

## CHAPTER 9

### THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES ON OTHER RANGE STATES – A NAMIBIAN PERSPECTIVE

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#### 1. WHY THE RHINO IS IMPORTANT

The sun is setting and you are sitting by a water hole. In the distance you see a puff of air, warm and made visible against the cool night breeze. As you watch, slowly she walks towards you. She stops and gazes out at the scenery, as if she sees something beyond. She walks to the water hole pauses and catches your eye. The majesty of meeting a rhino in the wild is an unforgettable moment.

Rhinos are one of the great elders of the animal kingdom. Ancient bushman rock paintings in Southern Africa depict rhinos, which have always played an important role in the circle of life. They are prehistoric creatures and according to science they have been around for 50 million years. They represent an ancient wisdom of the beauty of solitude.

The rhino is the symbol of Africa. If we lose the wise elder rhino, we lose the wisdom of Africa.

#### 2. NAMIBIA'S RHINOS

The elder rhino is the guardian of a magical desert land in Namibia. This place is where the last truly free roaming unfenced rhinos exist in the world.

The area they live is charming in its remote, rugged aridity (less than 2 inches of rain per year). All of Africa's iconic wildlife comes together in this magical land. By protecting the black rhino, we protect all the other animals that share the same homeland. The black rhino is the flagship species for conserving the miraculous wilderness that is home to a plethora of unique desert adapted wildlife.

They are Africa's symbol of the wilderness.

Namibia maintains one third of the world's black rhino population. Our desert maintains the last truly free-roaming unfenced black rhino population on the planet and the only desert adapted rhinos. They are critically endangered.

#### 3. RHINOS ARE IN DANGER OF EXTINCTION

Why are they so critically endangered? This is due to the fact that some 96% of the world rhino population had been decimated by humans in a short time period. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were one million rhinos in the wild. By 1970, there were around 70,000. Today there are less than 24,500 in Africa and currently more than two are being killed per day.

Even though rhinos are well built for survival, they were not prepared to face an organized gang of humans with an insatiable taste for greed. The driving force behind the horrific killings of this great animal elder is the very thing

which was meant to protect them. Their horn has been sought after for rumoured and unproven medicinal benefits in Asia. Historically, using rhino horn is a sign of prestige in several Asian cultures.

Due to the demand for their horn, Namibia lost most of its rhino population in the 1970s and 1980s. Now Namibia hosts the last remaining truly free roaming black rhino population on the planet. How quickly can that amount of rhinos be lost? Current statistics show that it took only 2 years to lose the same amount of rhinos that Namibia hosts. We can lose our rhinos very quickly. Black rhinos are one of the rhino species most under threat and they are classified as critically endangered, meaning that they are at an extremely high risk of going extinct in the wild.

#### 4. PRECAUTIONARY APPROACH

A critically endangered species is at a high risk of going extinct if we make any wrong moves now. It doesn't take much to see that we need to look ahead with extreme caution with whatever policy decisions we make. There is very little room for error.

Some say that legalizing the trade in rhino horn is the best way to meet the demands of a growing Asian market, but it's not that simple. The problem is that the end market is massive. The combined population of Vietnam and China alone is over 1.4 billion. It's impossible to meet the demand of even less than 5% of that population because we simply don't even have enough rhinos left on the planet.

#### 5. A GROWING MARKET

To make matters worse, studies have shown that the market is in fact growing. "A recent study in Vietnam, sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), reveals that demand for rhino horn may be much larger than previously thought. In addition to consumers of rhino horn, there is a large group of 'intenders' — people who intend to buy rhino horn when they can afford it. The study shows that rhino horn is bought not just for traditional medicinal purposes, but also as a status symbol. Rapid growth in living standards means the number of people who could become consumers of rhino horn is potentially enormous."

What will happen when more people can afford it? With only a total of approximately 28,000 rhino left on the whole planet, what happens if the Asian market increases because we encourage it by legalizing the trade? Rhinos are finite resources that will never be able to meet the demand. It is unsustainable to trade in endangered species and/or their products. Endangered, by definition, means something that is seriously at risk of extinction. It simply cannot be defined as sustainable to remove any animal which is seriously at risk of extinction.

#### 6. SENDING A MIXED MESSAGE

In addition, it has been proven that rhino horn has no medicinal properties and this has been widely publicized in order to educate the end market in Asia. Legalizing trade in rhino horn would send a mixed message to the end market, making it difficult to continue to progress on lessening demand through education in Asia. When we work so hard and spend so much money to convince Asia that it is not medicinal, doesn't it send a very confused message to then try to sell it legally?

It is also unethical to sell a product for its medicinal benefits when it has been proven there are no such benefits.

Finally, legalizing the trade in rhino horn also send a message to local Africans that rhinos are worth more dead than alive. Sending such a message is a very dangerous proposition as it is very likely that an increase in poaching would occur based on this fact alone.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In Namibia, our Constitution calls for a sustainable environment for current and future generations. Our Environmental Management Act calls upon the government to apply extreme caution when full scientific certainty is unknown. We cannot afford any slight miscalculation and in fact, any miscalculation would go against the terms of our laws.

Have we forgotten already what happened in 2011? The Western Black Rhino went extinct. It is a real possibility that the South-western Black Rhino will go extinct if trade is allowed and any slight miscalculation occurs.

Extinction is forever. Extinction cannot be defined as sustainable.

For Namibia, and for the whole Earth, this is what is at stake: the last truly free roaming black rhinos in the world.

“Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great. You can be that great generation.” Nelson Mandela