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*History of
rhinoceros conservation
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- J.G. du Toit*

CHAPTER 1

History of rhinoceros conservation in South Africa - J.G. du Toit

The white rhinoceros conservation success story is well known world-wide. During the early 1900s the number of white rhinoceroses in Natal was below a hundred individuals. Simon, a well-known scientist, mentions four important reasons why the numbers were low: “...it was easy to approach and kill, the flesh was highly esteemed for its tastiness, the skin was prized for the making of whips and the horns were of value overseas.” The last animals in the previous century occurred in the Umfolozi/Hluhluwe reserves in northern Zululand. The former Natal Parks Board was responsible for the conservation success of this small population. The tsetse fly played an important role in the conservation of the white rhinoceros. The tsetse carries a blood parasite that causes a deadly disease, nagana, in cattle. This parasite kept the hunters and oxwagons out of the natural habitat of the last surviving rhinoceros population. The estimated numbers of white rhinoceroses and the population growth can be seen in Figure 1.1.

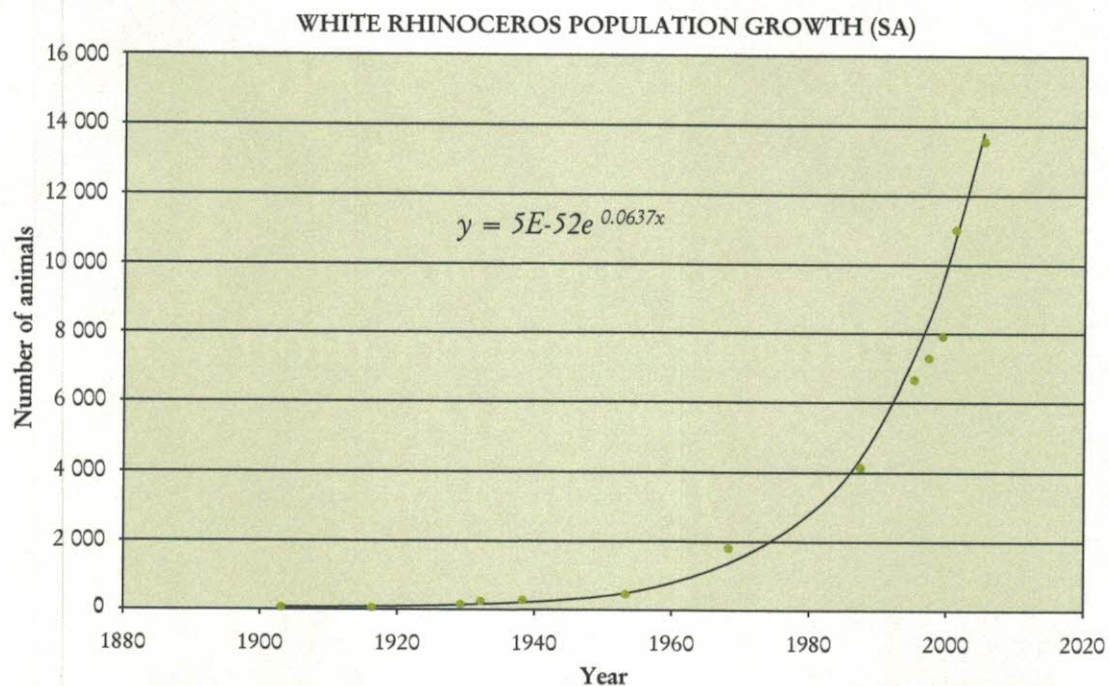


Figure 1.1: Population growth curve of white rhinoceroses in South Africa

In 1908 Selous, the well known hunter, wrote as follows: “In South Africa the black and white rhinoceros has been almost absolutely exterminated during the last sixty years. During that period, thousands upon thousands of these animals have been killed.....” He also remembered Oswell, who shot large numbers of rhinoceroses during the period 1844–1853. One dealer had more

than 400 hunting weapons distributed under the local communities and there was always rhinoceros horn in the stores between the trophies.

The history of the population growth of the white rhinoceros can be divided into five eras.

- 1810–1900: Hunters reduced the number of animals to fewer than 100 individuals in the former Zululand Reserves (Refer to Table 1.1).
- 1901–1960: The population in the Umfolozi/Hluhluwe Nature Reserves recovered and the species could be removed from the endangered list of the IUCN.
- 1961–1970: The repopulation of white rhinoceroses occurred in game reserves in African and overseas zoos and safari parks.
- 1971–1985: The repopulation of white rhinoceroses occurred in state-owned National Parks and nature reserves and a few selected private properties.
- 1986–2012: White rhinoceroses were sold on public auctions to repopulate private game ranches.

