





# RHINO WATCH

news • views • updates • debates



TIM JACKSON



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

## THE OFFICIAL STORY

In late March, the rhino world was a-twitter with the news that the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) would be managing all communications regarding South Africa's rhino situation, with many observers decrying what they saw as an attempt to muzzle SANParks, the country's conservation agency – and the owner of more than half its rhino population.

On 4 April, Minister of Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa (above) released a statement detailing the government's response to the crisis. To date, 90 arrests had been made, and 75 of the 150 new rangers destined for duty in the Kruger, the epicentre of the crisis, were completing an intensive six-week paramilitary course. The establishment of buffer zones between the Kruger and private reserves and farms in Mozambique was also under discussion with the Mozambique authorities.

The minister reported that the DEA had approached the Vietnamese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to request that it conduct inspections and verify that the white rhino trophies exported from South Africa to Vietnam were still in the possession of the hunters. 'We are consulting at the diplomatic level and the outcome of this process will allow us to refuse all applications for white rhinoceros hunting by foreign hunters whose state of usual residence is Vietnam,' said the minister, who then gave details of a case where hunting permits for five Vietnamese nationals were, eventually, not issued.

Molewa also discussed rhino-horn stockpiles – an area of considerable concern and relevance to the legal trade debates – confirming that an inventory of rhino horn in the possession of conservation agencies exists, but that security risks preclude the DEA from announcing the size of those collections. She urged private landowners to register their stockpiles with their provincial conservation authorities. Owing to either legitimate concerns about the trustworthiness of those authorities or deliberate attempts to withhold that information, it is not clear exactly how much horn lies in private hands.

If the country is to make a proposal to the 16th Conference of the Parties of CITES next March regarding the legal trade in rhino horn, all horn, whether in government or private hands, will need to be registered – and that is just one of a number of conditions that will have to be fulfilled (see 'Conditions of trade'). While Molewa didn't comment on the issue of trade itself, she confirmed that 'the process to prepare for the 16th Conference of Parties has been initiated'. (And indeed, a feasibility study on whether to lift the domestic moratorium on rhino horn trade is already under way.)

She also reported that the proposed amendments to the regulations governing hunting permits – chiefly to clamp down on 'pseudo-hunts', in which rhino horn destined for the black market is legally obtained through a trophy hunt – would

come into effect pending their publication in the *Government Gazette*. Among other considerations, a person may now hunt and export only one rhino for trophy purposes within a 12-month period and rhino hunts must take place under the supervision of a conservation official. When issuing a permit, the official now has to take into account the hunter's country of residence (in other words, somewhere like Vietnam should set off alarm bells).

## proposed amendments to the regulations governing hunting permits – chiefly to clamp down on 'pseudo-hunts' – would come into effect

The collection of DNA samples when live rhinos are darted for translocation, treatment or any other management purposes will become mandatory. Although many rhino owners have already voluntarily contributed to the RhODIS database, this is good news as DNA makes a key contribution to the successful prosecution of rhino-related crimes.

The minister concluded her statement by saying, 'We are continuing to do research work to find more innovative mechanisms to curb rhino poaching.'

## CONDITIONS OF TRADE

Before South Africa can petition CITES to open the legal trade in rhino horn, certain boxes will need to be ticked. These include:

- All rhino horn in private and government possession must be marked, registered and verified.
- Strategic engagements to be set up with regional and international partners.
- Trading partners identified and confirmed, and their legislation amended to permit them to legally import and sell rhino horn. (Rhino horn has been banned in China and other Asian states since 1993.)
- A proposed system for trade, including appropriate legislative provisions in South Africa and potential recipient countries, to be developed.

If the process is similar to the African elephant downlisting and ivory sale proposals, a Panel of Experts will be appointed to evaluate the status and management of South Africa's rhino population, including its viability and sustainability; and the country's capacity to monitor and protect it. The panel will also assess the nation's ability to control the trade in rhino horn, including whether offtakes from both legal and illegal killing are sustainable; whether mixing of legal and illegal rhino horn can be prevented; and whether law enforcement is effective. Only once the panel has made its report will CITES consider the proposal, which must then garner a two-thirds majority to be approved.



