

ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE



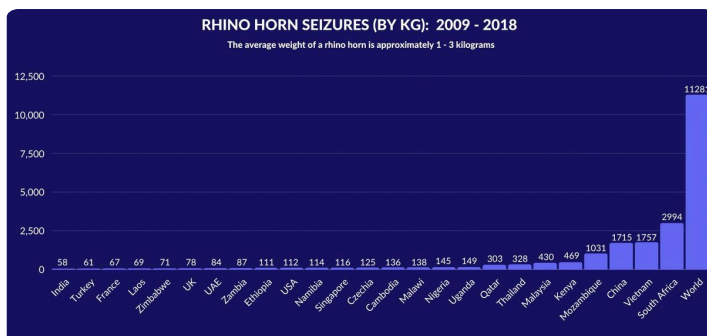
Rhinos In Crisis (Intro)

Rhinos. One of the oldest living mammals on earth. Instantly recognisable. Undeniably iconic. Surprisingly charismatic and utterly irreplaceable.

Their role in the ecosystem is unsurpassed. Rhinos are nature's environmental engineers. As well as shaping landscape topography through grazing, wallowing, and defecating, they also increase biodiversity. The changes they make ensure the survival of countless other species of flora and fauna. Lose rhinos and we risk losing other species too.

Our unprecedented activities have had a profound impact on rhinos and their habitats, contributing to the decline of rhino populations. Environmental pressures and illegal wildlife trade are threatening rhinos' survival, putting this magnificent, sentient animal at risk.

If rhino populations continue to decline at the same rate as they have in the past decade, rhinos could be extinct in the wild by 2032.



The Environmental Investigation Agency reported the seizure of over 11,000 kg of rhino horns worldwide between 2009 and 2018



What is the illegal wildlife trade?

Often stolen from their natural environment or raised under unnatural, controlled conditions, the illegal wildlife trade consists of the illegal capture, transportation, and sale of plants, non-domesticated animals, and their body parts.

In addition to being a low-risk and high-reward activity, rhino horn trafficking is intimately linked to other organised crimes and terrorist groups and is now one of the most lucrative transnational crimes, along with drugs, weapons, and human trafficking and is estimated to be worth around \$17 billion per year.

In recent years, wildlife crimes have escalated from a conservation problem to a humanitarian issue and a global threat to national security.

Why do people use rhino horns?

There has long been a thriving demand for traditional remedies in Asian countries, despite the widespread adoption of science-based medicine. The healing properties of rhino horn reign supreme in an exotic market where nature's oddities such as black bear bile, tiger bones, musk deer, seahorses and a bizarre array of other wildlife are revered.

Rhino horn is a prominent, but meaningless, component of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) now prevalent across Asia. It's used to treat a range of illnesses, including fever symptoms, nosebleeds, strokes, and cancer.

The Chinese government banned domestic trade and medical use of rhino horn in 1993 and removed horn from the official (TCM) pharmacopeia, but lifted the ban in 2018. China's State Council announced it would permit the use of rhino horn for scientific and medical purposes as well as cultural exchange, despite demand remaining high and unsustainable.

Aside from being used for medicinal purposes, rhino horn has been carved into libation cups (ceremonial drinking vessels) and fashioned into an endless array of curios including buttons, paper weights, belt buckles, Jambaya handles, and ornaments. Furthermore, ground horn is becoming a popular recreational drug, and whole horns have gained prestige due to scarcity, increasing their value.



Rhino horn being ground in a ceramic bowl in Hanoi, Vietnam



Antique cups made from rhino horn valued between \$1-\$1.5 million in Tulsa, Oklahoma.



Seized rhino horns worth \$5 million displayed at a press conference in Bangkok (Credit Athit Perawongmetha/Reuters)



Why are rhinos being killed?

Wide-scale hunting has historically contributed to the rhino's rapid decline. Climate change and habitat destruction are affecting their numbers today, but poaching has the greatest impact.

