



SKYDIVE FOR RHINOS

Michelle Bradshaw, Skydive for Rhinos campaign ambassador and actress in the TV programme, *The Wild*, with tandem master Graham Field.

RHINO WATCH

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WORLD RHINO DAY TAKES OFF

In advance of World Rhino Day on 22 September, the Skydive for Rhinos campaign aims to raise R10-million and assist 448 people – one diver for every rhino killed by poachers in 2011 – to take a 3 000-metre leap that will help protect South Africa's beleaguered rhino population.

Close to R4-million is already in the kitty, thanks to participants, businesses, schools, shopping centres and other general donations to the African Conservation Trust's Rhino Fund, the 'motherhip' of the skydiving initiative. The launch took place in Rustenburg, Limpopo province, in July. The next jump takes place in Port Elizabeth during the first weekend of this month and the final event will be held in Robertson in the Western Cape on the 22nd, World Rhino Day. (Team Africa Geographic will be there; see box on left.)

Springbok and Blue Bulls rugby player Juandré Kruger was one of the 64 'Rhino skydivers' at Rustenburg airfield. 'I'd rather face the All Blacks than jump out of a plane,' he joked, 'but the rhino crisis is serious enough for me to do it. Being a part of this campaign has been very enjoyable.'

To sign up, go to www.skydive4rhinos.org. If you'd like to contribute, but don't want to leave terra firma, you can help by making a general donation towards the R10-million; contact the organisers on +27 (0)33 342 2844 to find other ways to get involved.

Team Africa Geographic

Africa Geographic staffers Judy Beyer and Janine van Eeden have signed up to take part in the Robertson Skydive for Rhinos 2012 event. Go online at www.givengain.com/activist/81147/ or www.givengain.com/activist/81224/ to find out more and sponsor them – you could win five gorgeous black and white posters of the Big Five, courtesy of up-and-coming photographer Richard Millar.

A step forward?

At a meeting in July of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Standing Committee, decisions were taken to increase pressure on a number of countries to account for their failure to deal with rampant poaching and illegal trade, but no sanctions or punitive measures were agreed. African nations identified as the main sources of illegal ivory, East African and Asian transit countries and China and Thailand, home to the largest ivory consumer markets, were given until the end of the year to provide written reports on the progress they have made in tackling the illicit trade. Failure to do so could result in a suspension of all trade in CITES-listed species with the country concerned, but the CITES Parties have thus far avoided taking such action.

Vietnam, which is at the centre of the rising demand for illegal rhino horn, was instructed to report on the progress it had made in curbing demand for the horn, and has until this month to comply. The country will need to explain what measures have been implemented to prevent the illegal import of and trade in rhino horn, target the black market and discourage rhino horn use. 'Vietnam is the principal driver of rhino horn trafficking and, as such, has an international obligation to curb the demand, implement national trade controls and help end rhino poaching in Africa,' said Tom Milliken, TRAFFIC's rhino expert. Read more at www.traffic.org/home/2012/7/27/cites-bares-teeth-but-can-it-bite.html and see 'Into the Asian underworld' on page 34.



TIM JACKSON

A BOOST FOR ANTI-RHINO POACHING

In July the Unite Against Poaching campaign, managed by UNITRANS Volkswagen and the SANParks Honorary Rangers, sponsored a VW Amarok worth more than R400 000 to help with rhino anti-poaching efforts in the Kruger National Park. The vehicle has been specially equipped to transport three foxhounds, as Bruce Leslie of SANParks Special Operations explained (above). The dogs, appropriately named Kombi, Jetta and Chico, are currently in the final stages of training and are the latest weapon in SANPark's anti-poaching arsenal in the Kruger Park, where they will enable law-enforcement teams to pursue poachers more quickly and efficiently.

In accepting the vehicle, SANParks CEO David Mabunda said, 'This sponsorship signifies increasing cooperation from the public that we hope will realise more successful convictions of the perpetrators.'



ALESSANDRO BONORA

Bag it for rhinos

Pop in to your nearest Woolworths store and purchase a limited edition 'rhino' bag (left) for your groceries. R10 from every purchase goes directly to the Wildlife ACT Fund to support its efforts to increase rhino territory via the WWF-SA Black Rhino Range Expansion Project. You could also win a four-night stay for two people at &Beyond's luxurious Phinda Private Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal. www.wildlifeactfund.org

EWT's canine recruits

Rico, the Endangered Wildlife Trust's (EWT) two-year-old Belgian shepherd sniffer dog, has foiled the efforts of a number of wildlife poachers trying to smuggle contraband through O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. He recently flagged a suspicious package containing ivory and elephant skin and helped in a rhino horn bust. Both cases are under investigation.