## THE WILDLANDS CONSERVATION TRUST

The Wildlands Conservation Trust, a member of Project Rhino KZN, reports that a Cheetah light aircraft has been purchased and will be based in the Mkhuze area. The initiative, made possible with funding from WWF, the African Conservation Trust and the other Project Rhino partners, builds on the success of two aerial support models tested by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. The first of these was the introduction of a Bantam Ultra-Light aircraft into Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, and the second was the provision of a helicopter in iMfolozi Game Reserve. The helicopter flies a minimum of 20 hours a month and is deployed on an ad hoc basis. Statistics suggest that between October and December 2011 as many as nine rhinos may have been saved as a result of its presence. Visit [www.wildlands.co.za/partners/project-rhino-kzn](http://www.wildlands.co.za/partners/project-rhino-kzn) for more information.

### FROM THE CANINE TO THE RIDICULOUS

In April, the South African newspaper *Die Burger* reported that a 'poacher' had struck the Lombardini Game Reserve near Jeffrey's Bay in the Eastern Cape province. In the wee hours of Monday morning, 2 April 2012, the reserve's fibreglass mascot, a white rhino named Barendina, was pulled from her pedestal and her horns chopped off. Susan Lottering, co-owner of the reserve, discovered the crime and suspected that the perpetrator may have been fuelled by Dutch courage. 'He was probably looking for money and when he couldn't find it, he looked for refreshments in the bar.' It would appear that 'he had drunk some stroh rum and liqueur when his eye fell on the rhino horn'.

### 2012 FACTS & FIGURES (as at 4 April)

**159** the number of rhinos poached.

**95** the number of rhinos lost in the Kruger National Park.

**90** the number of rhino-related arrests.

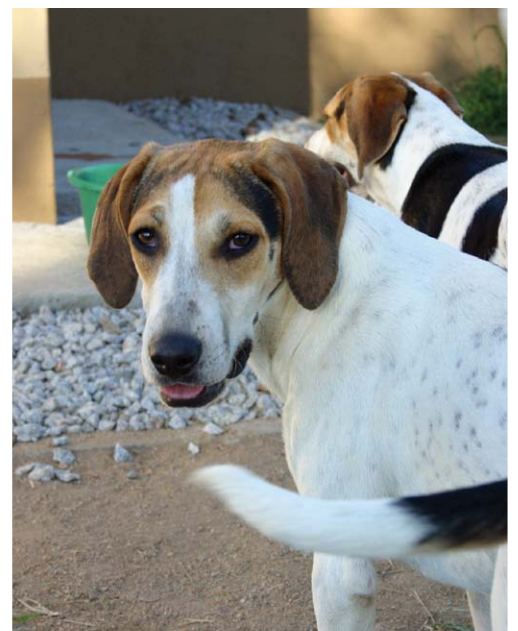
Source: Department of Environmental Affairs

## THE NEW (HAIRY) FACE OF COUNTER-POACHING

**T**hree foxhounds are currently undergoing intensive training in tracking, with a view to joining counter-poaching teams in the Kruger National Park before the end of the year. Sponsored by the volunteer initiative SANParks Honorary Rangers, the pooches – named Kombi, Jetta (right) and Chico in honour of the Unitrans Volkswagen and Audi division that funded the project – will give the park's rapid reaction team extra teeth when tracking poachers. Follow their progress at [www.sanparksvolunteers.org](http://www.sanparksvolunteers.org)

Not to be outdone, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) also has a new canine staff member. Rico the sniffer dog is being trained to detect wildlife products and will be deployed as part of a partnership between the EWT and the African Consultants for Transport Security (ACTS), a cargo-screening company. Funded by the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust, Rico, a two-year-old Belgian Malinois, arrived in South Africa from Germany in March this year to take up duty at OR Tambo International Airport's cargo and baggage sections.

Rico is the first of six dogs that will be deployed by the EWT at various high-risk border points of entry and exit during 2012. It is hoped that they will contribute to increasing the detection rate of wildlife contraband in transit and, therefore, the risk associated with wildlife crime.



SANPARKS HONORARY RANGERS

# RUN BABY RUN!

Your response to our April 2012 special issue has been fantastic! Our inboxes and social media forums were abuzz as the magazine hit the newsstands. Here are just some of the comments you made:

'Well done to you all. The "Run Baby Run" Special Issue is excellent, I should say outstanding, and of great importance to promoting the rhino cause.' *Tim Condon, editor, Rhino War News newsletter*