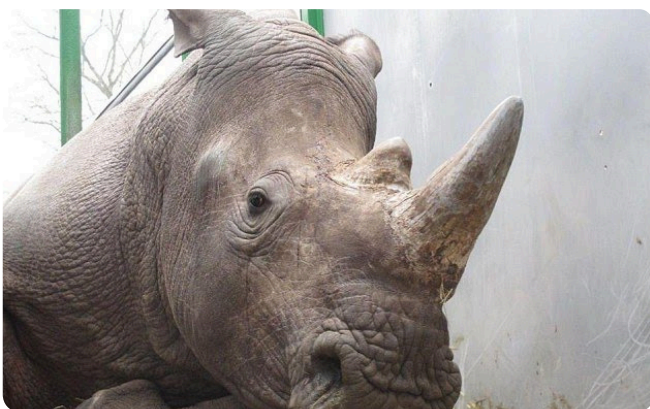
The trade is driven in part by the deep-rooted superstitions and traditions surrounding the animal, particularly the use of its horns, which have been an essential practical, medical, and emotional staple for centuries.

The primary purpose of poaching today is to obtain horns, although other body parts such as tails, ears, genitals, organs, and meat are also used.

Blood and urine are also falsely believed to contain medicinal properties. In 2001, employees of India's oldest zoological park, the Alipore Zoo (Calcutta Zoo), were found to be collecting rhino urine and selling it (illegally) for around £3.00 per litre. Despite rhinos naturally relieving themselves around ten times a day, investigators found racketeers may have been doping rhinos to increase their frequency.



An Indian rhino in Kaziranga National Park, Assam, home to the largest number of Indian rhinos in the world



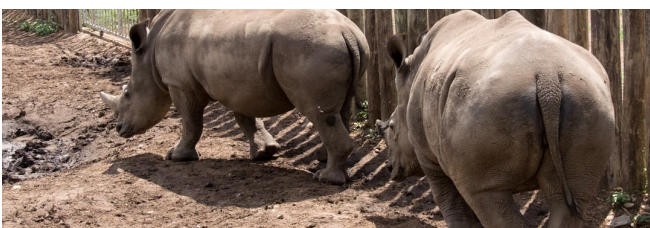
A four-year-old rhino named Vince was shot and killed in March 2017 at a zoo near Paris (Credit: Thiory Zoo)

How many rhinos have been poached?

Despite best efforts, not all countries release regular data on poaching mortality. The criteria vary from range state to range state. For example, South Africa excludes poaching survivors, survivors who later die, unborn calves, orphans, and poached rhinos with intact horns from their accounts, and a margin of error should be expected.

Numbers run into the thousands, as we know. In the last decade, approximately 10,000 rhinos have died due to illegal activity, but this figure is conservative.

Several subspecies of rhino have become extinct in the last century, including the northern white rhino, the western black rhino, the Vietnamese rhino, and the Indian Javan rhino.



Orphaned rhino calves Impy and Gugu, both 18 months old, were killed in a South African orphanage in February 2017

Is poaching a threat to all rhinos?

Yes. Although rhino poaching poses a threat to all five species, Javan and Sumatran rhinos are arguably less vulnerable due to their increasingly low numbers, isolated populations, inhospitable habitats, and increased security. There have been 26 Javan rhino poaching incidents between 2018 and 2023, so they are not immune to poaching.

Despite its proximity to China, a primary driver of rhino horn demand, poverty in the fringes of the park and porous borders (a major trafficking route is through the India-Myanmar border), Kaziranga National Park recorded 191 poaching mortalities between 2000-2021 and zero mortalities in 2022. The park has arguably one of the most successful anti-poaching records, but success has come at a cost. In 2017, BBC's broadcast *Our World: Killing for Conservation* criticised the brutal shoot-to-kill policy, accusing rangers of additional judicial policing, claiming innocent villagers were being caught in the conflict.

There hasn't been the same success in Africa. The poaching has affected all rhino range states in Africa, but none more so than South Africa, which has reported over 8500 deaths since 2008, most of which have occurred in Kruger National Park, which has lost 76% of its white rhino population since 2011 and 51% of its black rhino population since 2013 according to SANParks' annual report.



