



and until they are released permanently, the young rhinos are taken for daily walks through the bush with an armed guard, where they familiarise themselves further with browse material and their wild neighbours. Frequently browsed species include *Combretum zeyheri*, *Combretum apiculatum*, *Holmskioldia tettensis*, and numerous others.

AS RECENTLY as 1970 an estimated 65,000 black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) roamed throughout Africa. Today less than 3000 remain in the wild. In the greatest conservation tragedy of the twentieth century, rhinos were slaughtered by thousands to satisfy markets in Asia and Yemen.

Officials, translocation, re-introduction and captive breeding programmes have been established in an effort to boost numbers. The rhino programme at Matusadona National Park is one such effort. Orphaned rhinos, as well as some born in captivity, are brought to Matusadona where they are hand raised for a

For 2000 years rhino horn has been used in traditional Asian medicine, leading to the near extinction of Asian rhinos and has, in recent years, dramatically impacted the African rhino as well. Today, Asian medicine still calls for rhino horn as a treatment for numerous ailments. The most common of these is an antipyretic (fever reducer), but scientific study has shown these treatments to be largely ineffective.



When the time comes for release, each rhino is fitted with a radio collar and has its ear notched for identification in the event that the collar is dropped or destroyed. Afterwards, individual rhinos are taken to independent remote enclosures where they undergo the process of isolation. Black rhinos are solitary by nature, and must become habituated to being alone before they can be fully released. Over a period of several months, only an armed guard accompanies the rhino until the day arrives when the rhino turns and finds he is alone.

The primary market for black rhino horn has been Yemen. The prize handle for an ornamental dagger, the jambia, is rhino horn. Thousands of kilograms have been smuggled into Yemen, and although trade of raw horn has been banned, the open air markets (souks) still have stalls selling rhino horn daggers. Today an uphill battle against generations of tradition and custom is being waged to promote the use of modern medicine and lower the demand for horn among various Asian communities. In addition, public awareness campaigners in Yemen are educating the public on the rhino's plight, and encouraging the use of other materials for jambia handles. Several countries around the world have banned the formal trade of rhino horn, but smuggling still takes place and rhino populations are far from stable.

period of three years before release. While under the care of National Parks officials, employees and volunteers, rhinos are bottle fed until they reach the age of eighteen months. This process takes place as close to a natural cycle as possible. The feedings are frequent and ample in the beginning, but as they age the feedings decrease in both frequency and volume until they are weaned. During this time,

Since September 1997, five rhinos have been re-introduced. Three underwent the hand-raising process at Matusadona National Park, while the other two were an adult breeding pair from captivity. In the end, only time will determine the effectiveness of the programme and controversy will always remain. Some animals habituate rapidly while others may never lose their bond with humans. Still in its infancy, and battling for financial support in a struggling economy, the Matusadona rhino programme is unique and a step in the right direction. Perhaps a new dawn is breaking for an animal that not long ago was near the sunset of its very existence.

Through the hard work of dedicated biologists, veterinarians, and National Parks of-



Midnight at midday - almost

WEZ Mashonaland is organising an 'Eclipse Event' on 21 June 2001 at the Mukuvisi Woodland. There will be a mini-expo with eclipse, wildlife and environment and woodland information.

The Woodland will be open during the special event. Come and take time to wander around, decide on your viewing place, view the

eclipse in close contact with birds, animals and nature.

Bring your own food, refreshments and comfortable chairs. Braai fires will be permitted in specified areas, ghetto blasters will not be allowed. "The Hamburger Hut" will offer catering, if you prefer to buy.

We will get a 97.6% solar eclipse in Harare and it won't be as spectacular as the 100% viewing in the north east of the country - but for those of us left in Harare it will be very close and very sociable.

The eclipse starts at 13:48 hours, maxi-

mum at 15:14 hours and it will be all over by 16:28 hours. Followed by after-dark star gazing with astronomer in attendance.

Further details will be available closer to the time, from WEZ Mashonaland. WARNING - viewing of the eclipse without proper eye protection will cause irreversible blindness. *Eclipse eye protection glasses are available at a very competitive price at WEZ Mashonaland Wildlife Shop at Mukuvisi Woodlands, Harare.*

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