

LAKE NAKURU RHINO SANCTUARY

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The Status of Rhinos in Africa

By Lucy Vigne

The status of rhinos in Africa is gloomier than ever before. The 1970s witnessed a 50% decline in the number of black rhino in Africa. A depressingly similar trend can be seen for the early 1980s with a 40% decline over the last four years. The number of northern white rhino has continued to plummet and the subspecies is nearly extinct. The southern white rhino, after a precarious crash at the turn of the century, has continued to recover remarkably well with careful management. This gives us hope that all is not yet lost for the black rhino despite the trends.

The first thorough pan-African rhino survey was carried out in 1979 by Kes Hillman, who was Chairman of IUCN's Rhino Specialist Group. She sent out questionnaires to all the African countries with rhinos specifically to the Wildlife Departments and to people working in the field. Data were collected on rhino numbers and ranges for each country. Similar questionnaires were sent out again by David Western, the Chairman of the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group, and were completed a year later in November 1984. Although much information had to be based on educated guesses, enough data from well-studied areas provide us with an overall picture of reality.

The rhino numbers for each country are shown in the Table. The estimated totals of black rhinos in Africa in 1980 were 14-15,000 and now there are about 8-9,000 left. Only two populations, those in the Luangwa Valley, Zambia, and in the Selous Game Reserve, Tanzania, exceed 1,000 black rhinos. In the 1970s East Africa was hard hit by poaching and in the early 1980s, with increased military arms and political instability spreading from Uganda to Sudan, Chad, Zaire and Ethiopia, these regions have now come under serious threat. Highly organized poaching gangs have reduced the black rhinos to less than 400, a tenth of the number in this northern crescent five years ago. The Central African Republic (CAR) has witnessed the most dramatic decline in rhino numbers. Poaching gangs have been hiding and hunting undisturbed, gradually eliminating rhinos. This dramatic reduction in black rhino numbers need not solely be attributed to killings, since in some countries, for example Kenya, improved censusing techniques have enabled us to gather more accurate information than previously. As the map shows, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe have stable or increasing black rhino populations and these make up 30% of the total in Africa.

However, as 60% of the black rhinos are in East and Central Africa, this area, from Kenya to Zambia, is of great importance to the black rhino's future.

The northern white rhino in Sudan, Zaire and CAR dropped in numbers from about 600 in 1980 to about 30 now. Garamba National Park in Zaire is the last stronghold for the northern white rhino. The southern white rhino, however, has been increasing encouragingly from 3,000 in 1980 to nearly 4,000 today (see Table).

