

# FACTS AND FICTION: THE RHINO HORN TRADE

## THE PROBLEM

The use of rhino horn as a recreational drug or cancer treatment in Asia is based on myths, but has escalated exponentially over the last few years. As a result, rhino in Africa and Asia are brutally slaughtered in huge numbers for their horns.

With prices able to fetch more than cocaine or gold, the trade is attracting the attention of organised crime and terrorist organisations, leading to an epidemic-proportion illegal rhino horn trade between Africa and Asia.

Criminal offenses include illegal hunting and poaching, illegal weapon possessions, illegal export, illegal (international) trade, bribery and corruption, money laundering, and financing of criminal syndicates and terrorists.



## DANGEROUS MYTHS

In Vietnam, rhino horn is a recreational (party) drug and used by affluent people as a detoxifying beverage and body-rejuvenating tonic. In China, rhino horn is used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to treat fever, pain, rheumatism, convulsions and other disorders (but is not, as commonly believed, prescribed as an aphrodisiac). The value of horns on the black market has escalated dramatically to US\$60,000/kg.

Scientific studies proved that rhino horn has no medicinal value. Rhino horn is comprised of keratin, the same material as our hair and fingernails – and the hoofs and horns of many animals.

## RHINO POACHING

Rhino poaching, in South Africa alone, now accounts for **1.6 animals per day**. This comes down to **1 rhino** poached every **15 hours**. More than **550 rhino** will die annually if current poaching rates continue. Rhino poaching has increased with **4000%** in South Africa between 2007 and 2012.



## BRUTAL METHODS

Brutal rhino poaching methods have escalated in South Africa. Poachers are often using modern equipment such as GPS, night vision goggles, AK-47s and sometimes even helicopters. In the past 10 years, rhinos were simply shot and killed by poachers and their horns removed. In recent years, poachers use darting guns and veterinary drugs to immobilise the rhinos. Darting guns are silent and prevent detection by anti-poaching patrols. The poachers hack off the horns very roughly using an axe, panga or chainsaw, often removing half of the rhino's face, and leave them to die a horrible death.

## RHINO HORN SUPPLY & DEMAND

Rhino horn consumer countries in Asia include Vietnam, China and Thailand. A growing body of evidence indicates that Vietnam currently is the world's leading destination and consumer of rhino horn. This situation is unlikely to change soon unless Vietnam demonstrates a strong political will to make rhino horn crime a national priority. South Africa has been strongest hit by poachers due to its sizeable rhino population, however poaching is increasing and causing alarm in Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya, and Tanzania. The only people benefiting from the current rhino poaching crisis are those running the criminal networks.

## CRITICALLY ENDANGERED

There are currently five species and 11 subspecies of rhinoceros surviving on earth. Two species (Black and White) occur in Africa. Three species (Greater One-horned rhino, Javan, and Sumatran) occur in Asia. Rhinos have suffered a 90% population decline in the last 40 years.

## EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

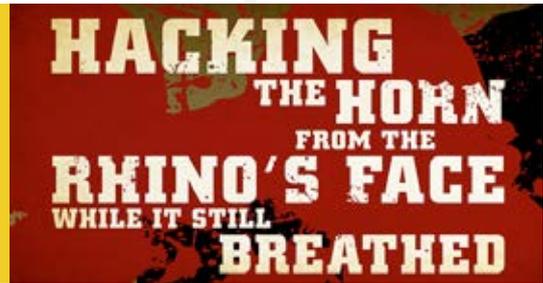
Animated clip about the rhino poaching crisis:

English: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoRs66lX4cI>

English: <http://vimeo.com/49620599>

Vietnamese: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiGcfielvYc>

Chinese: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KID5p-ZX8y8>



## ACTION PLAN

A Strategic Rhino Rescue Plan is the key to rhino conservation and requires a multi-faceted approach:

1. **Massive education and awareness raising campaigns in Asian aimed at curbing the demand for rhino horn in the main consumer markets (medium to long term effects).**
2. **Strict law enforcement and prosecution of criminals in African countries, export control and intensified on-the-ground surveillance and anti-poaching units (immediate effects).**
3. **Diplomatic action to urge African and Asian governments to dramatically and consistently improve its enforcement controls.**

## AFRICAN RHINO SPECIES

### Black Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*)

Population 4,880. The West African Rhino species was declared extinct in 2006. From 1980 until 2006, 14,000 were slaughtered by poachers in East Africa.

### White Rhino (*Ceratotherium simum*)

Northern White Rhino - nearly extinct, 4 individuals surviving in Kenya, outside their natural range.  
Southern White Rhino - 20,165 surviving, under pressure of poaching.

## ASIAN RHINO SPECIES

### Javan Rhino (*Rhinoceros sondaicus*)

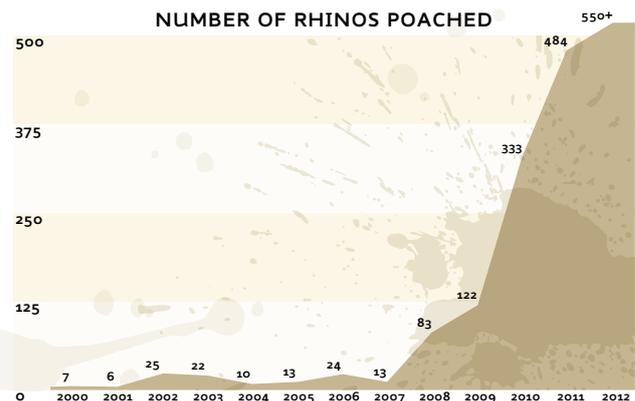
The Indonesian Javan Rhino population is about 55 individuals. The Vietnamese Javan Rhino subspecies in Cat Tien National Park was declared extinct in 2011.

### Sumatran Rhino (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*)

Population approximately 200 individuals, with poaching on the rise.

### Indian Rhino (*Rhinoceros unicornis*)

Population 2,850. Officially protected but poaching is on the rise.



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### Data Sources:

South Africa Department of Environmental Affairs <http://www.environment.gov.za>

The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species™

IUCN 2012. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2012.2. [www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org). Downloaded on 16 November 2012

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