

Corruption Undermines Rhino Conservation



Why is Rhino Poaching Increasing?

During a Mission to Mpumalanga, I spoke with police and game rangers involved in the war against rhino poaching. They were frustrated. In the year 2000, 7 rhinos were poached. In 2005, 13. In 2008, 83. In 2009, despite widespread outrage and pledges of decisive action by the government, 122 rhino were poached. In 2010, the number of rhinos poached shot up to 333. By 2011 it was 448. In 2012, 668 rhino were poached. 2013 was even worse, 1004 rhinos were killed by poachers in South Africa. 2014 was the worst year in living memory for rhino conservation, 1215 were killed. So in 2015, 750 rhino have been poached.

Asian Market

The drastic surge in rhino poaching is being driven by an insane demand in Asia for rhino horn. In Vietnam and China, people are willing to pay thousands of dollars for just a sliver of rhino horn. Rhino horn is considered a *miracle drug* and an aphrodisiac. Although there is no scientific evidence to support this bizarre belief, rhino horn can fetch \$22,000 per kilo on the black market. Rhino poaching is now a R150 billion industry annually.

Rising Rage

For the game rangers and police on the ground who have been energetically implementing every measure possible for the protection of rhino and tracking down of the poachers responsible for this wholesale targeting of South Africa's rhino population, these escalating rhino poaching statistics are disastrous. They are convinced that



there is corruption at a high level, enabling the poachers to loot our wildlife heritage.

Rhinos at Risk

In 1900, there were over 500,000 white rhino in Africa. Today there are less than 20,000 (barely 5%) left. The 18,800 white rhino left in South Africa represent 95% of Africa's total white rhino population.

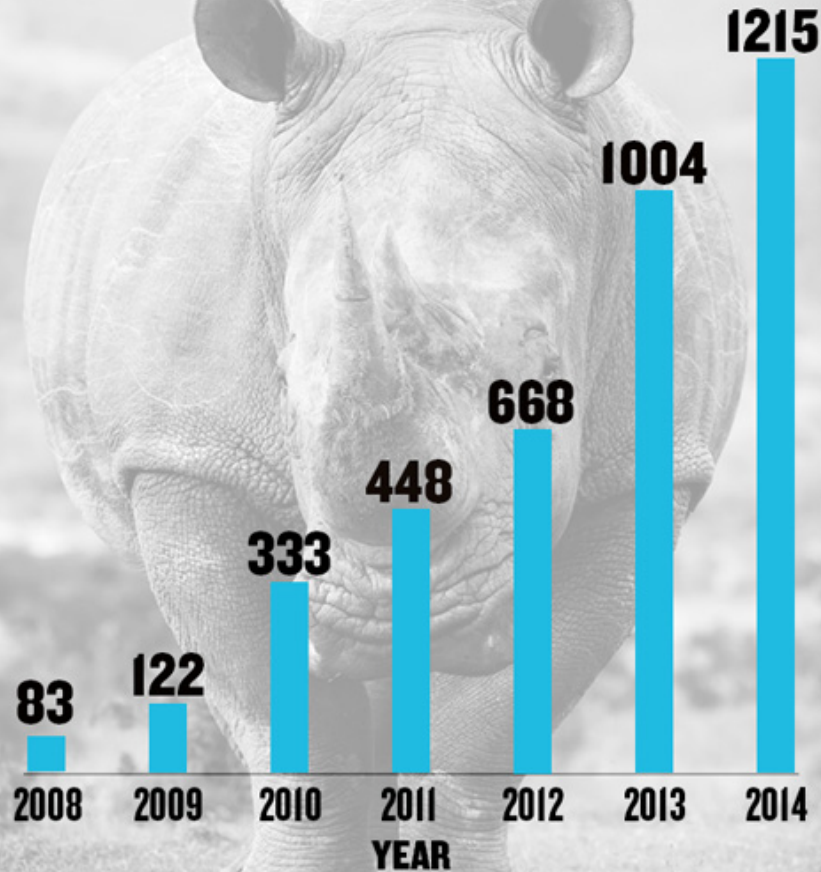
Catastrophic

The situation for the black rhino is even more catastrophic. In 1960, there were 100,000 black rhino in Africa. Today there are barely 5,000, of which 40% are in South Africa. The World Wildlife Fund reports that South Africa's "*superlative conservation record of more than a century is under threat.*"

Unprecedented Conservation Crisis

The 2012 Report by TRAFFIC, described the rhino killings as: "*an unprecedented conservation crisis for South Africa.*" Rangers report a disturbing

RHINOS POACHED IN SOUTH AFRICA 2008-2014



Source: South African Department of Environmental Affairs

Park security forces and the poachers. In almost every one of these encounters, the poachers, although very heavily armed, are killed, wounded, or captured. During one recent incident, a game ranger was seriously wounded.

