

DO THEY REALLY CARE?

*I am an African, as was my Dad, as was his father's father too
Our natural heritage is slowly dying, what can we do?*

*There are so many tragedies in this continent's long history
Drought, floods, coups, wars, genocide, the list goes on and on
Some disasters natural, but more, many more show man's hand
How much more pain can the occupants of this great land stand?*

*Not satisfied with making war on each other every day
Some people now turn their attention to yet another prey
All creatures great and small are God's gift
But when all is said and done how few will be left?*

*At the root of all of this slaughter is pure insatiable greed
Men risk their lives to fulfil this so called need
Elephants, pangolins, lions and rhinos, none are spared
Misguided, ill-informed, pagan beliefs drive others to despair*

*Poaching is big business, the stakes are high
But the world has faced threats before, equally dire
So where is the will to stop it at this critical time?
There must be a leader who will fight fire with fire*

*One rhino is poached every three hours, that is true
While Governments chatter, saying... we know what to do
Our heritage is dying, under mortal threat
Much talk, no action, is all that we get*

*Where is our leader, our lighthouse of hope?
Think of your children and grandchildren, how will they cope?
Imagine a world, devoid of wildlife
Where greed and corruption still are so rife*

*Now, more than ever, we need leaders with vision
Leave a true legacy, make that your mission
Stop this carnage, stop this slaughter
If only for the sake of your sons and your daughters
You have the resources, now please show the courage*

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing"

- John F. Kennedy, 1961



POACHERS' MOON

Full moon in Africa seems to shine so more brightly than anywhere else. Perhaps this is because, by and large, the continent is relatively sparsely populated (at present). This is a gift to poachers, since they can see everything so much more clearly than on a dark night. So, in recent years, full moon has seen poaching incidents increase dramatically. In South Africa, full moon has become known as “Poachers Moon” when there are more than forty poaching incursions per day and night from Mozambique into the Kruger National Park.

I wrote this poem about “Poachers Moon” to try to articulate how a once beautiful sight has become a time of danger. A time of danger for both man and animals. The words of John Fogerty’s song “Bad Moon Rising” for his band ‘Creedence Clear Water Revival’ could easily have been written for the rhinos.

Here is the first verse:

*“I see the bad moon arising
I see trouble on the way
I see earthquakes and lightnin’
I see those bad times today
Don’t go around tonight
Well it’s bound to take your life
There’s a bad moon on the rise”*

My poem attempts to give the sense that the reader is on the killing team.

POACHERS' MOON

*Blue moon, you saw me standing alone
Without a dream in my heart
Without a love of my own*

*In '69 man walked on the moon
Today the poachers kill by that self-same moon*

*They cross our borders, guns in hand
Darkness falls, they are ready
Trained to live off nature's land
Powered by Muti, their hands are steady*

*This is no hunting trip, the target is known
The well paid informer has been on the phone
North of Satara on a path well worn
You'll find the black rhino with the enormous horn*

*Full moon a real bonus, they can see so well
Not like the dark which can be such hell*

*Their progress is swift, the killing is done
This is so easy, this is such fun
Three hours to the border
No need to run*

*With the stakes so high, they need some stealth
Altho' with horn in hand, they can already taste the wealth*

*There was a time I loved full moon
Now, for our rhinos, it just spells doom*

THE GENERAL

In 2012, South African National Parks formed the Special Projects Group in an effort to implement mitigation measures to deal with the severe increase in wildlife crime and in particular rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park. Major General Johan Jooste was approached to head up this Division. His brief was to review current anti-poaching strategies and put in place para-military strategies, structures and systems that would enable SANParks to respond to this increased threat and change in tactics. Part of the process was to support and coordinate the efforts and actions of Rangers and other law enforcement agencies on the ground.

It was clear from the outset that counter-poaching measures conducted within the boundaries of the National Parks alone would not be sufficient, and the term 'clearing the Park from the outside' was coined by the General.

General Jooste was appointed by SANParks Chief Executive David Mabunda who said that the appointment was a part of a multipronged strategy against poaching. Jooste had retired from the army in 2006, after 35 years of active service. The war veteran was always involved with strategy, leadership development and knowledge management.

At the time of his appointment, Jooste said "I am not a messiah, but a proven leader and a team player. I will do my best to bring acceptable results. This fight against poaching is not about an individual, and success depends on the collective collaboration and commitment from the men and women tasked with the responsibility of conserving our heritage."

I first met General Johan Jooste in 2013 when I had decided to travel to South Africa to try and get a first-hand feel for the rhino poaching situation and also to assess the possibility of sourcing rhino for our planned project. One of the first people that I met was General Johan Jooste and he is, without doubt, one of the most impressive men I have ever had the pleasure of meeting.

