

# RHINO IN TANZANIA AND THE INFLUENCES OF PROFESSIONAL SAFARI HUNTING

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The writer has been a Professional Hunter in Tanzania since 1963 and has a sound knowledge of the country's wildlife areas, and especially in the past, the distribution of rhino throughout the country.

Prior to 1973 (the year Tanzania banned hunting), rhino were common throughout most of Tanzania's National Parks, Game Reserves, Game Management areas and even open areas.

Up until 1973 a limited number of rhino were made available by the Tanzania Government for hunting by safari hunting clients.

These limited permits were on quota in areas that had prolific populations. In particular the following areas were issued with rhino hunting quotas:-

- The Selous Game Reserve
- The Rungwa Game Reserve
- The Kizigo Game Reserve
- Masailand
- Loliondo
- The Itigi Thicket area (Singida)
- Lake Eyasi
- Yeida Valley
- Moyowasi Game Reserve

A total of about 20 rhino were made available on quota for the whole country. All of these areas had prolific rhino populations, and it was not unusual to see anything up to a dozen rhino per day in each of the above listed areas. In fact, in the Itigi Thicket, it was extremely dangerous even to enter the thicket - there were so many rhino that it was impossible not to bump into one!

The hunting ban lasted until 1983. During that time no safari hunting was conducted anywhere in Tanzania. When safari hunting was re-started in 1983, the most noticeable change was lack of rhino throughout most of their former range. The writer, in fact, did not return to hunt in Tanzania until 1984. Since then, up until this time he has only seen rhino tracks and signs in two areas:-

- Moyowasi Game Reserve - the tracks of two animals were seen here in 1985.
- Ruvu Masai - the tracks of one rhino were seen here in 1986.

This is the total extent of the writer's sighting of rhino sign in Tanzania's hunting areas since 1984. What this means is that during the period of the hunting ban, Tanzania's Rhino Population was decimated to such an extent that they only now survive in a few isolated populations:-

- Parts of the Selous Game Reserve
- Ngorongoro Conservation Area
- Parts of Rungwa Game Reserve
- Parts of Ruaha National Park
- Rubondo Island in Lake Victoria

There are other unconfirmed reports from various parts of the country.

Safari hunting is misunderstood by many. It is seen as a sport enjoyed by wealthy foreigners to the exclusion of local interests. Many changes have taken place recently to try and change this image. In so far as rhino are concerned, the fact remains that even if sport hunters are not permitted to hunt rhino (which they most definitely should not be in Tanzania at the present time, owing to such a small surviving population), their mere presence in the bush is an active deterrent to poaching activities. One cannot leave an empty wilderness without an interested party's stewardship and interest. The result of having no hunting safari activities in Tanzania's remote areas is unrestricted poaching.

How can the safari hunting industry be supportive of rhino conservation in Tanzania?

- 1/ Simply by their mere presence and interest in the areas allocated to them by the Wildlife Department.
- 2/ Giving assistance and help to the Wildlife Department in anti-poaching exercises, and by supplying up-to-date information on rhino sightings, etc.
- 3/ By involving local communities and ensuring that they get a proper share of the benefits that accrue from proper wildlife utilisation.
- 4/ By establishing village anti-poaching teams to patrol their own areas and districts in conjunction with the Wildlife Department.
- 5/ To pay rewards for arrested poachers, confiscated firearms and snares.
- 6/ To encourage safari clients to promote Tanzania's rhino conservation plans, through publicity and financial aid.

- 7/ The writer feels that there is room in some of Tanzania's hunting areas and game reserves for the setting up of rhino projects. This could be done by enlisting the help of local village communities to support such an effort. The writer feels that with enlightened villagers, such as the people of Makau in Maswa Game Reserve, that a rhino project could be established successfully in such an area. Ideally a project involving local communities in rhino conservation would need to be set up in suitable habitat near to and adjoining their villages. The reason for this is so that rhino can be seen daily by the local community, become part of their lives, and being in the immediate vicinity of the village would discourage any poaching possibilities. Interestingly enough, one of Kenya's best rhino populations occurs in Nairobi National Park, where it would be difficult for a poacher to successfully kill any rhino - there are too many seeing eyes! Thieves do not like witnesses!

Such a village rhino project would necessitate the fencing of suitable habitat, to the extent of approximately 10,000 acres. This would support 10 adult rhino, forming a good breeding nucleus. The offspring could be released in the adjoining wilderness area, and by this means re-establish themselves.

- 7/ The writer believes the hunting safari industry could be helpful as follows:-
- To help in the location of black rhino for purchase from other countries, for importation and re-stocking in Tanzania.
  - To encourage safari hunting clients to financially support the purchase of such animals for Tanzania, in the form of a donation.

To summarise, although misunderstood in many circles, safari hunting can be a useful conservation aid to Tanzania's black rhino. The hunting industry does need encouragement to go out and solicit support from their clientele, for the benefit of Tanzania's conservation ideals. The hunting industry's clientele includes many of the world's leaders of industry, finance and politics. We should take advantage of this connection.