

824

PILANESBERG BLACK RHINO REPORT FOR 1992

by Hanne Lindemann and Hans Hansen

Bob is lying quietly with a jacket over the head to protect his eyes from the sun. We are very happy to have found this particular rhino, not because he is named after Dr Bob Keffen the vet, but because we have not seen him for two years. I am checking his temperature, while Hans is at the other end punching an ear notch. Suddenly, with no warning at all, Bob gets up and staggers off, knocking Hans over in the process. Bob the vet is hanging on to the tail of Bob the rhino, frantically trying to stop this bulldozer of a Black Rhino, all the while shouting "He'll lie down again just now". He did not!

Eventually, after a long detour up and down a steep hill, Bob is darted once more, and this time he decides to lie down in the only hole nearby. The antidote is quickly applied and 60 seconds later he is on his way back to the bush while we all agree that we do not want to see him for another two years!

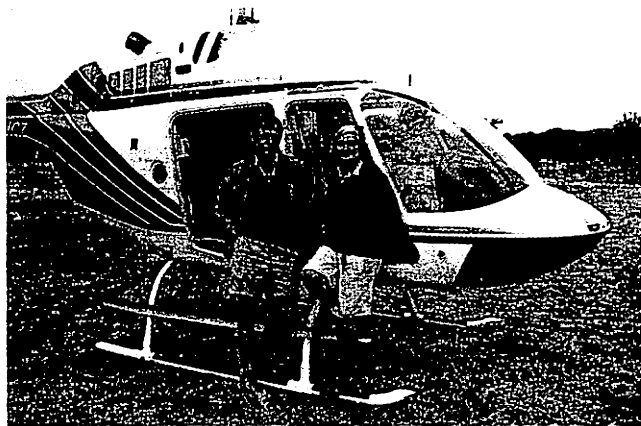


Everybody has a job to do when the rhino goes down.

Seeing that the rhino is all right, we can now attend to Hans and take him to a doctor in Sun City. He gets six stitches in his chin and some painkillers for his bruised ribs. This experience gave us something to think about. The first 18 rhino we had darted followed the book, but number 19 had his own ideas!

No risk was taken

Apart from this small incident, the Black Rhino monitoring project in Pilanesberg in August/September 1992 went

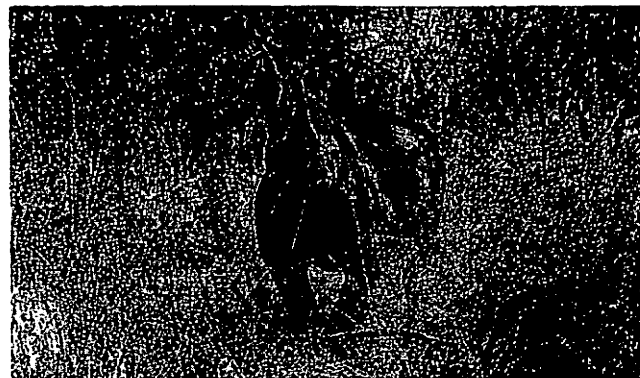


well for the fourth year running. Seven rhino were darted and ear-notched and all except Bob had a transponder put into each horn and one under the skin. We had decided during the first year that no risk should be taken with any rhino, so when Bob fell into the hole and was lying in an awkward position, the antidote was quickly applied and he walked off without transponders and with only one ear notch.

Contrary to previous years, the 1992 Black Rhino monitoring project was carried out before the game count, which had the advantage that we could fly during prime time – this is mornings from eight o'clock, when there is light enough to photograph. Twenty-nine Black Rhino were found during the 24 helicopter hours we had been



A young male rhino being earmarked by Dr Bob the Vet.



Minutes later he is on his feet, curiously watching the photographer who is safely up a tree.

allocated. The total number of Black Rhino in Pilanesberg was 33 when we left in September: 17 males and 16 females. This is one less, compared to 1991, since two males had died but only one calf was born.

Calf production

Each year we get to know the rhinos better. It seems that the calves leave their mother when she is having a new calf. The males seem to be hanging round their mothers' area and will often be seen with her and her new calf while the females will roam over big distances in search for an area to settle, before they have their own calves.

There are six adult females that have produced more than one calf each. Together they have spent 60 female years in the Park. In this time they have produced about 18 calves, which gives an average of 3.3 years between calves. However, two of the originally introduced females have died. Including these, the eight females have spent 71 years producing 20 calves, which on average is one every 3.5 years. This does not include any calf mortality, so the calving interval is probably less. As more information is collected, it is possible to work out a maternal family tree, and thus the exact interval between calves.

Two young females have calved for the first time. One is about eight years old, the other nine years, indicating that females are probably older than the seven years that was estimated earlier, as the age at first calving.

The hunting issue

In 1991 we recommended (see *Endangered Wildlife* 11, June 1992) that an old post-reproductive male named Foldy, was auctioned for hunting. This could have given an income of several hundred thousand rand, which would have benefitted the Black Rhino project and rhino conservation in general. Unfortunately we found Foldy dead in August, outside his normal range. He died from wounds inflicted by horns, indicating that he was killed by another male.

Again this year, the controversial hunting issue was brought up by Bophuthatswana National Parks Board at a press conference at Bakubung Lodge in September where it was received positively by everybody. Now only



Old Foldy in September 1991, a potential trophy for a hunter.
Value: R600 000.

one old male was left called Van Gogh, because of his missing right ear. We found Van Gogh outside the range he occupied last year. He looked old and his condition worried us. He had lost his second horn two years earlier, so he would not be as good a trophy as Foldy, but as he would not have long to live, it was decided to go ahead with the hunting and apply for the necessary licences. The Parks Board decided that the revenue from such a hunt would be shared equally among the Black Rhino in Pilanesberg, the local community round the Park, and Black Rhino conservation in general.

