



Shoot to kill?

Last year, Save the Rhino received an email from a concerned supporter after a comment on a well-known rhino conservation blog apparently 'celebrated' the death of five poachers, shot by rangers in South Africa. What were Save the Rhino's views on the shooting, they asked? Is it ever OK to defend a policy that can mean the loss of human life in order to protect wildlife?

Laura Adams | Office and Communications Manager

Save the Rhino's position, and the policy adopted by most of the programmes that we support, is to shoot-to-kill only as a last act and in self-defence. Anti-poaching rangers must first do all they can to avoid this. In the event of a contact (a ranger meeting a poacher), it would be much more beneficial if they were caught and arrested, giving the opportunity to recover valuable information about who has commissioned them to turn to poaching, information about the supply chain, and smuggling routes. If a poacher fires – they virtually all carry guns these days – and endangers the ranger's safety, then rangers may fire back, with the chance that lives may be lost in this exchange.

Furthermore, in Kaziranga the forest guards will not be prosecuted for shooting a poacher, whether in self-defence or as a pro-active ambush or attack. The issue of indemnity for armed wildlife guards is an important one for many field programmes, whose staff risk being caught up in lengthy court cases and even prison, while acting in the line of duty.

Protecting rhinos endangers lives. Mohammad Hasen Ali, a ranger at Rajiv Gandhi Orang National Park in Assam, India was fatally wounded when apprehending a poacher and declared dead on arrival at the nearest medical centre. His family received \$2,000 in compensation. Conversely, a Zambian poacher has just been killed, one of a group of three armed poachers who resisted arrest and shot at rangers in Tshakabika, Sinamatella in Hwange National Park in Zimbabwe. There are casualties on both sides.

In South Africa, 232 suspected poachers were arrested in 2011. But of these how many will actually end up being sentenced? Why don't we hear of more poachers going to prison, and why is it so hard to convict a poacher?

> The disparity between sentencing in different countries is great. The law in many countries does not assign long prison sentences to wildlife crime.



Poachers who do not receive a prison sentence are free to return and poach more rhino

Many anti-poaching and monitoring programme staff in the field are armed but not all. Those protecting National Parks or Game Reserves usually are, while those protecting rhinos and other wildlife in

conservancies (private or community-owned) are not. It's a tough ask to face a poaching gang when all you possess is a torch, a phone and a GPS. Some rhino holders are applying for Police Reservist status, which would allow named individuals to bear arms; others have come to arrangements with local

police forces or the government department to carry out joint patrols. Whoever is protecting the rhinos, is it morally acceptable to shoot to kill?

Very occasionally, shoot-to-kill is not only tolerated but encouraged, as a way of sending a very clear signal to poaching gangs, and rewarding the bravery of the rhinos' protectors. In Kaziranga National Park, India, forest guards receive a cash bonus to their salary if they successfully wound and kill a poacher. This stance has affected funding; indeed this policy caused the BBC Wildlife Fund to pull out of planned funding for the programme a couple of years ago.



Shoot-to-kill is one of the most controversial issues facing rhino conservation

MAKASAILAND PRESERVATION TRUST



Many anti-poaching teams are armed and virtually all poachers carry guns



STEVE ROBBINS

In Zambia, possession of rhino horn or a conviction of poaching can receive a sentence of 20 years, while in Kenya, the penalty for poaching is simply a fine (and a relatively low fine at that)

- Even where tough laws do exist, for a criminal case, it is difficult to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that a poacher is guilty. To do so would require DNA analysis linking the rhino carcass, the horn and the poacher. Too often, the expertise is not available for this type of sophisticated analysis. Even in South Africa, where this facility is available, many poachers are currently awaiting trial dates, and appeals have been sent out for more evidence from the public to complete these prosecutions. If a poacher is apprehended before an attack, there is very little to prove, except armed trespass

