

BACK TO THE WILD

IN 2010, THE JAVAN RHINOCEROS, THE RAREST LARGE MAMMAL IN THE WORLD, was declared extinct in Vietnam. The last one was killed in October in Cat Tien National Park, found with a bullet in its leg and its horn sawed off.

JESSAMY CALKI Features Editor, *The Telegraph Magazine* from which this article is extracted with permission



MAIN PHOTO
The rhinos on the DHL transporter lorry on their way from Port Lympne.

THIS PAGE, TOP-BOTTOM
Phil Couchman, CEO of DHL Express with **Charlie Mayhew**, CEO Tusk.

The Duke of Cambridge meets one of the rhinos at Port Lympne before their departure to Tanzania.

The Duke of Cambridge with one of the rhino whilst being interviewed by BBC Presenter **Kate Silverton**.



As a species, the rhino is some 60 million years old, but if something is not done to curb the appetite for its horn, it may not last the century. In Africa, the poaching trade in both rhino horn and elephant ivory has moved on to a whole new plane and now operates in a way that is comparable to drug cartels or arms dealing.

Penalties are often derisory in Africa, from where much of the horn originates, and not well enforced in Asia, where it ends up. Some crime syndicates are expanding their existing operations into the ivory and horn trade – the risks are fewer and the profits can be greater.

Technology has helped the poachers enormously. From 2010 until the end 2012, 1,400 rhinos were killed in South Africa (only 13 were killed in 2007, by 2012 it was 618); poachers are using GPS systems, helicopters, and semi-automatic weapons. In East Africa, the technology is not yet as sophisticated but illegal arms are readily available from Somalia and the perpetrators, driven by poverty, are inventive. Night vision goggles have been stolen from the Kenyan army, and chancers have been known to jump over fences when there's a full moon and kill rhino using guns fitted with silencers made from bicycle pumps. And it's not just rhinos; people are

getting killed too, both poachers and rangers.

As most of us now know, the reason for all this slaughter rests on a deep-rooted, ancient belief, which is nothing more than myth. Rhino horn has no beneficial medical properties. Chinese *materia medica* lists it as a method of reducing fever and febrile convulsions. But even if it did work, one cannot help asking, when the rhino population of Africa has been reduced by 96 per cent in 50 years – why not take an aspirin?

Mkomazi National Park


Conservationist Tony Fitzjohn established a black rhino sanctuary at Mkomazi National Park in northern Tanzania 18 years ago. First he rehabilitated the park itself, turning it from a near-derelict, over grazed wilderness into the thriving and magnificent piece of land that it is today. Mkomazi is 3,245 sq km of thick vegetation, perfect for animals to hide in, but the visibility is poor.

There are few tourists and no luxury lodges, only a small tented camp, popular with bird watchers. The cattle herders – the park's former biggest enemy because of the damage their cattle's grazing caused and the threat to wildlife – have been cleared out since hefty fines were imposed by the Tanzania National Parks Authority (TaNaPa), which runs the

parks. There were 15 black rhino in the sanctuary which covers an area of 55 sq km with 8ft high electric fences, patrolled by an armed security team.

I visited Mkomazi in April last year – when I arrived a plan was being discussed to import three black rhinos, born and raised in Kent, a gift from Damian Aspinall's Port Lympne Wild Animal Park; reintroducing animals to their indigenous countries is one of the things in which the zoo specialises. The three new rhino would diversify the genetic pool at Mkomazi.

So there was a lot of discussion about permits and logistics. DHL were providing a plane, an expert vet had been lined-up along with a rhino whisperer, Berry White.

The irony of importing rhino from Kent to Africa is not lost on anyone. But it's not new: in 2009 three rhino were translocated from Dvur Kralove zoo in the Czech republic, making the transition from zoo to wild with surprising ease. Despite their former diet consisting mainly of baked goods, they took to the African vegetation with vigour. "Their keeper arrived with all these pastries and vegetables," says Fitzjohn. "It was like the bloody Gordon Ramsay show. Our guys chopped off some grevia and euphorbia, chucked it in their boma and they just went for it and left the bread." 



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Rhino on the move

On June 16 last year the three black rhinos from Port Lympne – Monduli, Grumeti and Zawadi – were individually and carefully coaxed into specially built crates for their long journey to Tanzania. A few days before Tusk's Royal Patron, The Duke of Cambridge, had paid a visit to the park to lend his support to the translocation. The Duke gave an impassioned interview to the BBC calling for the world to halt the illegal trade in rhino horn, which is now seriously threatening the species with extinction. The rhino, once safely in their crates, were lifted on to a waiting DHL transporter lorry and driven the short distance from Port Lympne via Dover to Manston Airport. Here DHL had organised for one of their Boeing 757 'live cargo' aircraft to be ready for its precious load.

Once Customs were satisfied, the three crates – along with assorted food supplies – were squeezed onto the aircraft which had been emblazoned with a large rhino sticker on its fuselage to mark the operation.

Accompanied by specialist rhino vet, Dr Pete

Morkel and two rhino keepers, the rhinos finally arrived in Kilimanjaro International Airport at 7.00am on Sunday morning.