On 20 December 1992 Van Gogh reached the front page of the English paper *The Sunday Telegraph* under the heading: Bad news for Van Gogh the one eared rhino. Van Gogh was nominated as a Christmas offer to hunters. By then he was already dead according to the *Sunday Star*, 27 December. This is really bad news, not for Van Gogh, his troubles are over, but for Black Rhino conservation, which could have benefitted a lot from him as a trophy. Now he is just another dead rhino, providing food for some vultures.

Rhinos can pay their way

If a ban on trading in a species' products could save it, there would still be many Black Rhino enjoying life in the wild. But their number has declined drastically from about 15 000 in 1980 to a mere 2 000 at present, in spite of the total ban on trading in rhinoceros products. It is about time that we start to think less traditionally and at least consider that hunting might help save this fascinating animal.



Dead Foldy in August 1992, killed by his own kind. Value: NIL.

Unfortunately we can no longer afford to let valuable animals die for nothing when much needed funds could be generated to help improve today's desperate situation for the Black Rhino. Rhino are valuable animals and can easily pay for their own conservation if it is possible to utilise them. The rhino deserves better than being just one more endangered species begging for money.

Tracking rhino with EWT supporters

In 1992 we spent less time in Pilanesberg than the three previous years, so our stay was hectic. In addition to our usual work with updating the photo-file and darting the rhino, we were also involved in a number of other interesting activities, including days with press and television crews.

One of the most pleasant experiences we had tracking Black Rhino, was the day we spent with Thys and Martie Basson. They had won the Endangered Wildlife Trust's Black Rhino Adventure Competition. Thys and Martie are keen nature lovers, and know as much about the bush as we do, if not more. Thys even speaks Setswana!

We set off in the morning following a fresh track. It had rained a little that night, so tracking was fairly easy. Unfortunately we spooked one rhino, which ran off puffing and snorting, before we had time to identify him, although we were almost sure it was a young male living in that area. George Phiri, our faithful game scout sergeant could see our despair, but with his never failing optimism he promised that he would find us another rhino. And so he did.

After another couple of hours walking, the rhino is suddenly there just in front of us, under a tree. The bush is thick so it was not easy to see if we could recognise him, but after some time we managed to get close enough to get a good look and sure enough it was an old elusive male, called Kimbea, which means 'run' in Swahili. He got this name because the first time we found him, he ran off in such a rush that he gave us all a fright. We had not seen him at all this year, so it turned out to be a happy reunion.

A few days later we received a fax from the Bassons thanking us for an unforgettable and exciting day in the reserve: "We have learned a lot and we see Black Rhino and it's conservation through different eyes now". That is exactly how we feel too. What a pleasure to take such nice and keen people for a walk. We look forward to repeating the exercise in 1993, and urge all readers to participate in the EWT competition so that you too may have the opportunity to track rhinos in the bush with us!

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Bophuthatswana National Parks Board for asking us to participate in the fourth round of the Black Rhino monitoring project. We would also like to thank the Endangered Wildlife Trust and Mr Fred Keeley for financial support, and the Mazda Wildlife Fund for the use of their 4x4 vehicle. Regional Warden Koos Herbst and his staff at Pilanesberg helped in many ways, but special thanks go to Keryn Adcock who is now in charge of the rhinos' welfare, and to Sergeant George Phiri, who lends us his eyes and ears when we share adventures in the bush.



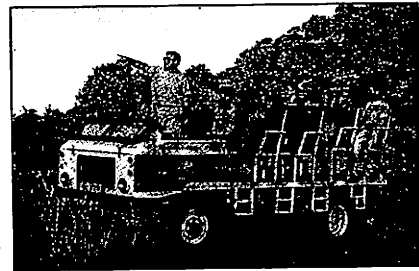
Hans, George, Martie and Thys after a successful walk in Pilanesberg.

Hanne Lindemann and Hans Bjarne Hansen are freelance wildlife biologists and writers based in Denmark. Please send correspondence c/o Endangered Wildlife Trust, Private Bag X11, Parkview, 2122, Johannesburg.

The Endangered Wildlife Trust would like to thank Mr Gert Brumme for arranging the donation of prizes for the winners of our rhino fieldwork competition (two nights for two people at both Kwa Maritane and Bakubung lodges), and Independent Paper Supplies for donating the paper for the entry forms.

We are offering the same prizes again in 1993. Entry forms are enclosed with this issue of Endangered Wildlife, and further supplies are available from our offices. Enter now! The competition closes on 31 July 1993.

ANOTHER UNSPOILT PARADISE IN THE HEART OF THE PILANESBERG.



When you visit Bakubung you'll find expert staff catering to your every whim.

Because, above all, Bakubung is about people having fun, whether as family groups, in couples or while making use of our unrivalled conference facilities. And Bakubung is within five minutes of the bright lights and hectic excitement of Sun City.

Designed in a horseshoe shape and set in the middle of a valley, Bakubung - "the people of the hippo" - offers wildlife from aardvark to zebra waiting for you to visit them - including the hippopotamus living in the 80 metre pool.

Tel. (014651) 21861 - 7 (011) 803-6714. Fax (011) 803-6715

Bakubung
PEOPLE OF THE HIPPO
HOTEL AND TIMESHARE LODGE