Over the years I have come to know the General well. He is a passionate, articulate man who abhors the whole poaching epidemic. He has no doubt that he is fighting what he terms a low intensity war. He feels very strongly about the Mozambicans casually crossing South Africa's border with no fear of retribution. He knows better than most that this war cannot be won through the barrel of a gun. A political solution is the only way to save Africa's iconic wildlife. There has to be political will and leadership. Both of these are proving elusive and sadly lacking in today's world.

General Jooste is an extremely humble man who will always look out for his rangers and share any credit that may come his way. A true gentleman.



THE GENERAL

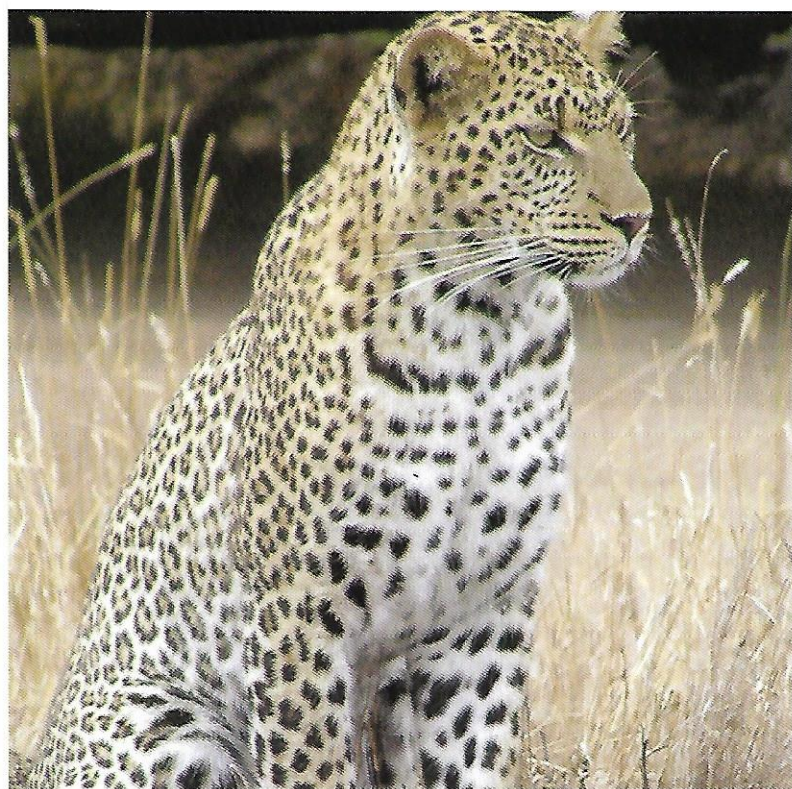
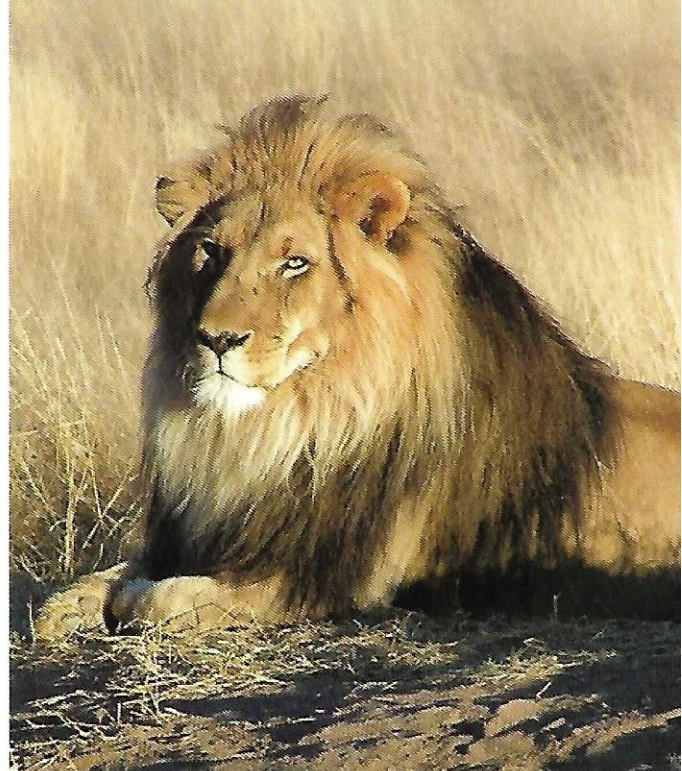
*He'd done his duty. He'd served his country well
He'd hung up his boots and was preparing for the quiet life
The phone call came, now a different threat
Would he lead the team with people he'd never met?*

