise to meet the day, and their challenge. Today is the big day, where our client will hunt and shoot his first rhino. There is however one big difference here – this rhino will not be shot and killed with a bullet, but shot and immobilised with a dart. After the hunt the rhino is given an antidote to the tranquillising dart and sent trotting into the sunset, perhaps hoping never to be bitten by such a big Tsetse Fly again!

Great idea! Why hasn't anybody else thought of this before? The truth is they have, and a few have even done it, but this is the first time that the concept has been launched as a service to, and fund-raiser for, conservation purposes.

**The happy client with his "bagged" rhino**

Darting Safaris, or "green hunts", refers to the practice of hunting where the high-powered rifle is replaced by the dart rifle. The professional hunter takes his client on a hunting safari, and is accompanied by a wildlife veterinarian whose job it is to oversee the immobilisation of the animal.

The client enjoys all the excitement of the hunt, including stalking the rhino to the point where he can clearly hear every organic sound the animal makes. The dart is shot from a 32-gauge rifle with a powder charge, and if all goes well the rhino should be fast asleep in ten minutes. A bullet can stop a charging rhino, but a dart



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cannot, so the hunting party has to ensure that they are protected, or able to run very fast!

Once asleep, the rhino is worked on by a ranger who, helped by the rest



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**Frank Molteno drilling a hole in the rhino horn, while Paul Bartels inserts the micro-chip**

of the party, inserts micro-chips into the animal and its horns and takes appropriate measurements and tissue samples. The wildlife veterinarian monitors the sleeping rhino while the hunter poses for photographs with his "bagged" trophy.

After taking a cast of the horns, an antidote to the immobilising drug is injected into the sleeping animal. The rhino wakes up within seconds, and it goes without saying that all concerned should be out of reach ASAP – if not, it's tree climbing time!

It's also celebratory beer-can-cracking time! It is a celebration because all parties involved in the hunt have won – the hunter has shot his rhino and goes away with a cast of its horns and an entry in the Safari Club International record book, the rhino custodians and scientific types have recorded their much-needed data, the Endangered Wildlife Trust gets more funds for rhino and other species conservation, and the rhino survives to kick up the dust for a few more years. Darting Safaris will never replace

conventional hunting, but they will certainly expand the options for the renewable utilisation of our wildlife heritage. Hunter-conservationists now have an opportunity to experience not only the thrill of the chase, but also to have literally a 'hands on' experience with a rhino, to work with rhino conservationists in the field, and to know that their money is going directly back into conservation.

Darting Safaris, which form part of the WBRC's Wildlife Darting Services, have been endorsed by the conservation community in southern Africa and are supported by the Dallas Ecological Foundation, Safari Club International, the Houston Safari Club, the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa and the South African Hunters and Game Conservation Association.

The WBRC would like to thank the Tony and Lisette Lewis Foundation, the Atomic Energy Corporation, Mondi Recycling, DHL and Mustek and AST computers for their ongoing support of the WBRC and our projects. 🐾

*Paul Bartels, Director, WBRC*