Michelle Bradshaw, Skydive for Rhinos campaign ambassador and up-and-coming photographer Richard Millar.

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van Eeden have signed up to take part in the
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Team africa geographic
the CITES Parties have thus far avoided taking such action.

• SEPTEMBER 2012
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to the African Conservation Trust’s Rhino Fund, the ‘mothership’ of

businesses, schools, shopping centres and other general donations

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 ‘mothership’ 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.

A step forward?

At a meeting in May 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 (mainly countries in 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 issue. Failure to do so could mean 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 it has 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 user 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 Miller, TRAFFIC’s rhino expert. Read more at www.traffic.org/home/2012/7/27/cites-bans-teeth-but-can-it-bite.html and see ‘Into the Asian underworld’ on page 34.

EWT’s canine recruits

Rico, the Endangered Wildlife Trust’s (EWT) two-year-old Belgian shepherd sniffer dog, has failed 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 – Heidi and Remus (below) and Condon – 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 sniffer 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 Hohetsahl Charitable Trust Fund, administered via BGIC. bikini Magraith is sponsoring the operational costs for the animals and has donated two vehicles to the project.

For more information, e-mail Kirsty Brebner at kirsty@ewt.org.za
A very young white rhino calf.
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 it 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 tiger horn and elephant skin. After drinking the wine and again buying a very small sample of what he proclaimed as rhino horn, we were offered some powdered horn by the lady of the house. Producing from a jar a piece of one.

During all these discussions, nobody was probing the tiger trade or the ivory, tiger and rhino horn trade. We were told that if we were interested in cats, he knew dealers in a nearby town. We were given the address, but they were approached by a lorry driver. He told our local investigator off by himself with a bribe officials. Our hosts then sold us a fake (left) and real horn.

I recently bought a fake horn from a US store that produces all kinds of fakes. 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 misinformed. The consumers of rhino horn on offer, the size of the market is far, entirely on whether they too are concerned about rhino horn. Their view was that highlighting the waste of energy and resources on fighting, 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 products on offer...

Our hosts were not decision-makers and could not be confronted. The key Laotian delegate could not be confronted - one of the evidence I had collected was used to interrogate 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 misinformed.

During all these discussions, nobody was concerned about the threat of enforcement (which stood in stark contrast to the 20 years’ improvement our translator’s brother had served for heroin offences). Their view was that highlighting the waste of energy and resources on fighting, 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 products on offer...

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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.

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