



Goodbye, Zanna

Staff Reporter

TRAUMA and feelings of utter loss were laid bare by the owner of a white rhino cow that was brutally slaughtered by poachers.

Joachim Rust of Farm Ghaub gives a heart-rendering eyewitness account of what he had to go through when he discovered the dead rhino on his property.

The account reads as follows:

The first time I met with Zanna was when she stood as a three-month-old calf alongside her dead mother in a very dense bush thicket.

Zanna's mother was our first "Zanna", and we bought her only about six months prior, not knowing, that she was pregnant. Mother Zanna was not used to humans at all. As from the day she was offloaded in our reserve at the Waterberg, she crept away in thickets on the slopes of the Waterberg.



On 08 January 2014, our security guards reported, that according to the tracks they did observe, mother Zanna obviously gave birth to a calf – the first rhino – calf ever to be born in one of our game reserves. Because of mother Zanna's secretive behaviour and the densely bushed area she had chosen to stay in, it was impossible to get a direct and full view of her and the newborn calf.

On 21 April 2014 an enormous thunderstorm went down on our farm (www.waterberg-wilderness.com) and we did measure 120 mm in a few hours' time.

About three days later, the security guards reported that they cannot observe the fresh tracks of both mother Zanna and her calf. While we were used to not being able to get a view of these two rhinos, we regularly kept a close eye on their movements by observing the tracks and the dung they left in the area we knew they stayed in. With no fresh tracks to be found, we realized something to be seriously wrong.

We found both mother Zanna and her baby in the lower-lying thicket. Because of her weight, the mother got stuck in the mud, and obviously succumbed to exhaustion, while trying to get out of the mud for a prolonged time. Small baby Zanna was standing alongside her, on top of the mud, but unable to reach for the udder.

Realizing what the situation was, I rushed home to get a 20 meter long, thick rope.

When I approached dead mother Zanna and got near to her, baby Zanna ambushed at me, obviously trying to defend her and her dead mother.

I cannot recall how I managed to do it, but I threw a rope sling over baby Zanna's head. Space was very limited in the thicket of bush, mud was all over, and I only had one single chance.

Immediately when the rope fell over her head, little Zanna rushed off into the bushes. Most certainly, with no rope around her neck, this would have been the last time this little rhino was to be seen alive.

Luckily with the guards at hand, we managed to chase after the rhino, smashing through thickets and brush. Catching the rope was our only chance to get hold of this panicking little rhino.

After several hundred meters we eventually got hold of the rope and the rhino. We blindfolded her, and then we struggled to get her to the nearest farm road. Even after covering her eyes with a shirt, she bumped her nose bud at us with a mixture of fury and terror. It was only later that we observed how many bruises this action caused on our bodies.

On the same day, we bought a female sheep in nearby Herero-land, and we kept both the sheep and Zanna in a small enclosure under a roof, as it kept on raining every day. Luckily the sheep had a very thick layer of wool on her body because Zanna was bumping her nose at everybody nearby.

Zanna quickly got used to the milk bottle, and she calmed down in a few days.

My wife Caroline raised Zanna on a special milk mixture for 18 months. She received milk every four hours and lots of love and attention. The sheep was her big friend, and both slept close together. The sheep also taught Zanna to start eating grass.

At a later stage, we accustomed Zanna to start grazing in a camp where we also kept other, bigger Rhinos. She and the sheep would walk out of the enclosure and graze outside, but whenever Zanna felt insecure, or hungry, she kept running into her enclosure with the bigger Rhinos not being able to follow.

At the age of two years, we relocated Zanna and some of our other rhinos into a new nature reserve that we've created at Farm Ghaub. This new area is much bigger, and Zanna started to live like a normal, free Rhino.

Huge was our joy when Zanna gave birth to a female calf on 14 April 2020. Despite being an orphan herself, she knew instinctively and very well how to tend to her calf.

Whenever we encountered Zanna on our regular inspection tours in the reserve, I was able to walk up to Zanna, talk to her and she took great joy in me rubbing her between her ears and underneath her belly.

On 16 May 2021, we received a message from our securities, informing us that Zanna has been found dead in the field. She was shot and killed, with her horns being hacked off and stolen.

Together with her was another cow, older and more experienced, also with a young calf. This cow was also shot at, into her stomach while running away from the crime scene, only to be found dead two days later in a distance of about five kilometres. This poor animal died a prolonged time and must have suffered enormous pain. In the hours before her death, she kept rubbing her horns and body on trees, obviously thereby trying to get rid of the pain.

This cow's calf has been found since, now walking together with one of her older brothers, but while writing this, we have not yet located Zanna's calf. Intensive searches are ongoing.

There is this gnawing thought in our heads, that the poachers fired more shots at the fleeing rhinos, and not only wounding the fleeing cow, but also Zanna's calf.

Currently, we hope and pray that not only we will find Zanna's missing calf, but also that both calves will survive and that they will overcome the trauma the poachers inflicted on them. Both calves are only 13 months of age, and under normal circumstances, rhino calves are being milk-fed by their mothers up to the age of 18 months.

Hopefully, a good future awaits the third generation of "Zanna" in our reserve. We will do everything possible to ensure just that, but when keeping rhinos in especially large and extended areas, this endeavour sometimes proves futile.

Needless to say, that the poachers not only inflicted trauma and hardship on the rhinos but also on us and all people loving and fending for these fantastic creatures.

Rest in peace, beloved Zanna, we will not forget our plight and responsibility to help save your kind from extinction.

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