

Photograph by Mariëcel van Jaarsveldt



Feedback from **rhino owners**

by Pelham Jones

Since my last report, a dedicated few have done a lot for the rhino poaching cause. I will outline these achievements in this communication and again call on members and owners to become more involved in the protection of our rhino.

Not only have we suffered a direct financial loss of over R200 million, but the value of the national herd has devalued by about R1,4 billion. This is mainly because of asset risk and loss of investor confidence in the product as seen in the drop in value at game auctions.

Summits and meetings

In addition to the numerous operational, policy and interest group meetings, we also participated in the DEA ministers' Rhino Summit. We serve on the executive LeadSA Rhino Security initiative and were invited to attend

the SADC RMG meeting in Namibia. The national board meeting of the WRSA PROA was held in Pretoria on 17 November 2010. As it is impossible to include a comprehensive report of the content of the issues covered at these meetings, I will give a summary below:

Security nodes

Seven nodes have been established, with two new nodes to be activated soon. The nodes are established around population densities and owners jointly serve as a support group for each other. They also share risk warnings with



each other and carry out proactive security. We feel that it is very naive of any owner to be of the opinion that he or she is better off alone, or that it will be safer to operate individually. All owners are therefore encouraged to become active within established nodes. If there is not an active node in your area, we strongly suggest that you establish one. The Conserv Communication System has proven itself time and again and is highly commended by the SAPS and various support groups and we encourage you to subscribe to their services. We are also working with pilots to establish a support 'air wing'. These dedicated individuals are willing to carry out proactive flights over the boundaries of reserves to report suspicious vehicles or individuals. This protocol is coordinated within the national security plan and nodes.

Population management

It is essential that we have accurate data on rhino populations and distribution in South Africa. This information will not only contribute towards security issues, but it is also important for the distribution of information regarding issues related to DNA, legislation, Cites and others. This is also the main purpose why we urge rhino owners and managers to become members of the WRSA Private Rhino Owners Association – we wish to keep members informed and ensure their involvement and participation in the management of the meta-rhino population. Confidential information is protected through a system of allocating codes to properties – no reserve or owners' names will be kept on the database. More information regarding this matter will be circulated shortly.

Dehorning and storage

The TOPS legislation prescribes the need for permits for all interaction with rhino and their products, including rhino horn. This includes the capture, hunting, holding, transport,

import and export of rhino, as well as the removal of rhino horn and the holding and transport of rhino horn. It is therefore vital that you comply with these requirements. WRSA have requested (in writing) the support of the national minister of environmental affairs pertaining to his support in the very sensitive issue of the safekeeping of rhino horn.

“The risk to owners is caused because the moratorium prevents rhino owners from disposing of the product legally”

An explanation of the huge risk caused by the current moratorium on the trade of rhino on rhino owners who are in possession of rhino horn was detailed in the request. The risk to owners is caused because the moratorium prevents rhino owners from disposing of the product legally. In the interim, we urge all individuals in possession of rhino horn to register the horns as soon as possible. Should you require any information on the issue, please contact the WRSA office. When or if the moratorium on the trade in rhino horn is lifted at a later stage and horns in your possession are not registered, you will not be able to sell these, as they will be seen as 'blood diamonds'.

Cites

The issue of trade in rhino horn has been widely debated and a resolution was made at the Ministers' Summit that the following research studies will be commissioned by the department of environmental affairs:

1. An urgent commission on the global competitive market research project
2. A commission for a feasibility study and the viability of the legalisation of rhino horn trading in SA, and
3. An impact study on dehorning

All these studies are essential to determine the suitability of the trade in rhino horn and also motivate and promote the legalisation of commercial trade in rhino horn. WRSA PROA support this position and asked this to be tabled at Cites urgently.

stoprhinopoaching.com

The huge effort and achievements of Elise de Villiers in raising awareness of the cause and obtaining funds have to be recognised. Her positive efforts as an individual who does not even own any rhino is an example of doing and not just talking. The fundraising by Jacaranda FM was also coordinated by Elise. Well done!

LeadSA

In addition to promoting national and international awareness, LeadSA helped to raise donations for special equipment to be used in anti-poaching endeavours. We have developed a rhino security and coordination plan, needs identification and call for funding. We need to put this plan into action and therefore we make an appeal for members' help and for funds from donors.

Membership drive

Certain members of the WRSA PROA only belong to WRSA, others only subscribe to Conserv, some to both and many rhino owners to neither. We need to formalise our situation and will in future levy an additional fee of R350 to WRSA Rhino members to cover the substantive operating costs we are incurring. Another resolution was made that only WRSA members can become WRSA PROA members. An agreement has been reached with WRSA that the administration fee of R300 charged to all new members will be waived. Again, we urgently request and encourage non-members to join our ranks.

DNA

DNA data has become an essential tool in fighting rhino poaching and has already proven conclusive in court. First, you are able to link a horn taken during arrest to a specific poaching incident, the ownership of the horn cannot be questioned and a conviction is much easier to achieve.

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As important is the possibility of civil legal action that the owner can now take against the syndicate. We will shortly circulate a protocol on how to take data and how to return the sample to the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory at the University of Pretoria, Onderstepoort.

Funds raised

From various sources including **stoprhinopoaching.com** and the Professional Hunters Association of South Africa, funds are being spent on the purchase of essential equipment to help investigators. This includes scanners, metal detectors, GPS units and more. We will also assist by helping cover costs during a poaching incident reaction.

Training

Please send staff on training courses, there are excellent trainers and programmes to train staff in all aspects of anti-poaching and reactive protocol, including crime-scene protection. The better trained, the better motivated teams will become. Do not be a soft target. **WR**