Since 2002, more than 15,000 rhinoceros have been slaughtered in Africa

Who are the rhino poachers?

During the first decade of the 2000s, rhino poaching increased largely from unregistered loose horns from private stockpiles, Vietnamese pseudo-hunters and subsistence hunters, originating in impoverished villages on the borders of Kruger National Park driven by poverty and hunger rather than greed.

"I poach because of circumstances. There is no work. No money and no food so that is why I poach" stated one man in an interview for a documentary called confessions of a rhino poacher.

Vietnamese pseudo-hunters purchased hunting permits under the guise of legal hunting as early as 2003. Using international loopholes and provincial legislation, hunters transported legally sourced horn (hunting trophies) to Asia where it was sold illegally. Julian Rademeyer, author of *Killing for Profit: Exposing the Illegal Rhino Horn Trade*, documents a meticulous account of the hunts in his award-winning book.

Rademeyer has also been instrumental in exposing government corruption in both Africa and Asia. In the last 30 years, North Korean diplomats have been caught trafficking rhino horn and ivory in at least 18 instances, according to the report, *Transnational Organised Crime and the War on Rhino Poaching* written by Rademeyer.

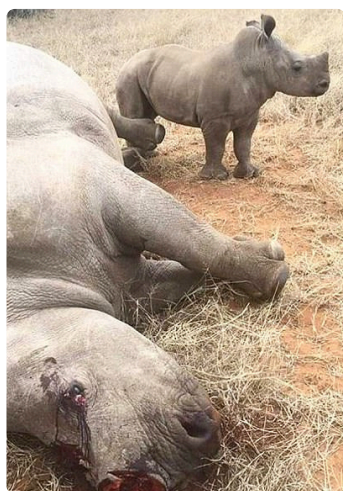
The emergence of sophisticated criminal networks has replaced opportunistic hunters. Wide-scale plundering has replaced isolated pockets of poaching. Besides exploiting poverty and threatening tourism, criminal activity is a growing threat to human life.



After confessing to killing at least 26 rhinos and ordering at least 50 rhinos to be hunted, Vietnamese kingpin Chumlong Lemtongthai was sentenced to prison in South Africa in 2012. After serving less than 6 years of a 40-year sentence, he was released in 2018 (Credit: Julian Rademeyer)



Anti-poaching patrols are commonplace in rhino strongholds. Between 2011 and 2022, 565 African rangers died (52% of them were homicides), according to Andrew Campbell of the Game Rangers Association Africa (GRAA).



What are the methods used to poach rhinos?

Primitive poaching methods to track and kill rhinos as well as international criminal gangs that use military tactics and sophisticated technology, partly because rhinos are no longer plentiful, but also to evade detection.

A poacher's speed is of the essence. The rhino must be immobilised, its horn removed, and taken out of the protected area as soon as possible. Consequently, foot tracking has been replaced by well-equipped triggermen who use sophisticated trackers, silenced rifles, drones, night vision equipment, and even aircraft that fly below radar detection. Anti-poaching units are often stretched and underfunded as a result of these increasingly sophisticated methods.

In 2011, four rhinos were killed in three separate private reserves in the Eastern Cape using etorphine hydrochloride, a veterinary tranquilliser 1000 times stronger than morphine, which was used to immobilise all four rhinos, indicating wildlife veterinarians were also profiting from rhino horn poaching. Sadly, although isolated, veterinary immobilisation has also been used in Asia. The horn of a sub-adult Indian rhino was removed after it was immobilised with M99.



It is common in Asia to use poisons to kill rhinos, particularly salt licks, which provide essential mineral nutrients. Trapping rhinos by concealing pits, then removing their horns and/or killing them while they can't escape. In rare cases, poachers have connected cables to nearby power lines, resulting in electrocution. In the Chitwan National Park, Nepal, a 14-year-old Indian rhino was found dehorned and dead next to her 4-year-old calf after being electrocuted.

The full Rhinos In Crisis series can be found at actionforrhinos.com/rhinos-in-crisis



Horns Of Contention



Environmental Pressures



Illegal Wildlife Trade



Poaching: The Aftermath