

What WWF is Doing

In order to safeguard the immediate future for Africa's black rhinos, WWF is:

- **Focussing on protection and management of the most important black rhino populations.** This includes providing financial and technical support for rhino conservation in Kenya's reserves and sanctuaries, Namibia's Etosha National Park, Zimbabwe's south-eastern conservancies, Kwazulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service's Game Reserves, and South Africa's Kruger National Park.



Black rhinoceros greeting each other - Zimbabwe

- **Supporting the work of the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group, a network of rhino experts from African countries.** AfrSG members share knowledge of the latest scientific research into rhino biology and conservation, and advise governments on improved rhino protection and management practices. WWF experts and other members of the AfrSG are also helping African governments to develop and implement effective national rhino conservation and management strategies.
- **Funding applied research into new methods and technology to improve rhino security and monitoring of rhino populations.** These include: rhino horn 'fingerprinting'; rhino identification techniques; population estimation based on DNA profiles of rhino dung; and the development of a 'rhino security information' database.



Black rhinoceros running - Kenya

- **Working to eliminate the illegal trade in rhino horn on several fronts.** TRAFFIC (the wildlife trade monitoring programme of WWF and IUCN) is assessing government stocks of rhino horn in African range states, monitoring illicit movements of rhino horn world-wide, and supporting efforts of Yemen, Taiwan, China, South Korea and others to find acceptable alternatives to the use of rhino horn.
- **Carrying out public awareness campaigns in communities wherever consumers and practitioners of traditional Asian medicine live.** WWF is also strengthening ties with local communities where rhinos live and building capacity among all stakeholders.

What needs to be done

African governments urgently need continuing moral, financial and technical support to protect and manage their rhinos, to train rhino specialists, and to develop national black rhino conservation strategies. Support also needs to be given to rhino conservancies run by the private sector, as these are becoming increasingly important as havens for black rhinos.

Efforts must be increased to put an end to international smuggling of rhino horn. All illegal trade must be continuously monitored and additional assistance given to governments to enforce CITES requirements. There is also an urgent need to develop acceptable alternatives for rhino horn products in the Middle and Far East and to educate users and practitioners of traditional Asian medicine about the plight of rhinos.



Black rhinoceros pair, Ngorongoro Crater

Responsible ecotourism should be promoted. Revenue from ecotourism, generated by protected areas, should be shared with local communities that cooperate in protection and management of a reserve. The use of revenue to provide amenities and the development of local credit systems for rural communities are two ways in which the benefits can be shared.

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WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption



Africa's Black RHINOCEROS

UNDER THREAT





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When Europeans first began moving into the interior of East and Southern Africa around 150 years ago, the savannahs teemed with wildlife. Even black rhinos, largely solitary animals, were so plentiful that it was not unusual to encounter dozens of them in a single day. Perhaps a million black rhinos existed in Africa at that time, although they had already been exterminated from the Cape Region of South Africa.

Today, only about 3,100 black rhinos survive in the wild and all four subspecies are listed as Critically Endangered in the IUCN (World Conservation Union) Red List. The western subspecies is facing imminent extinction, with only a few scattered individuals remaining in northern Cameroon.

Slaughter of the rhinos

Hunters with guns, following close on the heels of the early “explorers”, found rhinos easy prey. Accounts of killing five or six in a day, to be eaten or simply for amusement, were common. European settlers, arriving in the early 20th century to colonize and establish farms and plantations, continued this senseless slaughter: most regarded rhinos as vermin, to be exterminated at all costs. Where for centuries Africa’s indigenous peoples had co-existed with rhinos, by the 1960s, black rhino numbers had plummeted to fewer than 70,000 individuals.

And then came a further disaster. Between 1970 and 1992, ninety-six percent of Africa’s remaining black rhinos were killed when a wave of poaching for rhino horn rippled through Kenya and Tanzania, continued south through Zambia’s Luangwa Valley as far as the Zambezi River, and spread into Zimbabwe.

Current distribution and status

The poaching epidemic that started in the early 1970s effectively eliminated most of the black rhinos living outside conservation areas, and severely reduced numbers in national parks and reserves. Since 1980, black rhinos have probably disappeared from Angola, Botswana, Chad, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique, Somalia, Sudan, and Zambia.

In the 1990s, serious efforts were made to control demand on the international market. In a last-ditch attempt to save the remaining animals, conservationists in some African range states that still had free-living rhinos tracked down and captured as many as they could find. They moved the animals to rhino conservation and management areas (which include sanctuaries, conservancies, reserves, and national parks). Some of these havens are situated on private game ranches, while others are in State-run national parks and reserves, or in communal areas.

These rescue efforts were very costly, as is the continued surveillance necessary to protect the survivors. But at last, and probably for the first time in a hundred years, black rhino numbers are rising. The total population in Africa is now around 3,100, up from about 2,700 in 1999, and, in some of the sanctuaries, black rhino numbers are increasing by more than 5% a year. The largest of these black rhino populations are found in South Africa, Kenya, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Small numbers occur in Swaziland (where they have been re-introduced) and Tanzania. There are a few black rhinos left in Cameroon and Rwanda, but it is doubtful these represent viable populations.