In July, EWT announced the arrival from Germany of three new dogs – Heddi and Renaldo (below) and Condor – to swell its canine arsenal and help sniff out illegal wildlife cargo at various points of entry and exit.

According to Kirsty Brebner, EWT's Rhino Project manager, 'The deployment of three additional dogs will contribute to increasing the detection rate of wildlife contraband and, therefore, the risk associated with wildlife crime and rhino poaching specifically. With increased detection comes improved arrest and prosecution rates and, hopefully, a reduction in poaching by deterring individuals involved in organised crime.' The dogs are funded through the Hans Hoheisen Charitable Trust Fund, administered via BOE. Bidvest Magnum is sponsoring the operational costs for the animals and has donated two vehicles to the project.

For more information, e-mail Kirsty Brebner at kirstyb@ewt.org.za



FACTS & FIGURES

(as at 10 August 2012)

312 rhinos killed in South Africa in 2012.

XX arrests have been made in connection with rhino poaching.

Source: Department of Environmental Affairs

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A very young white rhino calf.

TIM JACKSON

INTO THE ASIAN UNDERWORLD



Investigative journalist **Karl Ammann** was probing the tiger trade in South-east Asia when he was offered rhino horn for sale. Two years and multiple trips to Vietnam and Laos later, he has amassed information that has implications for proposals to legalise trade and, if used properly, could help us fight the demand for rhino horn.

Back in 2010, I was filming with a German TV crew in a casino town on the Laos/China border, where gambling, prostitution, drugs and illegal wildlife consumption have become the main economic activities. We were exploring the streets when we came across two clouded leopard cubs hidden in a cardboard box. With the camera running, I took them out and played with them, until their owner started to protest.

While this was happening, our translator was approached by a lorry driver. He told our guide that if we were interested in cats, he knew of two tiger cubs for sale a few hours' drive away. He gave us the address, but when we got there the cubs had already been sold.

Nonetheless, on a return visit, I decided to follow up the story and hired the hunters

who had killed the mother tiger (using a landmine, and a cow as bait). With the help of a Vietnamese translator, we travelled to the area where the tiger had been killed and then crossed into northern Vietnam.

Our translator, who had trafficked wildlife in the past, introduced us to some of the well-known dealers in a nearby town. We were offered tiger cake (boiled down from tiger bone), claws and teeth, and a slab of rhino horn marked as weighing 89 grams. During all these discussions, nobody was concerned about the threat of enforcement (which stood in stark contrast to the 20 years' imprisonment our translator's brother had served for heroin offences).

The next morning, we sent our translator back to the dealer to buy US\$100 of what had been billed as 'rhino horn', and we documented the transaction using a hidden camera. The translator bought some horn

and was invited to the kitchen where a tiger skeleton was being boiled. It swiftly became clear that, irrespective of species, the traders we were meeting were all potential sources of information for ivory, tiger and rhino horn products. So, we also started looking into rhino horn and its prices, availability and usage.

We began by surveying the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) shops in the old town of Hanoi. When it came to rhino horn we were told that it did not have any aphrodisiac qualities (we were offered alternatives) and that it did not really cure cancer, despite the rumours. It did, however, reduce fever and cleanse the body, especially after bouts of overconsumption of alcohol, food and drugs.

As this was the start of the national New Year festivities, one dealer invited us to his family quarters for a glass of rice wine and freely showed us tiger-bone cake, claws, a rhino horn and elephant skin. After drinking the wine and again buying a very small sample of what he presented as rhino horn, we were offered some powdered horn by the lady of the house. Producing it from a brown plastic bag, she instructed us to sprinkle it into our rice wine so that, irrespective of our alcohol consumption during the holidays, we would never have a hangover. (When we returned in 2012,

We are shown how to differentiate between a piece of fake (left) and real horn.

BETTER BORDER CONTROL

I recently bought a fake horn from a US store that produces all kinds of skulls, human and animal bones, including museum-quality skeletons. I transported the convincing imitation product openly in my check-in bag across half a dozen international borders, expecting somebody to detect the shape on an X-ray machine and question me. It never happened.

we discovered that the husband had died of liver cancer from, according to his widow, 'too much drinking'.)

The trader explained that rhino horn was only for the very rich and our guide confirmed this with some anecdotes of his own, illustrating that demand in Vietnam was high and increasing in line with the growing affluence of the elite. Handing out rhino horn was becoming one way to show that you had 'arrived', it was offered to people in power as a present and could also be used to bribe officials. Our hosts then sold us a ceramic plate with a rough inner surface and a rhino drawing on the rim in which to grind our horn.

