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Conservation Union: Black rhinoceros population is recovering easily

Poaching and illegal trade continue to affect rhinos in Africa. But there is a ray of hope.



A black rhinoceros, recorded in the Phinda nature reserve. Photo: Frank May, dpa

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Gland (dpa) - The population of the black rhinoceros in Africa has recovered slightly since the dramatic slump since the 1970s. Between 2012 and 2018, the number of animals in the wild grew from an estimated 4845 to 5630 specimens, as the World Conservation Union (IUCN) reported on Thursday. Nevertheless, the black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) remains endangered.

The association with 1,300 member organizations worldwide has updated the Red List of Endangered Species. The experts have assessed almost 4,000 other animal and plant species since December 2019. The list today includes 116 177 species. 31 030 are at risk, around 850 more than in December.

The recovery of the black rhinoceros shows that protective efforts are working, said acting IUCN director-general Gretel Aguilar. But easing efforts would be dangerous, she said: "Poaching and illegal trade remain acute threats." It is important that the local population is involved in and benefits from protection programs.

The World Conservation Union fought back in February against accusations that it was unduly influenced by trophy hunters or manufacturers of leather goods, for example. Representatives of hunting associations in influential IUCN bodies tried to extend hunting rights even to endangered species, according to an article on the BuzzFeed website. The association said that well-regulated hunting plays a positive role in nature conservation. With the money from hunting licenses, gamekeepers could be hired to protect the stocks.

The subspecies Southwestern black rhinoceros has recovered to such an extent that the IUCN has now downgraded it from "endangered" to "potentially endangered" in its updated Red List of Endangered Animals. There are more specimens of white rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*), but the trend is more threatening. Between 2012 and 2017, the number dropped by 15 percent to 18,000. The growth of the population in the previous five years was practically destroyed. The main problem is poaching in the Kruger National Park in South Africa, where the largest population is at home. The northern white rhinoceros may already have died out in the wild.

The white rhinoceros is more popular with poachers because it has a larger horn, according to the IUCN. The horn is considered rubbed against cancer in Vietnam, although there is no medical evidence for it. While an estimated 1,450 rhinos were poached in 2015, the figure was just under 900 in 2018, according to the IUCN. Preliminary figures for the past year indicated a further downward trend.