

An Inside Look at the World's Biggest Rhino Farm

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October 2015, Klerksdorp, North West Province, South Africa—Rhinos graze on John Hume's land in Klerksdorp, South Africa. Hume owns the largest rhino farm in the world, with more than 1,160 rhinos. He's currently falling just short of his aim of breeding 200 rhino per year.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



A worker throws lucerne, also known as alfalfa, to white rhinos on Hume's farm. South Africa is home to about 80 percent of the world's rhinos, an estimated 19,700.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



A dehorned rhino feeds on Hume's land. Hume employs a full-time vet who works 52 weeks a year dehorning rhinos. Dehorning helps deter poachers. Before the 2009 trade ban on rhino horn in South Africa, farmers were able to sell the horn domestically for a profit.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



A lightly tranquilized white rhino is blindfolded and wrestled to the ground prior to being dehorned. Hume has been systematically dehorning his rhinos for years.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



A rhino is dehorned. Since South Africa's 2009 ban on rhino horn sales, Hume has stored the horn. The cross-border trade in rhino horn has been banned since 1977.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



Employees on the farm dehorn a rhino. Hume has about four tons of rhino horn stockpiled, worth around \$235 million in today's black market prices.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



This blindfolded white rhino has just been dehorned. In addition to dehorning rhinos to deter poachers, Hume employs a fulltime security force to protect the animals.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



A farm manager holds a recently removed horn. It will be stored, along with several years' worth of additional rhino horn. Hume and another rhino farmer are suing South Africa's government to lift the ban on the domestic rhino horn trade. The court [sided with the farmers](#) in December 2015, but the government is appealing the ruling.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



A rhino horn is weighed before being stored.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK



Rhino horn and shavings are stored in a safe deposit box. The illegal trade in rhino is flourishing. Last year, [1,175 rhinos were killed](#) in South Africa for their horn. Demand comes mainly from Vietnam, where some believe the horn has medicinal properties after a politician [claimed](#) it cured his cancer.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID CHANCELLOR, KIOSK

John Hume is a South African rhino farmer. He owns more rhinos than anyone else in the world—around 1,160. At his farm in Klerksdorp, about 100 miles southeast of Johannesburg, he has a vet who works year-round dehorning them. That’s allowed him to build up a four-ton stockpile of horn, which is more valuable than gold.

South Africa is home to about 80 percent of the world's rhinos. Poaching has grown substantially, from 13 rhinos in 2007 to 1,175 last year. It was a [slight drop from 2014](#), but still an “unacceptable” number, according to conservationists.

Trading rhino horn across international borders has been banned since 1977, but it remained legal within South Africa until 2009. A spike in rhino horn poaching to meet demand from Asia (mainly Vietnam, where a politician [claimed](#) rhino horn cured his cancer) encouraged the environment ministry to pass the ban.

But that meant rhino farmers like Hume, who in part made their living from the rhino horn trade in South Africa, suddenly saw the value of their product drop to zero. They couldn't sell horn anymore. So they sued the government. And in December 2015, a court [overturned](#) the ban.

The trade in rhino horn isn't legal in South Africa just yet—the ban is staying in place while the government appeals. But only yesterday, a court ruled against the government. Still, the government gets a second chance at filing an appeal, which the minister of the environment says will happen soon.

National Geographic photographer David Chancellor got an inside look at Hume's farm.

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