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Eye to eye

There can be nothing more exhilarating than the thrilling experience of coming face to face with a rhino on foot

We walk in silence for an hour, every snap or crunch of Africa's sun-scorched bush ricocheting through the burning air like a gunshot. Sound and smell could betray us here, in this vast expanse of the Sera Conservancy in northern Kenya, and while I keep my eyes to the ground, dodging branches and side-stepping leaves, my Samburu guide Sammy is watching the wind.

Shaking a sock, a wisp of ash floats south before he signals me to move on, slow, silent, single file, and then: Do. Not. Move. A thorn-laden acacia, just 20m ahead, begins to shake violently. The perpetrator is hidden, but undoubtedly huge. I stand, transfixed, seesawing inwardly between excitement and fear, my body wrestling with its primeval, protective response: fight or flight?

A look from Sammy vetoes both. Suddenly the thorns are stilled, and from behind the tangle of bush comes a horn — heavy, curved and most-coveted. Shortly behind is an immense, nonchalantly noble head, followed by a one-ton, leathered and battle-scarred body, as old as the Earth itself. I hear my own intake of breath and the head swings in my direction, ears forward; gentle, ancient eyes trying to work out what I am: friend or foe. I'm standing face-to-face with one of the rarest animals on the planet. He doesn't see me but I see him, and he's more magnificent than I could ever have imagined.

A warrior, a wanderer, an icon. A link to our past and a symbol of our future; an animal loved by millions and a victim of human greed. Everything that's right with our world and everything that's wrong; everything we could hope to gain and everything we could lose. I see him for just a minute, before he turns and is gone. →

Saruni offers the opportunity to track black rhino on foot at the Sera Rhino Sanctuary in Samburu, with conservancy fees benefiting local communities and wildlife.



SHARUN RHHINO / SARUNICOM

Powerful, prehistoric and precious, the rhino is one of Africa's most iconic creatures, symbolising the struggles and successes of African wildlife conservation. In a series of short articles, **Lauren Jarvis** looks at the threats to its survival, and meets the people battling to protect it

Glorious armoured giants

ROSS COOPER / REMEMBERING RHINOS



WILDFILE

GETTING TO KNOW OUR FLORA AND FAUNA

Saving the rhino

Hunted for sport, poached for its horn, prized for its power: history has been hard on the rhino, but conservation projects across Africa offer hope for a brighter future

It may look invincible, but while the mighty rhino is perfectly adapted to survive the harsh conditions of the African bush, sadly, this armoured giant is no match for mankind. Just 150 years ago, rhino roamed Africa in their millions, but their numbers declined drastically during the 19th century, as international hunters and traders plundered the continent's natural bounty.

Hundreds of thousands of horns were shipped to Asia to be used in traditional medicine or for ornamental carving. By the end of the century, between 50 and 100 southern white rhino remained, and the colonial 'Golden Age' saw trophy hunters take aim at the animals left behind.

The demand for horn caused a surge in poaching in the 1970s and '80s, prompting CITES to introduce an international trade ban in 1977, but by 1992, 96 per cent of black rhino had been lost.

Despite increasing pressures of human population growth and habitat loss, conflict and drought, determined conservation and anti-poaching initiatives have seen white rhino numbers bounce back to around 20,000, while the black rhino remains 'critically endangered' at about 5,000. "There are amazing rhino projects in place throughout Africa," says founder and CEO of Helping Rhinos, Simon Jones. "We must replicate models that have achieved results. If we invest in success, this is a battle we can still win."

As a result of these efforts, rhino can still be seen in the wild. *Travel Africa* recognises the increasing trend not to reveal specific rhino locations, but also understands the importance of tourism for their long-term protection. We have, therefore, consulted with many conservationists on the best places to include in this article.

TA TIP

Before posting any images of rhino on social media, always be sure to remove the location metadata to limit GPS information that could be used by poachers. For more information about the amazing work people are doing to protect the rhino, visit travelfricamag.com.

Where to see them



Botswana

Poaching brought Botswana's rhino to the brink of extinction, but recent years have seen them wandering the pristine Okavango Delta once more. Rhino Conservation Botswana (RCB) has been working with the governments of South Africa and Zimbabwe, and tour operators Great Plains, &Beyond, Wilderness Safaris, Abercrombie & Kent and Desert & Delta, to reintroduce wild black and white rhino to this beautiful country.

