

# The Last wild Rhinos

By Toni Carnie

South Africa won world acclaim in the 1960s for rescuing the white rhino from extinction. Known as Operation Rhino, the project involved multiplying their numbers gradually and translocating them to former wild living spaces across Africa.

But our reputation as a global leader in rhino conservation began to unravel in 2008 when criminal syndicates launched an unprecedented horn-poaching spree in this country.

Now, after 18 years of relentless killing, the initial sense of shock seems to have worn off. The public release of annual rhino poaching statistics passes with relatively little comment or scrutiny.

Over this period, official records suggest that at least 11,057 rhinos have been shot and butchered for their horns in South Africa. Yet, for many observers these are now just numbers on a graph.


This month I experienced a renewed sense of despair around the scale of this slaughter after visiting just one of several "boneyards" where the rhino skulls have been piling up in the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park in KwaZulu-Natal.

There was also some good news: the number of rhinos poached has dropped significantly in this park, largely due to a major dehorning project that began about 18 months ago and several other very expensive security and technological interventions.

Chopping the horns off so many rhinos was a desperate measure. But it is by no means a permanent solution. Poaching pressure is simply deflected to other more vulnerable parks and the shooting gangs will return – even if it is just to hack the remaining horn stumps from the survivors.

There has to be a better, long-term model for protecting Africa's last wild rhinos than perpetual mutilation and 24-hour fortress security.

Source: Daily Maverick Earth

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