*The poachers come, well trained and armed
Our rhinos their targets, the stakes so high
They know the bush, they are well prepared
We are not prepared, our men really quite scared*

*The clock is ticking, the time is short
Up steps the general, they must be caught
We need a leader, say the rangers
We'll take up the fight, we know the dangers*

*The general pauses, we need a plan
We must win this battle, I know we can
He starts afresh. He picks his team
He shares his vision, he shares his dream*

*The rhinos are dying, the poachers are winning
His steely eyes narrow, this is just the beginning
The country is supportive, but it will take time
This man is a leader, he will lead from the front
The rangers walk tall, we now have a plan
We have faith in the general, we know he's our man*



THE BIG FIVE

The Big Five are synonymous with Africa. The lion, the elephant, the leopard, the buffalo and the rhino make up the Big Five, so called because the early big game hunters considered these five animals the most difficult to hunt on foot. Hunting in those days was far more 'fair' than it is today. Then the hunter actually had to work for his trophy.



THE BIG FIVE

From across the globe, they come for the big five

This is our heritage, this is our Africa

The magnificent lion – fearless and majestic - king of the jungle

The giant elephant - intelligent, intimidating but so, so caring

The powerful buffalo – he looks so sleepy, but feared by all

The stealthy leopard - now you see it, now you don't

So that makes four, but isn't there one more?

Yes, indeed there was

Today we lost our last rhino – we had named her "hope"

She was shot by poachers

We have her body, they have her horn

Welcome to the big four



I AM A VET

In the four years of my journey with The Australian Rhino Project, I have met many wonderful people. What they all have in common are the passion that burns for conservation. As General Jooste once said to me, “the world has rhino fever”. I see this as a good thing. The plight of the rhino has shone a light on wildlife crime and on the multifaceted issues such as corruption, bribery, graft and the involvement of Government officials of many countries in this plague. It is estimated that illegal wildlife trafficking is valued at approximately \$23 billion per annum and is the fourth most lucrative global crime after drugs, humans and arms.

At the sharp end of this wildlife crime, and often he or she makes the difference between life and death, stands the veterinarian. Unlike in human medicine, veterinarians must rely primarily on clinical signs, as animals are unable to vocalize symptoms as a human would.

This poem draws on real life experience with real life people who I know very well and who work with injured animals due to poaching and also try to assist in the conviction of the perpetrators. Dr Will Fowlds travels all over the world sharing his personal testimony of the brutal reality of poaching from the coal face as well as efforts to bring back rhino from the brink of death with his pioneering veterinary care.

Dr Pete Rogers is a gruff on the outside, marshmallow on the inside kind of man. He vents his anger and frustration on the authorities who don't or won't act to stop the poaching.

Dr Markus Hofmeyr has spent much of his life in private game reserves and the famous Kruger National Park where he was Head Scientist and Chief Vet. Markus is effectively writing the book about veterinary care for rhinos.

Dave Powrie is the Warden of the Sabi Sands Private Game Reserve who was attacked at his home by poachers.

This poem is a tribute to these men and also to all of the men and women who protect the worlds' animals. God Bless you all.

I AM A VET

*Our generation was brought up on "All creatures great and small"
James Herriott brought to life animals, large, little, short and tall
The local vet was a friend who you could always rely on
A smiling face ready to have a cuppa and all satisfied once he'd gone
A gentler time indeed*

*Fast forward to Africa today for one of the world's most admired professions
"Your choice students - cats and dogs or some very different lessons"
Saving a life or saving a species? That's your choice
Whatever you decide, you are the animals' voice*