An expensive operation — translocating one rhino can cost over £50,000 including purchasing,

transporting, tagging and monitoring — rhino have been released in the Okavango Delta, one of the world's richest and most diverse ecosystems.

"It's not often that one has the chance to rewrite the future history of a species," says Dereck Joubert, CEO of Great Plains Conservation. "This is a global project that everyone can get behind to do just that."

Botswana's surviving indigenous rhino are protected at the Khama Rhino Sanctuary near Serowe, along with translocated rhino from South Africa. Now a Big Five destination, the Okavango's Moremi Game Reserve is home to reintroduced





HARRISON COONEY

WILDLIFE DEFENDERS This photograph — of a member of the Blue Canyon Conservancy counter-poaching unit in South Africa — is by Harrison Cooney. With his father, he created The Wildlife Defenders, a project that tells the human story, through photographs, of those risking their lives daily to protect endangered species.

To read more, visit thewildlifedefenders.org.

white and black rhino, while white rhino can now also be seen at Makgadikgadi Pans National Park for the first time in 200 years.



Kenya

Kenya's community conservancies are helping to make the country a safe haven for Africa's remaining rhino. The UNESCO World Heritage Site of Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in central Kenya has played a key role in the survival of the country's rhino. A member of the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), Lewa benefits local communities through tourism revenue and its star attractions are protected by armed rangers and highly trained tracker dogs. A Joint Operations Centre uses high-tech anti-poaching systems to monitor activity across the NRT conservancies.

"Community awareness of the benefits of protecting rhino is the single-most important aspect in creating space for them," says Ian Craig, Director of Conservation at NRT. "Rhino need grass-root political allies within Africa: local communities are those allies."

Ol Pejeta Conservancy is Africa's largest black rhino sanctuary, and home to the world's last three surviving northern white rhinos, while Sera Conservancy has brought rhino back to the Samburu region after 25 years. Nairobi National Park is a fantastic spot to see black rhino, along with the Solio Game Reserve to the north, and Lake Nakuru National Park in the Great Rift Valley has both black and white species. →

Why are rhino poached?

Despite an international trade ban, the rhino remains in the poachers' crosshairs to satisfy Asia's demand for its horn

Worth more than gold on the black market, powdered horn is used in traditional Chinese medicine to 'cure' ailments ranging from rheumatism to cancer (despite no proven medical value), and horns are carved and coveted for status symbols, or made into jewellery, in China and Vietnam. While poaching numbers fell slightly last year, Africa's rhino are in the midst of a crisis that began in Zimbabwe and soon spread to South Africa and beyond, seeing massive increases in poaching from 2009 to 2015. (See below.) Controversially, South Africa legalised domestic trade in rhino horn earlier this year. "If people don't stop buying these products, rhino could be extinct within 15 to 20 years," reveals South African rhino veterinary specialist Dr William Fowlds.

Numbers game

COUNTRY	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Botswana	2	2	0	0	0
Kenya	29	59	35	11	10
Malawi	2	1	1	1	1
Mozambique	16	15	19	13	5
Namibia	1	4	30	94	59
South Africa	668	1004	1215	1175	1064
Swaziland	0	0	1	0	0
Tanzania	2	0	2	2	0
Uganda	0	0	0	0	0
Zambia	0	0	0	0	0
Zimbabwe	31	38	20	50	30

These statistics show the increase in rhino poaching between 2012 and 2015 but a decrease since then.