Bringing Poachers to Justice

Last year a Thai citizen, Chumlong Lemtongthai, was sentenced to 40 years in prison, for his involvement in rhino poaching. Near Mtubatuba in KwaZulu/Natal, game rangers engaged in a hot pursuit, high-speed vehicle chase with poachers. One of the poachers managed to escape, but the other was admitted to hospital with a gunshot wound. In 2010, 165 poachers were arrested in South Africa, 232 in 2011, 267 in 2012, 343 in 2013 and 386 arrests in 2014.

The Dismantled Border Fence

Major General Johan Jooste, a military veteran from the Border War, heads up the Kruger National Park combined security

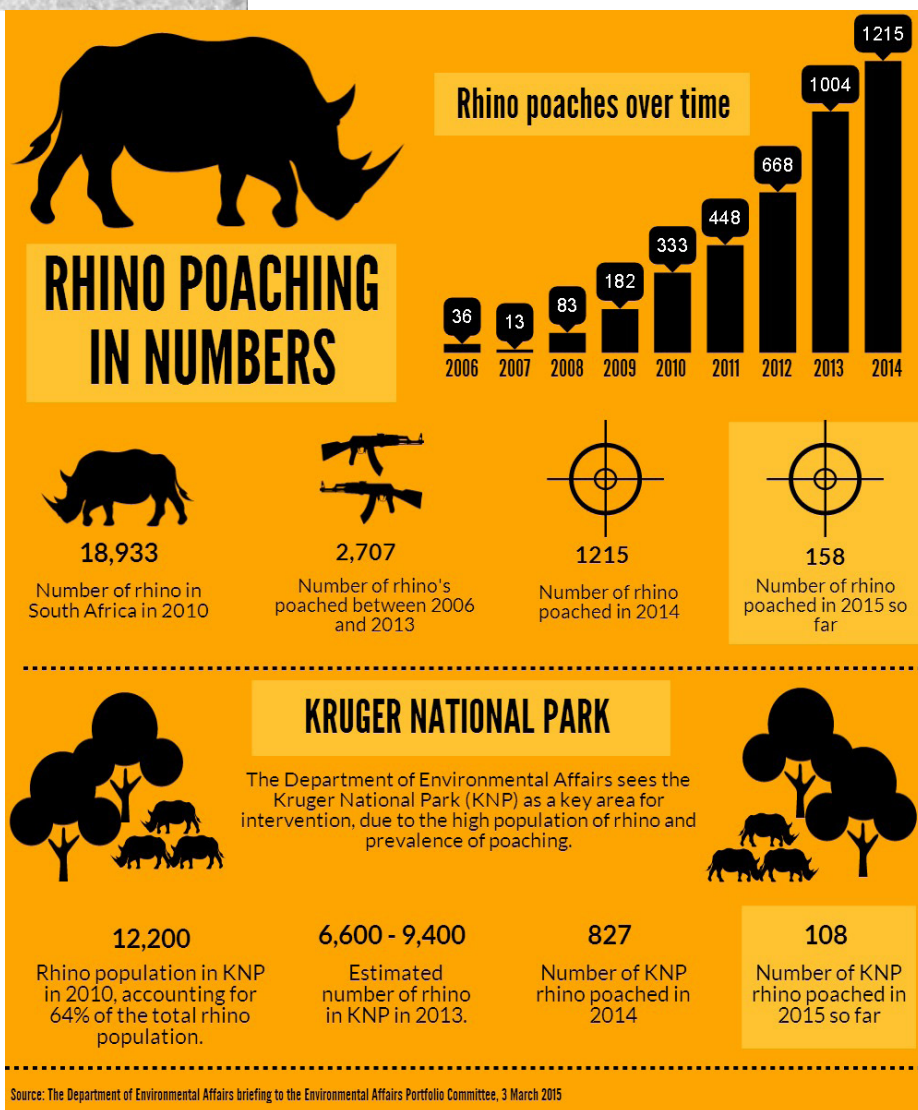
escalation in the conflict with the crime syndicates. Previously AK-47 assault rifles and .303 rifles were used. Now heavier calibre weapons such as 375s and 458s are increasingly being utilised by the poachers.

Organised Crime

Rhino poaching is now listed as the third most lucrative criminal trade in the world - behind drugs and human trafficking (slavery). Well-equipped, sophisticated organised crime syndicates, using helicopters and automatic weapons, are ruthlessly targeting rhinos throughout Southern Africa.

On the Frontline

The frontline of this battle for the survival of the rhino is being fought in the Kruger National Park, home to half of South Africa rhino population. Game rangers and police are involved in a deadly battle in that 20,000km² wildlife sanctuary. There have been an increasing number of shoot-outs between Kruger National



Source: The Department of Environmental Affairs briefing to the Environmental Affairs Portfolio Committee, 3 March 2015



forces. He reports that the worst problem has been that of poachers swarming across the park's 375km border with Mozambique. Against the advice of many wildlife specialists and conservationists, the Parks Board dismantled most of the border fence in order to amalgamate with the newly proclaimed Trans Limpopo Conservation area, which was meant to give Kruger National Park's wildlife more roaming territory. However, all it succeeded in doing was increasing the killing fields of the poachers in Mozambique.