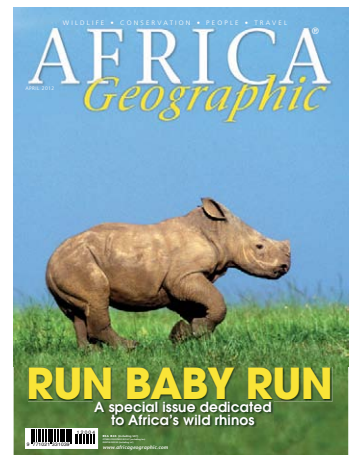
'Thank you so much for the wonderful edition of your magazine dedicated to rhinos. I am learning so much that I can use at my job as a wildlife educator in San Diego, where I am blessed to share these amazing creatures with our visitors every day.' *Vicki Notaro, California, US*

'Your rhino issue is fantastic! The subject deserves the space you have allocated and you really have tackled all sides – love the cover too!' *Amalia Christoforou, senior journalist, Carte Blanche*

'Must compliment you and your team on a great April edition. You have done a great job covering the tragic slaughter of our rhinos: raising awareness, what's happening on the ground and covering all possible solutions to this crisis. Well done.' *Simon Naylor, manager, Phinda Private Nature Reserve*

'Congratulations on an excellent issue. I had it with me on my trip to Kenya and had time to read it in detail on the flight. It is a very well-balanced and accurate presentation of the current crisis. The entire issue is a reflection of the very high standard of your editorial team. Thanks again for involving me in the content.' *Pelham Jones, Private Rhino Owners' Association*

'A quick congrats on doing a fantastic job with the rhino issue! I got my copy yesterday and what I have seen so far is very comprehensive and balanced – well done!' *Michael 't Sas-Rolfes, sustainability economist*



## 100% RHINOS

Over the course of two special reader events, *Africa Geographic* readers and Cape Union Mart fans were treated to two very different, yet equally thought-provoking evenings. A big thanks to our sponsors, Cape Union Mart, who provided the venues, logistics and prizes.

### IN JOZI...

Dr Hector Magome, head of Conservation Services for SANParks, got down to the nitty-gritty of the conservation authority's response to the rhino-poaching crisis. In 2009, for example, SANParks sold 252 rhinos for an estimated R151-million or US\$19-million. (Not only is selling surplus stock a revenue-generating exercise, but it is a recognised method of keeping breeding rates up.) That money went into buying more land, and other conservation projects. This year, because of the poaching figures – and the falling price of rhinos – he is not sure whether SANParks will sell any.

In the meantime, costs to protect rhinos have escalated. 'According to our cigarette box calculations,' said Magome, 'it's costing us almost R8-million (US\$1-million) to protect rhinos in Kruger... That is not sustainable in a developing country. Now we must be innovative.'

Innovation was a theme to which the head of conservation services returned a number of times. Musing on the efficacy of

end-user campaigns, he said, 'Asking the Chinese to stop using rhino horn is like asking Afrikaners not to braai.' He openly discussed the issue of rhino farms in the Asian super-power. 'The Chinese are not interested in killing rhinos,' he said. 'We sold them more than 150 rhinos and they are all still alive.'

'We have 20 tonnes of rhino horn stockpiled,' he went on. 'Maybe that could help in the meantime? We have to consider the issue of releasing rhino horn. I don't know how, but we have to consider it.'



TIM JACKSON

### IN CAPE TOWN...

Choosing rhinos over the Eagles (the legendary supergroup performed in the city on the same night), more than 80 Capetonians converged on Cape Union Mart's Adventure Centre to watch investigative journalist Ian Michler and sustainability economist Michael 't Sas-Rolfes engage in a spirited debate over the merits of legalising the trade in rhino

horn as a means to combat poaching. Chaired by *Africa Geographic* editor Sarah Borchert, the format followed the classic Oxford style. Over the course of 90 minutes, the protagonists picked apart issues of price and its importance, the role of speculators and whether the 1977 CITES trade ban is working. ('t Sas-Rolfes credits it with not only failing, but actually fuelling the poaching crisis, an analysis Michler strongly opposes, saying 'Rhinos are *not* being poached because of a ban on trade; they are being poached because of beliefs in Asia.'). The prospect of farming – and with it the inevitability of domestication – was also raised, with both protagonists agreeing that it would very likely happen should trade be allowed.

Question-time was intense and highly charged, with most of the challenges being thrown the way of 't Sas-Rolfes. Parallels between ivory and rhino horn kept everyone busy for some time, as did questions around what we know about the users ('Not nearly enough,' says Michler; 'Actually quite a lot,' says 't Sas-Rolfes).

While the debate ended with no clear winners (except for the guest who asked the best question of the night and won a bottle of Leopard's Leap wine, and Kate Wilkinson, who received a Cape Union Mart buff for posting the most insightful Facebook comment), there was a sense that the evening had been so successful that this may be the first of many *Africa Geographic* debates. Watch this space.



