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- RHINOS 'NOT NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY DEHORNING'



SAVE THE RHINO: New research shows that dehorning does not have negative effects on black rhinos.
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RHINOS 'NOT NEGATIVELY IMPACTED BY DEHORNING'

Study looks into four sub-populations in Namibia

The dehorning of rhinos began in 1989, making Namibia the first country to use it as an anti-poaching method.

Ellanie Smit

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Ellanie Smit

Windhoek

There remains a lot of conjecture surrounding the possible implications of dehorning rhinos.

While the benefits of such an exercise have long been proved, some sceptics believe it could have some effect on rhino behaviour and biology.

But now, new research conducted by the University of Bristol Vet School, the Namibian environment ministry and the Save the Rhino Trust has found that there are no statistically significant differences in key factors of population growth such as breeding, birth, survival, life span and death between dehorned and horned black rhinos.

The study looked into four sub-populations of black rhinos in Namibia - of which three had been subjected to some level of dehorning at least once.

Researchers looked closely at the age of females birthing their first calf, the average time between the birth of calves of each female, birth sex ratios, calf survival, life span and cause of death.

It found that there seemed to be no evidence that dehorning harms black rhinos, which it said is extremely encouraging for the continued use of dehorning as an anti-poaching technique.

'Not an ideal world'

The black rhino is critically endangered and poaching is one of the major threats that it faces.

Recent statistics provided by the ministry showed that at least 32 black rhinos had been poached this year by the beginning of September.

Dehorning began here in 1989, carried out by the ministry, making Namibia the first country to use this as an anti-poaching method.

"In an ideal world, no one would want to remove arguably one of the most iconic features of a

rhino, its horn, but unfortunately, this is not an ideal world, and relentless poaching has forced many reserves to resort to dehorning,” Lucy Chimes, former MSc student from the University of Bristol Veterinary School, said.

Due to the small sample size of this study, however, further research is required to confirm the validity of its results.

It is particularly important for future studies to collate data from as many reserves, conservancies and national parks across as many countries as possible, so a larger analysis - not only on the effects of dehorning but also its effectiveness as an anti-poaching deterrent - can be conducted.

The dataset included information on 265 rhinos.

The research was approved by the University of Bristol Animal Welfare and Ethical Review Body and the Namibian National Commission on Research, Science and Technology.