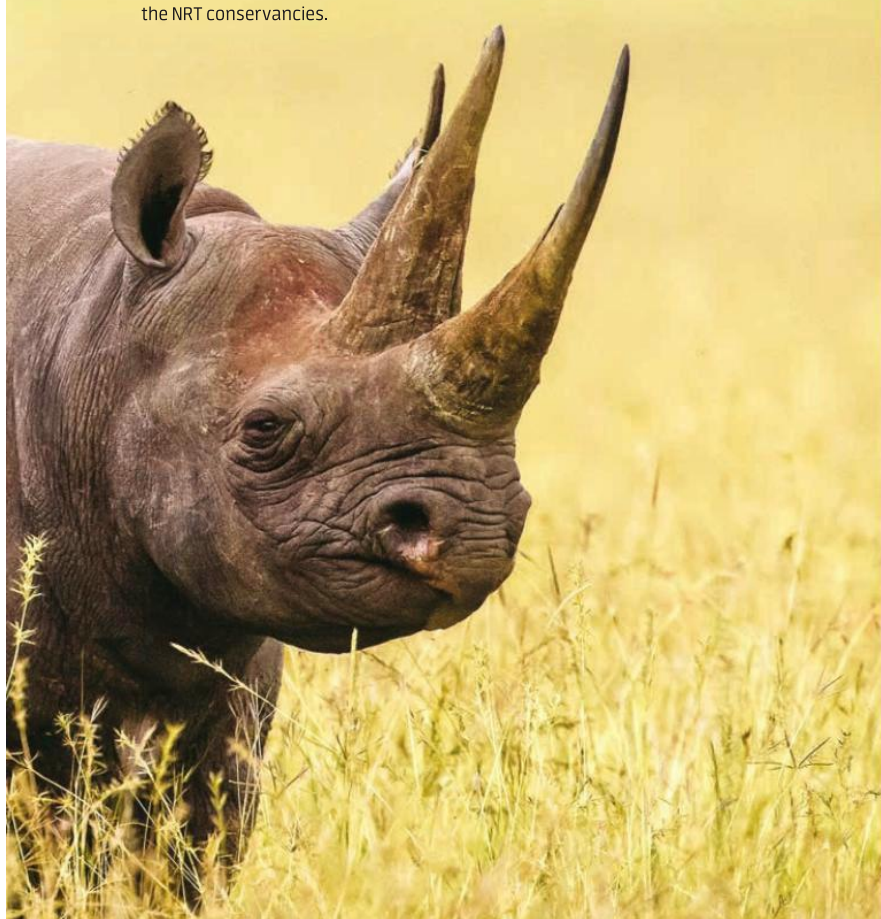
The rhino horn trade

CONSUMERS OF RHINO HORN

- Source countries
- Consumer countries
- Transit countries



This map illustrates the incredible journey of a rhino horn.



MARGOT RAGGETT / REMEMBERING RHINOS

AFRICAN RHINO SPECIALIST GROUP REPORT

RHINO.PANDA.ORG



USEFUL LINKS
helpingrhinos.org
matoborhinotrust.com
lowveldrhinotrust.org
rhinoconservationbotswana.com
rhinoswithoutborders.com
savetherhinotrust.org
savetherrhino.org
nrt-kenya.org
careforwild.co.za
ongava.com
sanparks.org
rhinos.org

WILDFILE

GETTING TO KNOW OUR FLORA AND FAUNA



Namibia

Namibia's remote and rugged wildernesses are home to the world's largest population of free-ranging black rhino.

The first African country to include environmental protection in its constitution, more than 40 per cent of Namibian land is dedicated to conservation, encompassing national parks, private preserves and communal conservancies.

Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) has worked with the environment department, local communities and NGOs to bring the desert-adapted black rhino of the Kunene and Erongo regions back from the edge of extinction through poaching and drought: by 1982, fewer than 10 rhinos remained. Employing former poachers as rangers and involving locals in decision-making is key.

"The motivation to work with rhino came from my elders, who awakened the pride of protecting them," says SRT tracker Denzel Tjiraso. "They're not my rhino, they're our rhino: we need the whole nation on board."

Etosha National Park's black rhino have been targeted by poachers

in recent years, yet sightings are still good, and Waterberg National Park also has viewing opportunities. Guests can join trackers on patrol in Damaraland's Palmwag Concession, while Ongava Game Reserve provides sanctuary for white rhino and the rare south-western black rhino.



South Africa

With more than 75 per cent of the world's rhino population, South Africa shoulders one of the continent's biggest responsibilities in protecting them.

Poaching records from the past three years reveal the crisis threatening South Africa's rhino populations: with more than 1000 lost each year, the world's rhino stronghold is under attack.