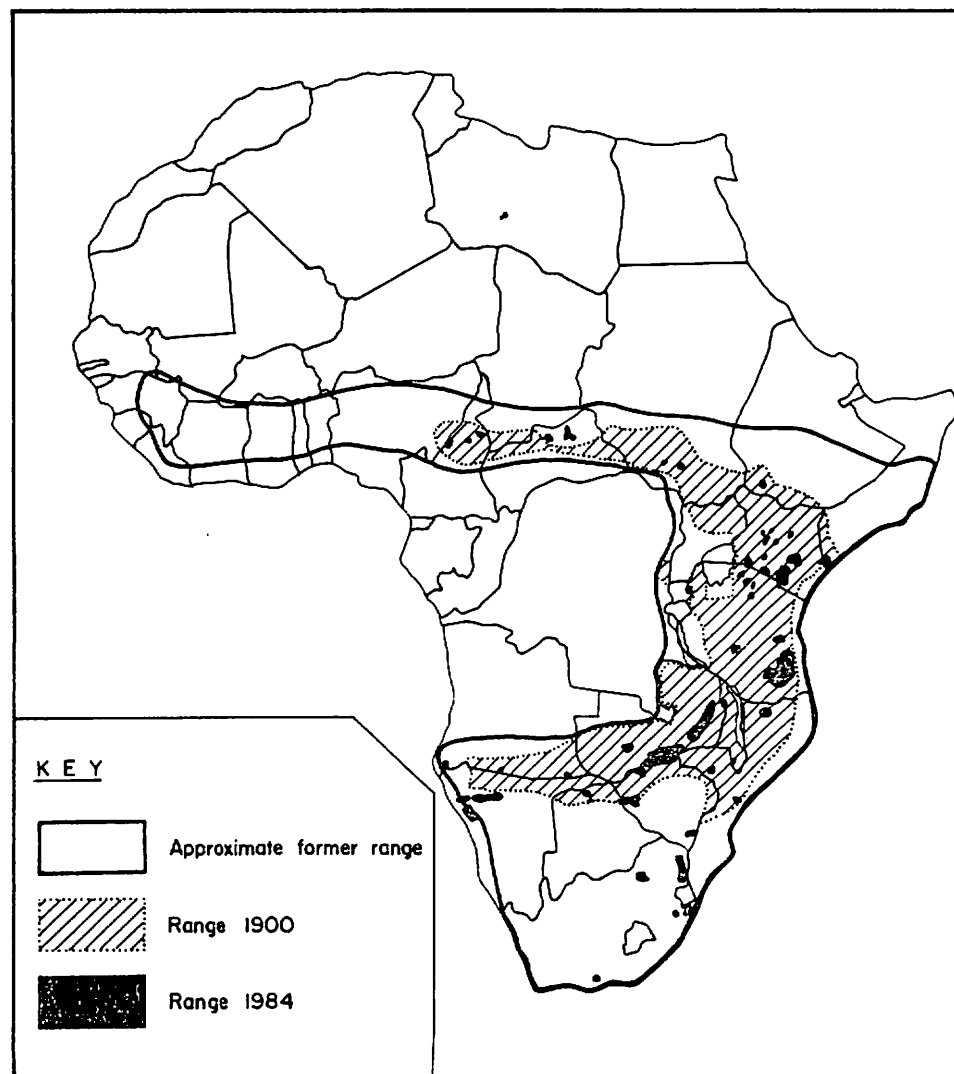
The dwindling of rhino numbers threatens the species' survival because it represents an overall decline in the rhino population sizes.

As the species fragments into smaller and smaller pockets, if the rhinos are not consolidated by translocating them into secure areas, fewer of these solitary rhinos are likely to meet and mate. Most rhinos now exist in isolated populations of less than 50 and these populations continue to decline and break up. Great attention must be given to anti-poaching measures. Although expensive, electric fencing is the surest method for keeping small rhino areas safe with proper management. Such sanctuaries exist in Kenya and we hope they are going to increase in number if enough funds can be provided for them.

The trade in rhino products must be stopped if it is at all possible. Esmond Bradley Martin has found that over 50% of Africa's rhino horn goes to North Yemen to be made into dagger handles; the rest goes to Eastern Asia for use in traditional medicines. The trade in rhino products can be curtailed by encouraging the use of substitutes.

The status of rhinos is dismal. There is no time to lose in trying to save the remaining few from man's unaccountable greed. If the trend continues to the end of the decade, the salvage of rhinos in most of Africa will be impossible. Active management programmes, as in Southern Africa, along with effective trading bans are a must if the black rhino in particular is going to survive.

Black Rhino Range



Sources
 Hillman, Kes (1981). *IUCN/NYZS/WWF African Rhino Survey Report to IUCN.*

Western, David and Vigne, Lucy (1984).
 "The Status of Rhino in Africa." *Pachyderm. Newsletter No 4 of the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group.*

Approximate number of black rhinos in Africa by country

Country	1980	1984
Tanzania	3,795	3,130
Zimbabwe	1,400	1,680
Zambia	2,750	1,650
South Africa	630	640
Kenya	1,500	550
Namibia	300	400
C.A.R.	3,000	170
Mozambique	250	130
Cameroon	110	110
Sudan	300	100
Somalia	300	90
Angola	300	90
Malawi	40	20
Rwanda	30	15
Botswana	30	10
Ethiopia	20	10
Chad	25	5
Uganda	5	0
Total	14-15,000	8-9,000

Approximate number of white rhinos in Africa by country

Country	1980	1984
South Africa	2500	3,330
Zimbabwe	180	200
Botswana	70	200
Namibia	150	70
Swaziland	60	60
Kenya	25	40
Mozambique	30	20
Zambia	5	10
Total	3,020	3,930

Northern White Rhinos

Country	1980	1984
Zaire	400	15
Sudan	400	10
C.A.R.	20	1
Uganda	1	1
Total	1,000	15-30

BLACK RHINO POPULATIONS SHOWING INCREASE IN FREQUENCY OF SMALL POPULATIONS