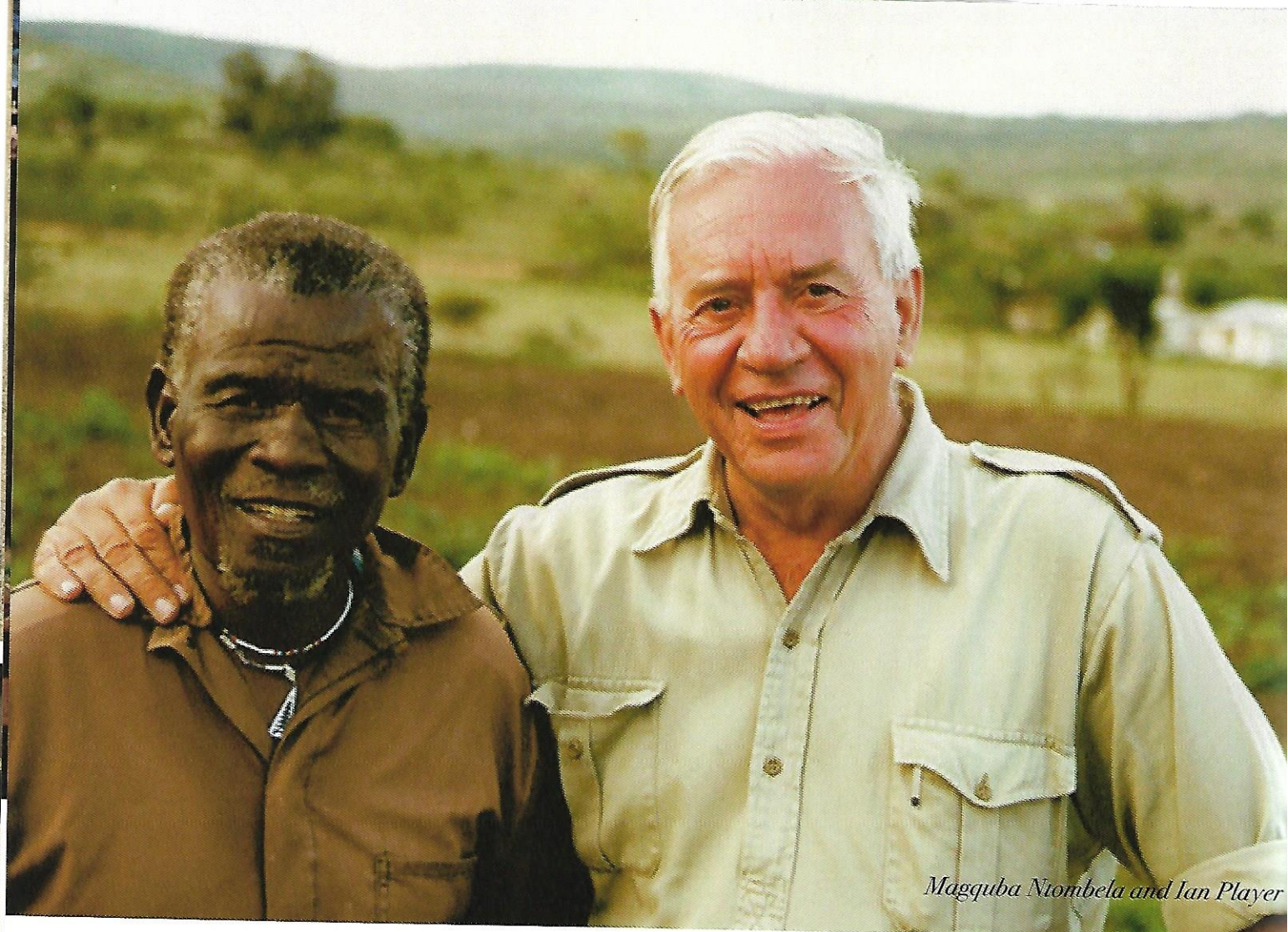
*I am a Vet. My name is Will.
I took my oath, I love my animals, I always will
The call in the night, yet another poaching slaughter
Will Thandi survive, will her daughter?*

*I am a Vet. My name is Pete.
Today, I notched my 227th rhino, quite some feat
Why so, you ask? I say - to save its life
It's the poaching man, it's cruel, it's rife*

*I am a Vet. My name is Markus.
The area I protect is vast, the animals rely on us
The enemy is armed, the rhinos are not and we are not
The horn regrows - why kill this mum and leave her to rot?*

*My name is Dave. I am not a Vet.
This is a war, the stakes are high and no rules are set
Mercy? Why should we show any at all?
Kill or be killed as our rhinos fall*

*My dress is now a bullet proof vest
My rangers are trained, they do their best
The vets are my friends, they are my heroes
They bear the brunt of man's greed and are the poacher's worst foes*



Magquba Ntombela and Ian Player

DR. IAN PLAYER – THE FATHER OF RHINO CONSERVATION

Ian Player is a legend in rhino conservation. Ian was an internationally recognised environmentalist and conservationist. But Ian was also a man of many facets and contradictions, not just a ranger: a man of culture and the arts, a deep thinker and Jungian, an irascible campaigner and a maverick. He was a writer, a lecturer and international diplomat and a deeply committed man to all he believed in.