The country's flagship national park, Kruger, has suffered more

than half of those losses, but a meerkat could save the day.

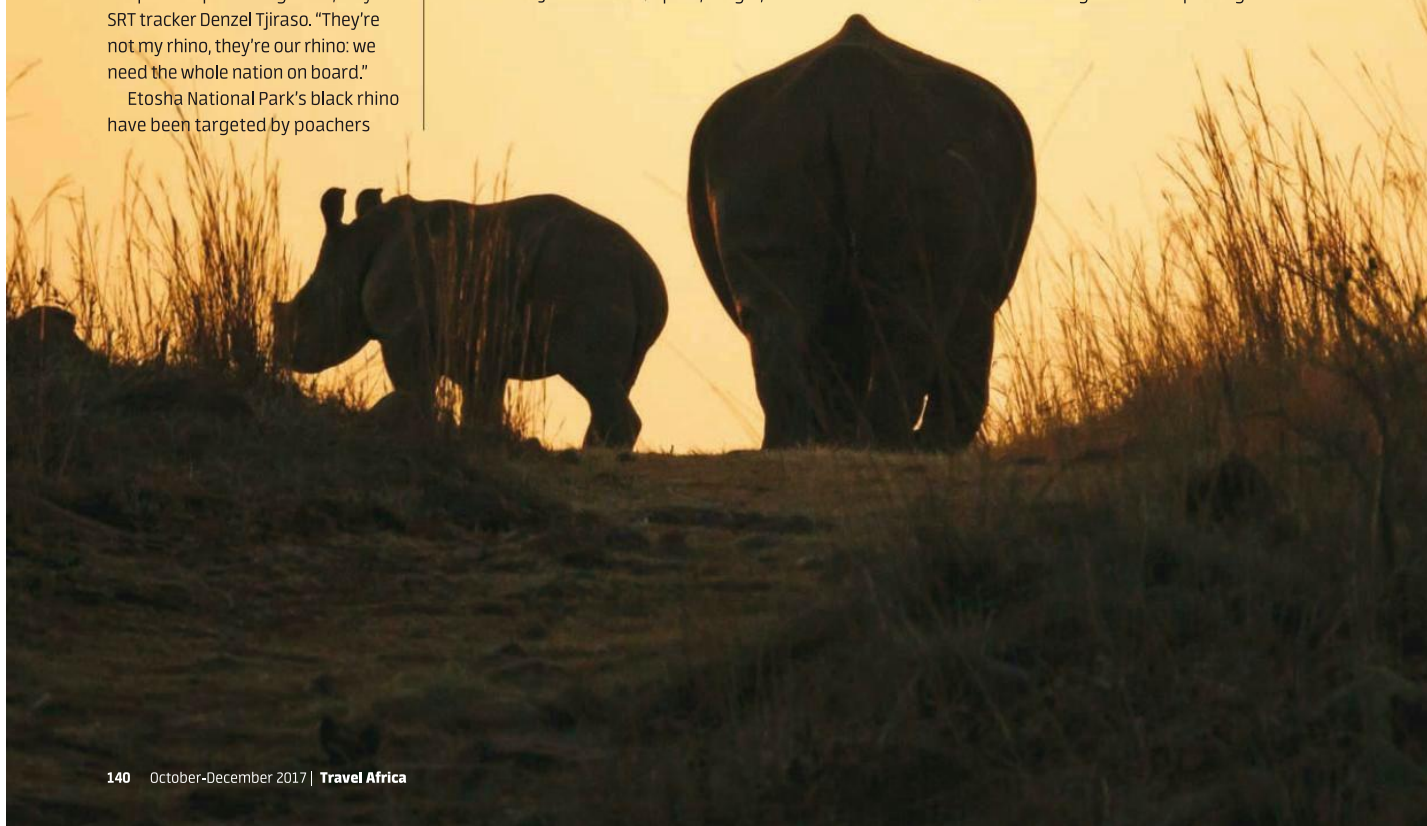
A new £4.7-million wide-area surveillance system, code-named 'Postcode Meerkat', was introduced last December, with no rhino lost in its detection area since. Sniffer and tracker dogs are also proving effective.

