

TRAVEL NEWS Namibia

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RHINO CONSERVATION | THE MAGICAL NAMIB | WATERHOLE THEATRICALS

TRAVEL NEWS NAMIBIA INITIATIVES

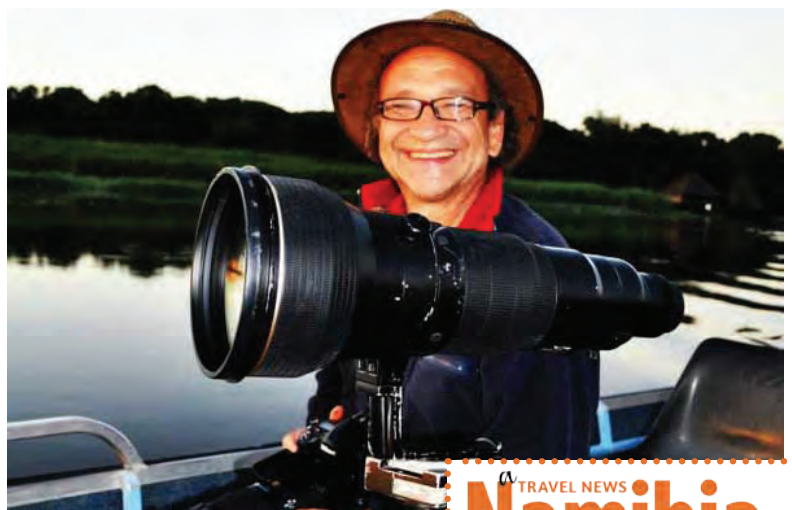
HELP SAVE NAMIBIA'S RHINOS



As part of the *RMB Namibia Ride for Rhinos* initiative, Venture Media, through *Travel News Namibia*, is involved in several projects to help spread the word and tell Save the Rhino Trust Namibia's story. You can help support the cause in many ways. Buy a *RMB Ride for Rhinos* t-shirt, donate N\$ 20 or more to receive Namibian recording artist Elemotho's newly released single, *Save the Rhino*, or just make a financial contribution. All these purchases and donations can be made on www.givetoday.com.na. Visit www.rideforrhinos.com.na for more information.

NOW YOU CAN GO BIRDING WITH POMPIE

Based in Windhoek, Pompie Burger is an orthopaedic surgeon whose pastime passion is photography, in particular birding. Pompie has been a regular contributor to *Travel News Namibia* for over a decade. His current series in TNN, *Birding with Pompie*, has inspired a new initiative. In February next year, eight birding enthusiasts will join him on a 10-day trip from Windhoek to Katima Mulilo. The tour will navigate past all Pompie's favorite Zambezi birding hotspots and guests will be able to sharpen their birding photography skills with this experienced guide and teacher at the helm. Venture Media will team up with tourism partner, Wilderness Expeditions, a part of Wilderness Safaris Namibia, on this latest adventure. Keep an eye on www.travelnewsnamibia.com and our social media platforms for more information on the tour.



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Travel News Namibia, as well as all Venture Media's other publications, is available online at www.issuu.com/travelnewsnamibia. You can read each magazine and follow all our publications from anywhere in the world! With a readership based across the globe, we have been able to promote Namibia and all its wonders far and wide. Thank you to all our international readers! From the USA to Russia, Uganda to Japan, Argentina to Australia! We promise to keep you entertained and inspired for your next trip to Namibia.

Travel News Namibia has been at the forefront of Namibian tourism promotion for over 23 years, celebrating all things Namibian in print and online. In 2015 Venture Publications launched "A Travel News Namibia Initiative", a project that will strive to promote Namibia across different platforms beyond the boundaries of print and publishing. Follow us on our journey as we celebrate the beauty of Namibia, its conservation successes and new exciting adventures to come with our emerging *Travel News Namibia* initiatives!

A passionate adventure

SAVING THE WORLD ONE RHINO AT A TIME

Text **Elzanne Erasmus**

Photographs **Chris Botha & Elzanne Erasmus**



“What are we going to tell our children when it’s all gone?”