Threats

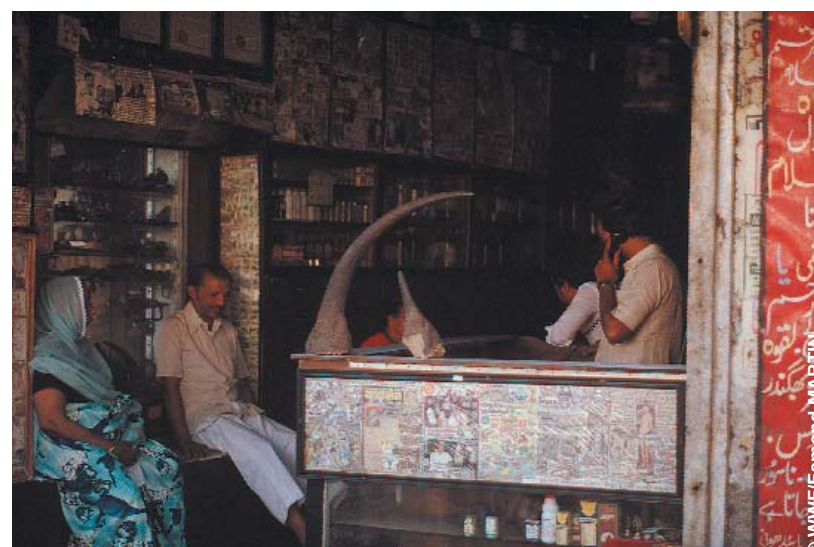
While black rhino numbers are stable or increasing in some countries, notably Namibia, Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa, there is no room for complacency, and the long-term future of the black rhino remains precarious. Although international trade in black rhino horn has been banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) since 1977, poaching remains a major threat due in part to inadequate enforcement and continuing consumer demand. Although enforcement efforts have improved significantly in some countries, powdered rhino horn is still in use in parts of Asia. For centuries it has been an ingredient in traditional Chinese medicine to reduce fever and for other ailments.

Demand for rhino horn in the Middle East appears to have diminished. Yemen was once a major destination for rhino horn, where craftsmen fashioned it into curved handles for ceremonial *jambiyas* (daggers). However, due to the country’s recent economic difficulties, most Yemenis cannot now afford rhino horn *jambiyas*, and are turning to handles made from buffalo horn, wood, plastic or agate. The government has also made some progress in trying to control the trade: it joined CITES in 1997, and Yemen’s religious leader has issued an edict declaring that the killing of rhinos is against the will of God. But recent investigations by TRAFFIC, WWF and IUCN’s wildlife trade monitoring arm, indicate that some horn is still finding its way into the Middle East through Djibouti, a small country in the Horn of Africa.



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Diceros bicornis - Black Rhinoceros



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Two black rhinoceros horns displayed on counter of a traditional pharmacy in Bombay

The demand for rhino horn for medicine and dagger handles originates outside Africa, but some of the greatest pressures on the long-term security of black rhinos originate within the countries they inhabit. These threats include poverty, wars, corruption, the varying attitudes of politicians and local communities to conservation, and land claims. In southern Zimbabwe, for example, privately owned rhino conservancies have recently been invaded by landless people, placing at least two large black rhino populations at grave risk.

The high cost of protecting rhinos

A WWF-funded study of the costs and benefits of conserving rhinos estimates that about US\$1,400/km² per year is needed to keep poachers at bay and manage rhino populations successfully. Maintaining fences and adequate numbers of guards is expensive, as is providing veterinary care. Also, rhinos in conservation and management havens are regarded as members of larger ‘meta-populations’ or breeding groups, so individual rhinos are often moved to other reserves and sanctuaries to improve overall breeding success. Aggressive individuals sometimes have to be moved, too.

The cost of these management interventions is rising at the same time as African countries face unprecedented economic difficulties, and as the budgets of their already stretched wildlife departments are fast diminishing. If we want the black rhino to survive, the international community must be willing to shoulder a large part of this financial burden. Funds are also needed to train African specialists in rhino management.



© WWF/Martin HARVEY
Black rhinoceros entering water

Some conservationists, mostly in South Africa where black rhinos are well protected, believe that horn from rhinos that have died naturally and from dehorned animals could be traded on a controlled basis to help meet the cost of conservation. But these proposals have met with widespread opposition. Some argue that it would be impossible to verify the origin of rhino horn in trade, that the corruption that has dogged the international trade in wildlife products still exists, and that re-opening the trade in rhino horn, even on a limited basis, would open the floodgates for another wave of poaching.

The nature of black rhinos

Black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*) historically inhabited a variety of habitats, from the Kalahari and Namib deserts of Southern Africa to the grassland-forest transition zones of East Africa’s mountains. Historically they were present in their greatest numbers in the vast thorny Acacia savannahs and deciduous woodlands that stretch across the drier areas of southern and eastern Africa.

Black rhinos are browsers, using their prehensile upper lips to twist off low-growing branches of trees and shrubs. In drier areas, they are particularly fond of seemingly unpalatable plants, such as euphorbias and aloes that other species avoid.

Unlike the white rhino, the black rhino is rather solitary, although temporary associations of up to a dozen individuals have been seen in the wild. A calf will stay with its mother for several years. Adults maintain separate but overlapping home ranges, which can be up to 100km² in extent, but are usually much smaller. Black rhinos are famed for being rather bad-tempered beasts, but encounters between neighbouring rhinos are rarely very aggressive except when they are males competing for the attentions of a female in oestrus. However, some individual rhinos seem to be exceptionally nervous, and a female with a calf nearby will charge anything she considers a potential threat. Rhinos have relatively poor eyesight, but have a keen sense of smell and sharp hearing.

A rhino’s horn is formed of agglutinated keratin, which grows from the skin of the nose on a corrugated mound of nasal bone. If knocked off or removed the horns grow again. Many rhinos surviving in sanctuaries have had their horns removed in order to reduce their attractiveness to poachers. Because the animal’s diet and trace elements in the soil influence the chemical composition of rhino horn it is now possible to determine the origin of an individual horn. This ‘fingerprinting’ technique may become a potent weapon in the fight against poaching.