"Last year, we had around 200 arrests and the dogs were responsible for 168 of them," says Kruger's K9 manager Johan de Beer. "We couldn't do this without them."

Kruger National Park and Madikwe Game Reserve are prime places for viewing. Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park in KwaZulu-Natal has the world's largest white rhino population, and Kariega Game Reserve has white and black rhino, including Thandi — the first rhino to survive a poaching attack. The Care for Wild Rhino Sanctuary in Mpumalanga is the world's largest rhino orphanage.

EVER SEEN A RHINO?

If you have, we'd love to hear about your encounter with this amazing animal. Please email us at editor@travelfricomag.com.



INTO AFRICA This photograph is taken from Frans Lanting's new book *Into Africa* (Earth Aware Editions), available to buy this month.

FRANS LANTING / INTO AFRICA



Zimbabwe

Several decades of political and economic instability have made rhino protection even more of a challenge, but innovative conservation initiatives bring hope.

Partnering with WWF and the International Rhino Foundation, the Lowveld Rhino Trust (LRT) protects 85 per cent of the country's rhino population in the Savé and Bubyé valleys of Zimbabwe. Conservation initiatives include monitoring, research and translocations, but LRT also engages with 140 local schools that benefit directly whenever a new calf is born, incentivizing communities to protect their rhino.

LRT Director Raoul du Toit says, "Wildlife on its own is not going to solve all the poverty problems. But if you have wildlife combined with a diversified approach to advancing and creating livelihoods, you can lift people up."

The Matobo Conservation Trust protects and supports black and white rhino tourism in the Whovi Wilderness Area. Stanley & Livingstone Private Game Reserve near Victoria Falls has a strong breeding population of black rhino, and Malilangwe Reserve in the south-eastern corner of Zimbabwe is a good spot to see both species.

Rhino relations

Many species of rhino roamed the earth millions of years ago, but now just five remain

WHITE RHINO

Conservation status: Southern white rhino: near threatened. Northern white rhino: critically endangered
Population: Southern white rhino: 19,666-21,085. Northern white rhino: 3

Scientific name: *Ceratotherium simum*
Current range: Botswana, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe
Habitat: Tropical and subtropical grasslands, savannahs and scrublands
Height: 1.5-1.8m
Weight: 1800-3000kg

BLACK RHINO

Conservation status: Critically endangered
Population: 5040-5458
Scientific name: *Diceros bicornis*
Current range: Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe
Habitat: Tropical and subtropical grasslands, savannahs, deserts and shrublands
Height: Around 1.6m
Weight: 900-1350kg

SUMATRAN RHINO

Conservation status: Critically endangered
Population: 100
Scientific name: *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*
Current range: Sumatra and East Kalimantan (Indonesia)
Habitat: Dense highland and lowland tropical and subtropical forests
Height: 1-1.5m
Weight: 500-960kg

JAVAN RHINO (LESSER ONE-HORNED RHINO)

Conservation status: Critically endangered
Population: 61-63
Scientific name: *Rhinoceros sondaicus*
Current range: Ujung Kulon peninsula, Java (Indonesia)
Habitat: Tropical and subtropical moist, broadleaf forests
Height: 1.4-1.7m
Weight: 900-2300kg

GREATER ONE-HORNED RHINO (right)

Conservation status: Vulnerable
Population: 3500
Scientific name: *Rhinoceros unicornis*
Current range: India and Nepal
Habitat: Grasslands, savannah and shrublands
Height: 1.75-2m
Weight: 1800-2500kg



MARIUS COETEE / RESEARCHING RHINOS

RICHARD DU TOIT



WILDFILE

GETTING TO KNOW OUR FLORA AND FAUNA

What is the point of a rhino anyway?

The world is currently rooting for its survival, but what does a rhino actually do?

Colossal relatives of the rhino roamed the planet 50 million years ago, but our modern-day species — dating back a mere 15 million years — are just as impressive, sitting firmly in the megafauna category. Size and power helped the rhino survive in large numbers, until modern man attempted to vanquish that power through trophy hunting and harness it for Chinese medicine.

But aside from the economic value now placed on its much-prized head, what benefit does the rhino bring to our world? Firstly, it's an umbrella species — when land for rhino is protected, insects, birds, fish and plants are protected too: win, win.