The rustic strains of Elemotho’s voice fills the air which I hoarsely draw into my lungs as I, for a horrifying second, contemplate a universe in which I exist and a species stronger, mightier, and just as important as my own does not. For an agonising moment I imagine myself sitting on the edge of a bed sometime in the distant future, reading a fairy tale to a child.*

The fairy tale tells of a gentle and majestic giant, ambling across an arid plain. The creature blends into the beauty of his surroundings. He is at peace with his environment. He belongs there. He is a part of the soil and the rocks and the scattered green protruding from dry earth. He is a part of the pulse of the land. From afar, watchful eyes observe his journey. The observers admire the creature as they admire the landscape around him, and they smile because they know that the beauty they see before them is a true reflection of the natural order of things. They smile because they are lucky enough to be enthralled by the magnitude of the moment.

Back on the edge of this future bed, I close the fairy tale and look down at the child. “Wow,” he says. “What a magical creature that was and what a magical moment. I wish fairy tales and creatures like those were real.” And a tear streaks a shining path down my cheek as I reply: “They used to be...”

*“What are we going to tell our children
when it’s all gone?
How we sold it all, even the last
rhino’s horn.”*

– Elemotho, Save the Rhino





“ For the second time in as many years, cyclists joined a group of like-minded individuals, passionate about the plight of Namibia’s black rhino, on this exceptional quest. ”

I saw him, that magical creature in the fairy tale. Except that he was no myth or legend. His name was Kangombe. No, delete that. His name is Kangombe, and he is alive and well. His horns are still where they should be. No one has ‘relieved’ him of his horns yet. The natural order is still intact. But I dread the day that I may have to report on Kangombe’s killing. I fear the day when his horn, a collection of hair follicles, costs him his life And I fear the day when man’s greed will cost us his species.

“IT TAKES A GREAT DEAL OF COURAGE TO SEE THE WORLD IN ALL ITS TAINTED GLORY AND STILL LOVE IT.” – OSCAR WILDE

So here are the facts: This is not a fairy tale, or a dream we will wake up from. Since 2008, poaching has led to the death of almost 6 000 African rhinos. There is estimated to be only around 5 000 black rhinos left in Africa today. The price of rhino horn has risen to \$60 000 per kilogram – twice the value of gold and platinum – and is now more valuable on the black market than diamonds and cocaine. According to news sources such as *The Namibian*, the rhino poaching statistics in Namibia read as follows: In the period from 2005-2014 the

Ministry of Environment and Tourism reported the poaching of eight white rhinos and 95 black rhinos. A total of 25 black rhinos were reported to have been killed in 2014 alone. And in 2015? Eighty rhinos were poached.

“YOU BEGIN SAVING THE WORLD BY SAVING ONE THING AT A TIME, ALL ELSE IS GRANDIOSE ROMANTICISM OR POLITICS.” – CHARLES BUKOWSKI

So what are the solutions? One topic under contention is the legalisation of the controlled trade of rhino horn. Much like the hot topic of the ivory trade that was under debate at a recent Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) conference, where it was suggested that the controlled trade of sourced or ‘farmed’ rhino horn gathered through de-horning activities would curb the poaching epidemic. This would come about as the trade will be flooded with a legal product at lower prices, nullifying the need for the substance to be sold on the black market. Save the Rhino International has not yet reached a conclusion on whether or not they agree with this suggestion, but they are currently investigating the merits



TOP FROM LEFT

Crew members Martin and Thomas await the riders at a water/beer stop | The tour's 3 Master Chefs: Frans, Jonno and Romans | Cyclists take on tricky game track trails through rocky terrain



of the idea. The organisation is discussing whether or not a compromise should be reached. It has been established that there is no single approach that will work. But perhaps a combination of anti-poaching initiatives and legal trade is the solution. Namibia has always been a big supporter of sustainable use. If this credo of viable absorption of natural resources and components of biodiversity can be used to support conservation efforts, these efforts could be income-generating and self-sustaining.

The main threat to rhinos is poaching fuelled by the illegal trade in rhino horn: for traditional Asian medicine, for high prestige gifts and for a cancer cure according to the latest rumours spread in Vietnam. Whichever avenue you choose to support, one thing remains certain. The final solution lies in eradicating these source markets. If communities in the source market could be educated and made aware that they might as well be chewing on their own fingernails, none of these drastic measures would even need to be discussed. This is a pipe dream, however. But those of us who are passionate about saving the species, are nothing if not dreamers.

"BE A DREAMER. A DOER. A THINKER. SEE POSSIBILITIES EVERYWHERE."