NATASHA FACCIO

Michael 't Sas-Rolfes, Ian Michler and Peter Borchert deep in conversation at the *Africa Geographic* reader evening.





# Saadani Safari Lodge

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At Saadani Safari Lodge, the Indian Ocean breaks almost at the foot of your bed onto the Tanzanian bush. Elephants have been known to walk along the beach, just a stone's throw from the open sea, and hippos wallow in the river estuary. The lodge is a delicate blend of rustic chic and eco-cool. Small and intimate, it has 15 tented cottages along the beach, cooled by soft breezes and shaded by casuarina trees. This is one of the few places where you can find four (elephant, buffalo, lion and leopard) of the Big Five in close proximity to the Indian Ocean.

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JULIE & IAN LONEY

## Happy elephants

**W**e've spent many hours watching elephant herds and their behaviour in eastern and southern Africa, but were still surprised on a recent visit to Botswana's Mashatu Game Reserve.

While enjoying an early morning tea break on a koppie, we watched a large family group of elephants leisurely browsing its way down the valley towards a distant river. The silence was suddenly broken by the sound of trumpeting and about 30 elephants of all sizes appeared, running at full speed in single file and in a perfectly straight line. We asked our guide if they were thirsty, but he said there were probably happy and this is how they showed it. *Julie & Ian Loney, Tasmania, Australia*

## Rhino NGO

**I**n the April issue, the Rhino NGO A-Z listing included an entry for Working Wild, a wildlife rescue centre run by Karen Trendler. The organisation she runs is, in fact, the Rhino Response Project (see below). We apologise for the misunderstanding.

### Rhino Response Strategy **MR**

**How it works** Managed by Karen Trendler, the project aims to provide a national support network for the casualties of the rhino-poaching crisis. It works in partnership with the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) emergency field response, provides training and has joined forces with Legend Lodges to create a rhino orphanage.

**Where your \$\$\$ go** Funds are administered by the EWT (NPO 015-502).

**How you can support it** Join EWT; donate, leave a bequest or purchase products online. The EWT is a beneficiary of the MyPlanet programme.

**Contact** Tel. +27 (0)72 372 3600; e-mail [karojay@global.co.za](mailto:karojay@global.co.za); [rhino-response-strategy.blogspot.com](http://rhino-response-strategy.blogspot.com); [www.ewt.org.za](http://www.ewt.org.za)

## Incorrect credit

**W**e received a letter from Robert Glen, who pointed out that the life-sized bronze of a lioness and impala at Mateya Lodge, depicted on page 128 of our publication *Safari in Style South Africa*, is credited to Donald Greig. Mr Glen in fact sculpted the bronze. We apologise for this error.

## WRITE TO US

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TAMMY MOULT

### HARRY THE PYGMY HIPPO

*A rare baby boy for South Africa*

In the early hours of the morning on Thursday 22 March, a pygmy hippo was born in a dusty Karoo town in South Africa. Harry, named after the British prince because of his love for Africa and its wild animals, popped out into the world at the Cango Wildlife Ranch in Oudtshoorn, where director Rob Hall and reptile curator Neal Martin were on stand-by all night after hippo mom Hilda's waters broke.

Pygmy hippos are indigenous to the forests and swamps of West Africa, where they are severely under threat from habitat destruction and poaching. There are currently fewer than 3 000 left in the wild, and the species is listed on CITES' Appendix II and classified as Vulnerable by the IUCN. For more endearing pictures, go to <http://africageographic.com/safari/blog/bush/harry-the-pygmy-hippo-a-rare-baby-boy-for-south-africa/>

### CELEBRATING RHINOS

With the launch of our special issue in April – a focus on rhinos and the current poaching crisis – we asked our Facebook fans to send in their pictures of rhinos. We collected all the images in an album to celebrate these magnificent creatures. You can view it at <http://on.fb.me/Hfw4UN>



### PICTURE OF THE MONTH

'Ten out of 10 for subject matter (very unusual) and 12 out of 10 for difficulty!' For our editor, these were the attributes that gave Tom Coetzee's atmospheric and intriguing photo of a swiftly moving black mamba the edge over some strong contenders this month.

*'While watching a pride of lions, the driver of the vehicle next to us pointed out this juvenile black mamba. It was quite interesting to see how inquisitive it was. Photographing it was tricky because of its movements, the amount of foliage and the overcast sky.'* Tom Coetzee

Africa Geographic added 40 photos to the album Celebrating Rhinos. Monday



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