Several of the dealers we spoke to subsequently weren't interested in selling small horn samples, only big pieces with price tags of thousands of dollars, making it clear that they were accustomed to negotiating with people of means and not tourists looking for a few grams.

Since my original trip two years ago, I have been back to Laos and Vietnam three times and have become convinced that Vietnam is one of the key consumer countries of rhino horn, tiger bone and bear bile products. With each trip it became increasingly evident that most of the rhino horns for sale were fake. Ninety percent of the 30 samples we submitted for DNA analysis were water buffalo horn. My translators and I became more discriminating and told dealers that we had been taken for a ride in the past and wanted to see and discuss prices for the real stuff.

Via the Internet, we found 35 dealers advertising horn. We made appointments and consulted with some of them but, as a foreigner, I was regarded with suspicion. Nobody seemed worried about being caught, believing instead that we were not big enough players willing to spend thousands of dollars on a horn, or a significant piece of one.

So, we refined the story and sent our local investigator off by himself with a hidden camera. He explained that he was looking for horn for a friend in Yunnan province who had been cheated with a fake product. At this point he only wanted very small samples that he could check, and would return if they were genuine. This approach proved to be more fruitful and we accumulated hours of

undercover footage, which we reviewed and transcribed.

My most recent trip, included a survey of some of the main towns in Laos. We found that its relaxed enforcement regime enabled

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- Rhino horn is openly available, not just in TCM shops but also in jewellery outlets and souvenir markets generally visited by Asian tourists.
- We did not hear of a single case of active enforcement or the prosecution of any hunter or dealer.
- Many dealers know they are dealing in fake horn products and as such consider themselves 'legal'.
- A wide range of verification methods are offered to 'prove' the horn's authenticity, from the density of the material when it is cut with an iron saw to the colour of the solution when powder is mixed with water or rice wine and pulling off individual fibres (this seems to be one of the most reliable ways to identify real horn).
- A dealer in northern Vietnam told us that a drug-enforcement unit recently visited him and took some of his horn, promising him payment later.
- A market for accessories is emerging. The 'grinding plates' have gone upmarket, with fancy packaging that includes images of a live rhino and promises that its contents can 'cure incurable diseases'. There is even a special device that grinds the horn into powder.
- The main import dealers are well-established businessmen who trade in all kinds of contraband. One key Laotian importer hands out a business card showing that he is the district head of the chamber of commerce and the deputy head of the Laotian boxing and swimming association.

dealers to handle their imports, then distribute them to neighbouring China and Vietnam without any problems. Again we found rhino horn, mostly fake, in a range of outlets. It was all said to come from Asian animals with many of the sellers insisting there were still Javan and Sumatran rhinos in the hill-tribe areas of Laos. (According to the IUCN, the country harbours no populations of either species.) The one African 'horn' we were shown

incorporated features typical of Asian species, leading me to conclude that whoever had produced it hadn't seen many real African horns. Outside Hanoi even filmed a factory where dozens of water buffalo horn tips were being prepared to look like the tops of rhino horns.

These investigations yielded a lot of interesting information (see left for). The question now is what should we do with it?

During a recent tiger conservation meeting in Bangkok, sponsored by the World Bank, and with Interpol, CITES and the World Customs Union in attendance, I asked the chair why the Laotian delegate could not be confronted with some of the evidence I had collected demonstrating the absence of any political will to enforce international conventions such as CITES. The answer was: 'Some of these officials are as frustrated as you and I are.' So, why then is so much money spent on meetings in five-star hotels if the attendees are not decision-makers and cannot instigate some real enforcement campaigns?

I met with Western diplomats accredited to Vietnam and discussed approaches to modifying the consumer demand for rhino horn. Their feeling was that attacking the validity and effectiveness of the TCM industry would probably backfire and that the viewpoint of the West on such issues was not relevant. We also discussed the merits of a Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign that would expose the 'techniques' used by dealers to prove that their horn is 'real'. The PSA would suggest that there is a large amount of fake product for sale and that the consumer might be better off buying a Gucci bag or a diamond ring. (Of course there is also a range of Asian rhino horn rings on offer...)

Their view was that highlighting the potential embarrassment of being cheated might prove more powerful than yet another study questioning the medicinal properties of rhino horn. As one diplomat pointed out, though, support for such a campaign by members of the ruling party would be crucial – and would depend entirely on whether they too are consumers of rhino horn.

One thing is clear; with so much fake horn on offer, the size of the market is far, far greater than can be supplied by the 312 rhinos poached in South Africa this year. 🐘