The hunting pressure on the rhinoceros population during the 1850s was very high, as indicated in Table 1.1 below (B. Ellis 1993/4). During the period 1861–1874 a total of 4870 rhinoceroses were hunted. This action was the final threat to the white rhinoceros population in Zululand.

Table 1.1: Number rhinoceros horns and income in £ from rhinoceros horn (1861–1874)

	1861	1862	1863	1864	1865	1866	1867	1868	1869	1870	1871	1872	1873	1874	TOTAL
No.	94	1161	1019	201	735	282	433	348	727	1289	2470	371	310	317	9757
£	120	729	874	129	626	260	449	388	808	1029	1721	221	135	236	7740
9757 horns ÷ 2 = 4879 rhinoceroses															
4879 rhinoceroses ÷ 14 = 349 rhinoceroses shot per annum															

On 13 October 1961 the first two white rhinoceroses were reintroduced to the Kruger National Park. The white rhinoceros calf born in the Loskop Provincial Nature Reserve on 11 August 1964 was the first to be born outside KwaZulu-Natal. This was a remarkable occasion because it was the first calf born in the Transvaal since 1896. These results could only be obtained with the game capture techniques developed by the pioneers, Dr. Toni Harthoorn, Dr. Tol Pienaar and Dr. Ian Player.

On 25 July and 3 August 1967 the first white rhinoceroses, a bull and a cow, were introduced on the Ubizane Game Ranch of Mr. Norman Dean in KwaZulu-Natal. Currently, the property still has rhinoceroses. Since 1979 white rhinoceroses were sold at a price of R800 an animal to farmers on a waiting list whose farms were ecological suitable. During 1971 the first surplus bulls were sold for trophy hunting. The number of rhinoceroses on private property increased from 80 animals in 1984 to 4000 animals in 2008. Refer to **Table 1.2**.

Table 1.2: Population increase of white rhinoceroses on private properties.

YEAR	1984	1987	1995	1997	1999	2001	2005	2008
Number White Rhinoceroses	80	931	1445	1742	1922	2543	3247	4000
Number Properties		103	153	165	164	242	318	395

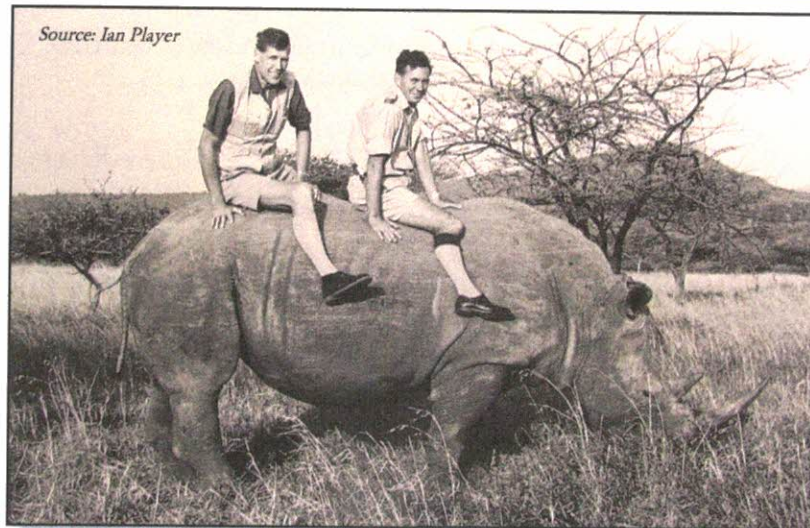


Figure 1.2: Dr. Toni Harthoorn and Dr. Ian Player with one of the first white rhinoceroses captured in the Zululand Reserves.



Figure 1.3: Hunters in the 1800s. Note the lion cub at the hunter's feet

The number of white rhinoceroses on private land in the various provinces in 2008 is reflected in **Figure 14.1**. The shaded areas indicate the natural distribution range of the white rhinoceroses in South Africa. These data show that a minimum of 700 animals occur outside the original distribution range. This is a clear indication of the important role that game ranchers play in the conservation of an endangered species. In 2005 there were 15 000 white rhinoceroses world-wide. The South African government owned 69.7%, South African game ranchers 22.1%, other African countries 6.8% and zoos and safari parks 1.4%. This indicates that the South African game ranchers are the second largest owners of rhinoceroses in the world.

REFERENCES

Ellis, B. (1993). Game Conservation in Zululand (1824 -1947). Changing Perspectives. *Natalia*, 23 & 24: 27 – 44.