He served with the South African forces in Italy in World War II and returned to South Africa at age 19 in 1946 with no idea of what he wanted to do with his life. When he pioneered the Duzi Canoe Marathon in 1950 he expected to see an abundance of wildlife along the river bank. To his dismay, he saw almost none. And so began an epic journey to fight for nature conservation.

He joined the Natal Parks Board and spearheaded two initiatives. With his team they pioneered Operation Rhino, which succeeded in saving the white rhino from extinction and obtained protected status for the Umfolozi and St Lucia Wilderness areas – a first in South Africa and on the African continent. He also founded the Wilderness Leadership School during the troubled days of apartheid, a multi-racial and experiential program, which was to spawn a global network of conservationists committed to saving wilderness and wildlife throughout the world.

I first met Ian Player in 1977 when he and Sir Laurens van der Post founded the first ever Wilderness Conference in Johannesburg at the suggestion of Player's friend and mentor Game Ranger Magqubu Ntombela.



Photography by Kirstin Scholtz

I wrote to Ian at the end of 2013 and briefed him on what I was trying to achieve and inviting him to be a Patron of The Australian Rhino Project which he kindly accepted and he wrote, “Many thanks for your recent email and I was delighted to see the progress that has been made and you can rely on me to do everything I can to help you make the project a great success. In the 1960s I was trying desperately to get a decent herd of rhino into Australia, but only succeeded in getting a pair to Taronga Zoo.

With the situation in this country and the consistent killing of rhino there has been worldwide revulsion so your project could not come at a better time and I am certain that with the right publicity you will be inundated with offers of help.

I would be very happy to become the Patron of your project and will lend my full weight to help make it an outstanding success, which it deserves to be. Looking forward to helping you in every way I can. “

If ever there was an endorsement that mattered, this was it. I was pleased to be able to present a framed version of the poem to Ian shortly before he died. My good friend Adrian Gardiner has now taken on the mantle of Patron of the Wilderness Foundation

For Dr Ian Player – *The Father of Rhino Conservation*

DR. IAN PLAYER – THE FATHER OF RHINO CONSERVATION

*I care not in which God you believe
Nor which religion you follow
What matters most to the planet upon which we sit
Is that you leave this place better than you found it*

*Look at what we have been given – and all for free
Day and night, sun and moon, plant and tree
Animals, both pets and wild
People black, white, mostly meek and mild*

*And yet today, there are those who ruthlessly steal and plunder
And do their greedy best to tear the world asunder
Their targets are the elephants and the rhinos
Their motives make me weep, make me wonder*

*But there is one man who will always take a stand
Having served his country well in a foreign land
He returned to the soil that he loved, his beloved animals to protect
He started Operation Rhino to save the few that were left*

*Through thick and thin, they fought the odds
Less than a thousand rhinos left, they took on the sods
Moved the rhinos to safer places, no matter the cost
Without these actions, a species was lost*

*Magquba Ntombela and Ian Player – such men of honour are few
They did the business, the numbers grew
With courage, commitment and unfailing care
These two went to extremes where few men dare*

*Well pleased, but never satisfied that the job was done
Ian changed direction and formed the Foundation
A new challenge, the focus now on education
Another mountain to climb and perhaps a little more fun
Ian's passion a beacon, a path to the sun*

*He hung up his boots and life followed its course
Then twenty years later all hell broke loose
Again his rhinos under threat
Hope turned to despair
Another tough challenge to be met*

*The fire burns within this lion-hearted man, but his hands are tied
His eyes became wistful as thousands more died
Man's greed is insatiable, his cruelty relentless
These ancient creatures completely defenceless

One senses the rage, the despair and the anger
For here is a man who has survived great danger
He will not give up, he will never surrender
On behalf of his rangers and his rhinos and his great rainbow nation*

*The baton must be passed to a new generation
'Age shall not weary them', we all wish it were so
Ian Player is a living legend and a true hero
Attenborough, Durrell, Fossey, Goodall, great names all
But for me, Ian Player is the one – he stands tall*



Photograph by Julia Salnicki

IN CONCLUSION

I am often asked how I see the future for rhinos. I am gloomy about the prognosis. So many things need to change to eliminate the demand, first amongst these is political will. So many countries in Asia are part of the problem and the demand for rhino horn goes back so many generations that I just cannot see that anything will change soon enough to save the rhinos. The solution is not through the barrel of a gun, it lies with the leaders of countries such as China, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand amongst others. A recent, very worrying development is the involvement of North Korea in smuggling rhino horn.

In this era where, apparently, anything goes, the likelihood of any form of consensus to stop rhino poaching is very slim indeed.

Elephants and lions will be next.

Ray Dearlove

October 2018

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Ball & Doggett