He was walking down a dry river when we found him. We had been cycling all day through the rough terrain of

Damaraland in northwestern Namibia and we enjoyed the reprieve of the game-viewer vehicles and the cold beers we had on hand. We had left camp only 10 minutes before to go in search of the animal we had travelled all this way for. We watched his progress for what seemed like hours, softly chatting amongst ourselves and savouring the moment. Later that evening, around a campfire, Save the Rhino Trust rangers told us they knew Kangombe well. He was an old friend. They had been watching over him for decades. My heart soared at their words and at the realisation of the sacrifices made by individuals for the greater good. Some dedicate their lives to it. Some give money. Some give time. Others give their hearts.

The 2016 *RMB Namibia Ride for Rhinos* combined all the adventure and thrill of a mountain-biking tour through the spectacular Namibian landscape with the passion driving an exciting new conservation effort. The tour, which first took place in October 2015, took 20 mountain-biking enthusiasts on a four-day journey through the Palmwag Concession Area adjacent to the Torra and Omatendeka conservancies of the Kunene Region. The area falls within Save the Rhino Trust Namibia's one million hectare protection area. For the second time in as many years, cyclists joined a group of like-minded individuals, passionate about the plight of Namibia's black rhino, on



“ *Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light*
– *Dylan Thomas* ”





this exceptional quest. For four days they traversed the rocky landscapes, battled the heat and the wind, and loved every second of their saddleback safari.

In their 'downtime' they discussed vital issues. Whether they were taking a water break, sipping gin and tonic while watching the sunset, or in deep conversation around late-night campfires, the dialogue never ceased. Opinions were given, issues discussed and ideas thrown about. I was thrilled every time someone used the term: "What if we..." This was a group of individuals capable of doing extraordinary things if they banded together. Among them were CEOs and department heads of major corporations in Namibia. There were tourism professionals, creatives, doctors, lawyers, entrepreneurs and bankers – influential people. People who could make a difference and be a part of the solution. And each of them wanted to find a solution. In any way they could.

"IF WE ALL STAND TOGETHER, WE WILL WIN," SAID SIMSON URI-KHOB, THE CEO OF SRT WITH THE GREATEST CONFIDENCE.

RMB Namibia, Wilderness Safaris, CYMOT and Venture Media, all crave to be a part of this solution. Upon starting the initiative, Venture Media realised that it would only be possible through the combined efforts of a wonderful group of people. With financial contributions, RMB helped get the initiative off the ground and allowed us to turn it into the enormous success it is today. Wilderness Safaris, heading up the logistics of the tour and host of the final night's accommodation, is integral to every step of this breathtaking experience. CYMOT's MTB expertise and support made sure that the adventure kept going, despite the rugged terrain. And Venture Media? Well, at the end of the day all we want to do is to tell stories. So we facilitate and organise and bring this brilliant group of people and companies together. We strive to inspire. And most of all we make the connections that will allow this all-important conversation to continue. To continue beyond the water stops and the sunset chats and fireside debates. Making the connection between those who want to help and those who need it. Compared to the challenges faced by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and organisations such as Save the Rhino Trust, our job seems menial and easy. It is they who face the real challenges, and also the criticism that comes with the task and its inevitable failures.

They have a tough job. But who can help? Those of us who can exert ourselves physically, or have cash or time to spare. What can we do? We can keep talking. We can facilitate the conversation. We can keep shining light on the problem and the issues at hand as brightly and for as long as possible. One thing every participant of this endeavour, this adventure for conservation, will tell you, is that a passion to take up the fight for nature comes from deep inside. You have to feel it. Feel the dread. Feel the dire consequence. And then you have to feel the need to stand up and do something. Feel the passion. Rally, roar, riot, rush, run, rage, or ride on a bicycle to save them. **TNN**

CITES

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) of wild fauna and flora is an international agreement between governments aimed at ensuring that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. See www.cites.org.



SUSTAINABLE USE

Sustainable use means the use of components of biological diversity in a way and at a rate that does not lead to the long-term decline of biodiversity, thereby maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

*Elemotho is a Namibian recording artist who recently released a song entitled *Save the Rhino* in conjunction with various other Namibian musicians as part of Save the Rhino Trust Namibia's *One Voice* campaign. You can help support SRT's efforts by purchasing the song at www.givetoday.com.na.



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