The Mozambique Connection

All the 314 rhino located into the Mozambique section of this park have already been killed by poachers. Now the poachers, funded by international crime syndicates, are mobilizing their poaching operations from Mozambique into Kruger National Park. They are using the Maputo harbour and airport to smuggle rhino horn to Vietnam and China. At this time, wildlife poaching in Mozambique is a mere misdemeanour, warranting a fine. Pressure is mounting on Mozambique to enact legislation to make wildlife offences serious felonies. Conservationists blame Mozambique's lax laws for enabling the huge concentration of international crime syndicates controlling the rhino poaching offensive on Kruger National Park.

Hot Pursuit

General Jooste has reported on the pattern of poachers fleeing across the border to Mozambique, some actually waving mockingly at their pursuers once on Mozambique soil. The wildlife conservation agencies are urging the South African and Mozambique governments to agree to the principle of "hot pursuit", which will allow National Parks security personnel to pursue poachers across the border into Mozambique.

Corruption Runs Deep

However, the World Wildlife Fund points out that "*corruption runs deep on both sides.*" of the border. TRAFFIC, an international wildlife trade monitoring network incorporating the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, report that "*the complicity of South Africa national and provincial officials undertaking, or enabling, illegal trade has been documented. In terms of killing rhinos, four government rangers were arrested in Kruger National Park in 2012, and at the Atherstone Nature Reserve in Limpopo the reserve manager committed suicide after allegedly being implicated in five rhino deaths. Provincial administrators have repeatedly turned a blind eye to pseudo hunting, especially in North West and Limpopo Provinces and allowed rhino hunts to transpire that violate TOPS (Threatened Or Protected Species) regulations.*"

Pervasive and Persistent Corruption

Wildlife specialists maintain: "*Corruption among government senior officials, escalating down to rangers, remains a persistent problem.*" Conservation scientists are reporting that "*Corrupt game industry insiders are now poaching rhino alongside other criminal groups – all well-organised, well-financed and highly mobile.*"

"How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished." Jeremiah 12:4

Failure of Justice System

Wildlife personnel that I have spoken to have expressed their frustration with the failure of the criminal justice system to effectively prosecute the violent and ruthless criminals involved in this industry of poaching rhino horn. On numerous occasions, prosecutors have failed to do their duty.



On other occasions, judges have let the culprits off lightly.

Against All Odds

The protection of rhinos is a brutal and ruthless war. The poachers are extremely well armed and the game rangers, police and soldiers on the ground deployed to confront them, are often denied the air support and prompt backup requested. The impression that I have gained, on the ground, is that there is no shortage of dedication and diligence amongst many of the game rangers, conservationists and police. However, there are definitely those who are seeking to undermine their effectiveness and the staggering escalation in rhino poaching is a testimony that something is seriously wrong.

Private Initiatives

Several expressed the conviction that the war against rhino poaching is going to be won by private initiatives, not by governments. There needs to be a comprehensive campaign to protect rhinos from extinction. One of the key battlefields in this war is Asia.

Save the Rhino

Conservationists recommend that to save the rhino and win this war against organised crime, there needs to be far greater co-operation between wildlife organisations, police, prosecutors, magistrates and judges. New technologies need to be developed to detect and intercept rhino poachers and horn traffickers, including DNA *fingerprinting* of rhino horn, tracking devices, improved conviction rates, increased severe penalties for rhino related poaching crimes, and no bail for rhino poachers.

Mobilise Against Poachers

In addition, I would recommend that, as this is a war against organised crime, more military specialists be brought in. The Air Force should assign more aircraft to assist Wildlife Protection Services to intercept helicopters used by



poachers. The Parabats should be assigned to hunt down poachers in the game reserves. The Reconnaissance Commando should be tasked to track down and deal with the organised crime syndicates behind the poachers. As with piracy, history proves that, when dealing with violent and ruthless criminals, only the most decisive and sustained action can prevail. Bounties can be placed on the heads of poachers and crime syndicates behind this, to provide incentives for independent contractors to track them down.



Prince Harry at Crocodile River

You Can Make a Difference

Invite conservation speakers to your school, congregation, or college. Visit www.thebibleandanimals.org website. View the **Rhinos, Poaching and Conservation** and **Corruption Undermines Rhino Conservation** PowerPoints on Slideshare.com, and share these with your friends. Support the **Chipembere Rhino Foundation** and other initiatives caring for God's Creation, such as the **Khumbula** film.

*“Who will rise up for Me against the wicked?
Who will make a stand for Me against the
workers of iniquity?”* Psalm 94:16

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