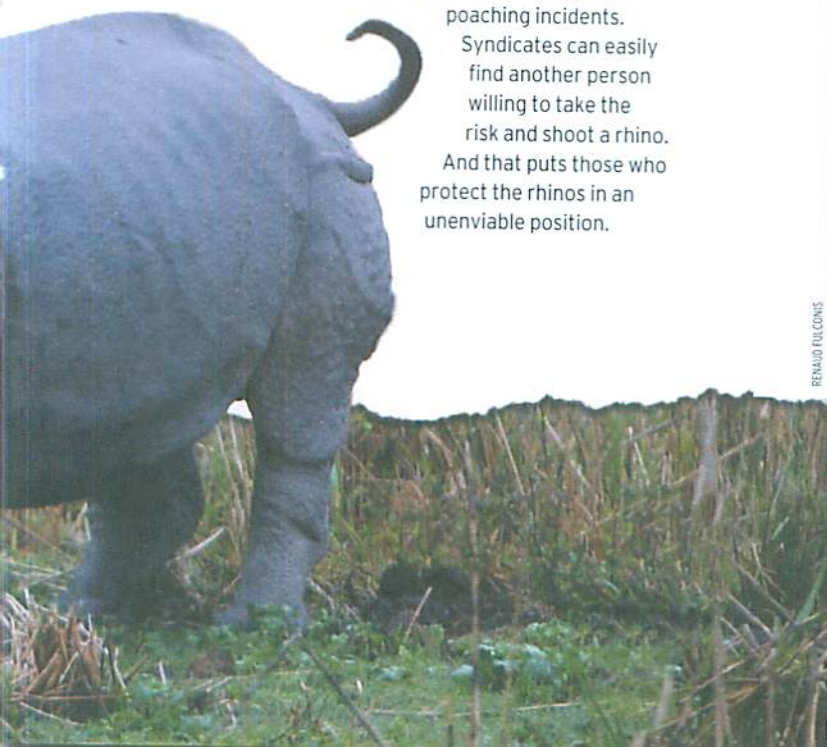
There is general frustration about the prosecution of rhino poachers. It is important to build the political will to ensure that prison sentences are given. Time and time again, poachers are acquitted at trial. If this is the case, then legal measures to crack down on poaching are not working. Poachers who do not receive a prison sentence are free to return to national parks and poach more rhino.

The highly organised nature of poaching syndicates means that the poacher 'on the ground' is doing the dirty work, but somewhere much higher up the chain is a criminal gang, very literally, calling the shots. This makes convicting poaching offences harder, and means that killing a poacher will achieve very little in terms of reducing the number of poaching incidents.

Syndicates can easily find another person willing to take the risk and shoot a rhino.

And that puts those who protect the rhinos in an unenviable position.

RENAUD FULCONS



PechaKucha

Wild!

On a dark night in the wilderness of London Zoo, some strange and unusual creatures gifted us with a brief glimpse of their beauty. Interacting quite happily with the spectators, this rare but wondrous species (*Celebritus dinewithus*) showed their natural aptitude for communication.

Jo Paulson | Events Manager

On 16 November 2011, six celebrity speakers and MC Clive Anderson (right) joined us at our annual fundraising dinner. Each speaker had just 20 slides with 20 seconds per slide to talk about something 'Wild'.



Clive Anderson was responsible for taming:

- Frank Gardner, the BBC's Security Correspondent, who told us stories from 20 wild places he's been – from the wilderness of Djibouti to the wild living in Tokyo
- Richard Bonham from the Chyulu Hills rhino programme, on the pressures on ecosystems and the challenges involved in wildlife management
- Louis Theroux, (right) on the USA's love affair with exotic animals, to the extent that the US now has more tigers as pets than there are wild tigers in India
- Ken Livingstone, (right) who talked about his passion for wildlife, from applying to be a keeper at London Zoo to hitchhiking across Africa
- Hayden Turner, wildlife television presenter, who took us to remote Cameroon where he met the Baka people who sharpen their teeth with a knife and hammer
- Richard Terry, cameraman and filmmaker, on the array of injuries he has sustained after he stepped out from behind the camera



ALL PICS COURTESY MICHELLE

The auction and raffle had some fantastic prizes, including a Kenyan safari, a restaurant review with Giles Coren, a brick of 500 \$25 billion Zimbabwean dollar notes, a Namibian safari and a rhino darting experience in South Africa.

The evening raised a massive £46,000 for rhino conservation.