In addition, as grass grazers (the white rhino), bush browsers (the black, Javan and Sumatran rhino), or both (the greater one-horned rhino), each species impacts its environment.

The consequences of removing apex predators from ecosystems are well known, but losing megaherbivores, such as rhino, also has damaging repercussions. Munching 25-50kg of vegetation a day, rhino shape their landscape simply by eating. Grazers keep grasses short, giving other plants room to grow, diversifying species. Browsers prune trees and pick fruits, spreading seeds in their dung; they are the gardeners of tropical forests. Losing these apex consumers could mean losing their habitats too.

But of course, the extinction of one of the world's most iconic species would be a tragedy on many levels. In the words of Ian Craig, Director of Conservation at the Northern Rangelands Trust, "If the world loses its rhino, then it's a slippery slope for all species — and where does that stop?"

EARS

The rhino has sharp hearing, thanks to rotating, cup-shaped ears that funnel sounds into the ear drum. The ears stand up when it's curious or alert and flatten when it's angry.

HUMP

The bump on the back of the rhino's neck — which helps to support its heavy head — grows as the animal ages. Black rhino, such as this one, have a less prominent hump than a white rhino.

HORNS

Black and white rhino have two horns and neither is attached to the skull. Made from keratin — the same material as human fingernails and hair — they grow between 4cm and 6cm a year.

BRAIN

Considering their huge size, rhino have small brains, but they're far from stupid. The olfactory portion (which detects smell) forms the largest area of their brain.

NOSE

Rhino have an excellent sense of smell. Each nostril has a patch the size of a small coin containing millions of individual sensory cells, which pick up even the slightest odour.

EYES

Their relatively small eyes are positioned on either side of their head. Rhino have poor binocular vision and struggle to see anything standing still at a distance.

MOUTH

Black rhino have a pointed, prehensile upper lip to pluck leaves and fruit from trees, while the white rhino's upper lip is flat for grass grazing. Neither has canines or incisors, but they do have flat molars for chewing.





REMEMBERING RHINOS This photograph is taken from the spectacular new coffee-table book *Remembering Rhinos* by Wildlife Photographers United, which will be published later this month. Read more at rememberingrhinos.com.

MARLON DU TOIT / REMEMBERING RHINOS

OXPECKER

Rhino have a symbiotic relationship with oxpeckers, known in Swahili as *askari wa kifaru* or 'the rhino's guard'. They keep the rhino tick-free and raise an alarm if danger is near.

SKIN

Despite their names, black and white rhino are greyish brown, with thick skin (around 1.5-5cm). They roll in mud to protect themselves from insect bites and sunburn.

RUMP

Males often rest their heads on a female's rump before mounting and mating. After a 15-18-month gestation period, females usually give birth to one calf, which they raise alone.

TAIL

An upturned tail can mean the rhino is alarmed or curious and a curled tail shows it is anxious. The rhino only has hair on its tail tip, ears and eyelashes.

STOMACH

The rhino has just one large stomach, and microbial fermentation of plant fibre in the hindgut (cecum and large intestine) is their main energy source.

FEET

The largest of the odd-toed ungulates — an order which includes horses and tapirs — rhinos' feet are adapted for running. Each foot has a cushioned pad and three rigid hoofed toes.



BORANA



Located at the foot of Mt Kenya at 6,500ft Borana Conservancy provides a unique and diverse habitat for a wide variety of wildlife. In 2013, a founding population of 21 Black Rhino were introduced. Once they were settled, Borana and Lewa Wildlife Conservancy were integrated to form one landscape; 92,000 acres of unspoiled wilderness.

Together with Lewa, we now host a thriving community of 87 Black Rhino and 79 White Rhino. Visit one of the four properties on Borana where every bed-night not only directly benefits local livelihoods and enhances ecosystem integrity. It also funds all core operating costs, these include the support of more than 100 rangers who protect and monitor over nine highly endangered species.

For more information please contact conservancy@borana.co.ke

BORANA LODGE

LARAGAI HOUSE

SIRAI HOUSE

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Borana is dedicated to the sustainable conservation of land and wildlife.

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