From under the shadow of Mt. Kilimanjaro, the animals were slowly driven by road to their new home in the centre of Mkomazi, where they eventually arrived some 24 hours after leaving Port Lympne.

At Mkomazi the large welcoming committee included the British High Commissioner and the Director General of Tanzania National Parks. Lunch was held on the airstrip. Speeches were made. The BBC filmed. The crates were opened and the rhinos wandered out cautiously but without hesitation into their new bomas. They were given water and immediately started munching the local 'browse'. It was a textbook translocation. Six months later, they are flourishing. In time, they will be introduced to the other Mkomazi rhino, and hopefully they will breed.

This remarkable journey was made possible thanks to months of planning and collaboration between the George Adamson Trust, The Aspinall Foundation, Tusk and DHL.

It took a while for the Mkomazi rhino to start breeding, but now they have had nine births (and a few deaths, though none from poaching). Ideally, in ten years' time, Fitzjohn would like to have 25 – 30 rhinos that he could move into an area accessible to tourists; in Tanzania there are only 113 black rhino, mainly in the Serengeti.

Black rhino – all rhino – need all the help they can get

The story hasn't always been bad: at the turn of the 20th century the southern white rhino population was down to 30. Conservation measures were put into practice and the population climbed steadily until two decades of heavy poaching in the 70s and 80s. But concerted efforts in conservation combined with a decline in the Yemenese economy (rhino horn was in demand to make dagger handles) pushed the numbers up again and in 2007 only 13 were poached in the whole of Africa.

Then the price of rhino horn started climbing: it is now worth more than gold. The sheer number of

Chinese working in Africa today and endemic local corruption has facilitated the export of rhino horn and ivory, and the market has diversified.

There is a surge of demand in Vietnam, where rhino horn is being illegally but aggressively marketed as a cure for anything from hangovers to cancer.

"Have you ever seen one?" asks Fitzjohn and disappears off, returning a few minutes later bearing a rhino horn. Once cut-off the animal's horn will re-grow but it will never regain its sharp point. It is dark grey – solid, smooth and gently curved. Suspiciously, there is a small bit pared off the base.

"Did you try some?" I ask.

"Yeah."

"And?"

"Didn't do anything."

Fitzjohn removed this horn from one of his rhinos, James, who was becoming increasingly aggressive and he worried it would damage the others. After it had been de-horned it underwent a character change, he says, and became calmer.

He slaps the horn on the table. "Someone's got to change the thinking of the Chinese and Vietnamese; they have to appreciate that they are impoverishing other countries by believing this stuff." He points out that the Chinese are hugely proud of their own iconic species, the giant panda. Killing a giant panda incurs the death penalty. "I had this great idea," he growls.

"I want to put up billboards all over the world – with one of those awful pictures of a dead rhino with

its horn cut off, blood everywhere, and underneath it would say: STOP BUYING CHINESE GOODS OR THE PANDA GETS IT."

The cost of rhino conservation

Rhino conservation is an expensive business. Fitzjohn's solar-powered fence costs \$25,000 per kilometer to install, and it has to be maintained. He has 22 men in his security team, the core of which is ex-Tanzanian army. His operation, which also includes education outreach programmes and the breeding and releasing of African wild dogs, is funded by donors, the principal being Suzuki Rhino

in Holland and Save The Rhino and Tusk in the UK. This is the future for rhinos: electric fences and armed guards. Is there a limit on how much should be spent to protect a species?

"Do whatever you can, whatever it takes, whatever it costs," says Fitzjohn. "Otherwise we lose another species, and it happens to be a fairly big one, and a fairly old one. And it's as important as the seas and the chameleons and the grasslands and everything else – you have your flagship species for a reason.

Take the elephant and the rhino out of the ecosystem and you'll be left with a few billion gazelle running round – and suddenly this huge great wonder of the world will be destroyed in front of us. And there's no need for it. There's plenty of room for animals, there's plenty of room for people too, it just needs a bit of management and central government control."

POACHERS HAVE JUMPED OVER FENCES DURING A FULL MOON TO KILL RHINO USING GUNS FITTED WITH SILENCERS MADE FROM BICYCLE PUMPS.



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Tusk has aligned itself with a very important conservation project taking place in the heart of the world famous Victoria Falls, on the Stanley & Livingstone Private Game Reserve.

The project, known as the Nakavango Conservation Program, invites volunteers from across the globe to come and participate in conservation-based work on the reserve.

The game reserve is home to the last rhino in the region and is the only place they can be viewed today. It is also home to elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo, crocodile, hippos and thousands of antelope.

The beauty of the location is that the reserve is a mere 10 minutes drive away from the Victoria Falls, known today as the adrenalin capital of Africa. The white river rafting, bungee jumping, canoe trails on the Zambezi River and vibrant nightlife of the town make this place a must-see.

The project also aligns itself to the disadvantaged communities that surround the falls – our volunteers help teach, they coach sport and also involve themselves in a nutrition food programme.

For further details of this life-changing experience, as well as other South African-based conservation programs, please contact us on:

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DHL is proud to support Tusk Trust and delighted to report that the three rhinos, Monduli, Grumeti and Zawadi, recently transported from the UK are all doing well in their new home of Mkomazi, Tanzania.

Rhinos. Simply delivered.



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