

SOUTH AFRICA

WATCH | 'Dehorned is better than dead': rangers race to protect rhinos as borders reopen

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As international borders reopen, the government has warned game reserves around SA to prepare for a possible resurgence in rhino poaching. Because of this threat, hundreds of rhinos in game reserves in the North West have been dehorned to protect them from poachers.

Dehorning involves tracking the animals and darting them before removing their horns while they are sedated. Tracking the rhinos requires two helicopters and teams of people on the ground.

In the North West this is done with the help of Nico Jacobs, founder of Rhino 911, a conservation group that hunts down rhinos to cut off their horns to save them from becoming the target of poachers who kill them to sell the horns as a form of traditional medicine.

“As soon as the lockdown hit SA, we started having incursions almost every day,” said Jacobs.

With rhino horn trading on illegal markets for incredibly high prices, dehorning the animals may be their last chance of survival.

Dr Lynne MacTavish of Mankwe Wildlife Reserve in the North West has made it her life's mission to save the rhino. She never wanted to go the dehorning route, saying the animals need their horns. That was until one day in 2014 when one of her female rhinos was “poached in the most brutal way”, and she immediately made the decision to dehorn them all.

In the first six months of 2020, the number of rhinos killed by poachers in SA fell by more than half compared with the previous year. For security reasons officials would not give the exact number of rhinos dehorned, but it is believed rhinos could be extinct in the wild within 10 years if they continue to decline at the current rate.

MacTavish encourages people to donate to save the rhino [here](#).

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