

Let's Stop The Insanity

World Rhino Day, 22 September 2019

By James Dunton

This is the third year that I've been actively involved in World Rhino Day. I became inspired — once the shock wore off — after reading a news article about how three rhinos per day were being killed just so poachers could saw off their horns. Through a sophisticated global crime network, the horns are sold to arriviste businessmen in China and Vietnam, who use the horn solely to improve their standing in the community. I heard about this behavior and was outraged. The injustice was simply too much for me NOT to get involved.



I had never been a social activist. My two teen-age daughters describe me as 'basic'. I am not exactly sure what it means but I don't think it means I am an extremist. But as Edmund Burke says, ***"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."*** And so, my hope in writing this piece is to inform and educate others about the plight of the rhino — so you'll be inspired to get involved as well. Or perhaps this article will move you to help other voiceless victims that need assistance.

World Rhino Day is a chance for the world to celebrate the existence of these magnificent animals that are still wandering the planet, much like they did over 50,000 years ago. (Rhinos are not, as some people assume, prehistoric. Today's rhinos are much different than the ones that walked the Earth 50 million years ago.) We celebrate today's rhinos for what they are — majestic, powerful creatures possessing the weaponry to cause much damage, and the willingness to use its awesome powers of destruction. But the rhino, unbeknownst to most, has a gentle, endearing side as well.



World Rhino Day is an opportunity to raise awareness of the fact that the rhinoceros is critically endangered and could easily become extinct in the wild during our lifetimes. There are less than 30,000 rhinos left on the planet (at the beginning of the 20th century there were over 500,000) and we are losing over 1,000 rhinos per year due to poaching. Rhinos are being systematically killed by transnational organized criminal groups who

traffic in illegal wildlife products such as the rhino horn, which they sell to wealthy buyers in Asia. (Primarily China and Vietnam). This aggressive poaching of the rhino horn over the last decade is now threatening their very existence.

The once-diverse array of rhinos has been reduced to just five species: Africa's white rhinos, which are divided into northern and southern subspecies. There are approximately 20,000 southern white rhinos — while the northern white rhino is virtually extinct. There are two females left on the planet. Sudan, the last northern white male, died last year from old age. The other African species is the black rhino, which is critically endangered. The current population is estimated to be less than 5,000. Indian rhinos are considered vulnerable, but that's far better than critically endangered. Approximately 3,500 survive in northern India and southern Nepal. The smallest species is the Sumatran rhino, which is, unlike the other surviving rhinos, slightly woolly. It, too, is also critically endangered. And the last surviving member of the species, the Javan rhino, spars with its horns, which only the males possess. They're also critically endangered, being confined to a tiny area on the western tip of Java. There may be only 40 Javan rhinos remaining.

World Rhino Day brings a chance to recognize and thank all the amazing people and organizations dedicated to helping and caring for every rhino left on the planet. Unfortunately, human involvement has been necessary to keep the rhinos (as well as the other endangered animals) from being killed off by poachers and a shrinking habitat. Parks and reserves have been built and established for endangered wildlife across Africa and India. **There are so many people doing much-needed work to help these endangered animals that it sometimes goes unnoticed.**

Well, I want to notice it.

We need to be grateful for the first responders and support teams — from the game rangers and their staffs, to the veterinarians — who are on the front lines, protecting and caring for the rhinos in the wild, healing the wounded and nurturing the orphaned. These people are risking their lives on a daily basis to help protect the rhinos. Sadly, many have given the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. We are also grateful to all the people working within conservationist groups, who are busy raising money and awareness to support all the first responders and support teams. (I have listed some of the groups and organizations below.) Numerous technology companies are also investing their time and resources to figure out how to protect the rhinos.

Finally, World Rhino Day is the perfect time to pay homage to the thousands of volunteers and citizens around the world working passionately to put an end to the slaughtering of rhinos for human greed and vanity. It's inspiring to see so many people coming together to help the rhino. Clearly, humans do care and plenty are doing amazing work. Poaching numbers are falling. **Still, the only real long-term solution is to end the demand for rhino horn.**

How do we make this a reality?

People have been using rhino horn for a thousand years. It is ingrained in the cultures and the behavior won't change overnight. In fact, studies have shown that the buyers are aware they're killing off the species with their buying habits — but somehow that doesn't stop them (insanity). They'll continue to buy the rhino horn.

The only possible way to curtail demand is by educating the next generation of consumers in China and Vietnam. There are organizations such as WildRhino in Vietnam/South Africa that are run by young adults doing inspiring work. Involving the younger generation in the effort to end demand for rhino horn, reminds me of a quote by Confucius: "If your plan is for 1 year. Plant rice. If your plan is for 10 years. Plant trees. If your plan is for 100 years. Educate children."

I'm encouraged by all the positive efforts of these groups and their dedication to the cause. I'm confident that the work we are all doing will lead to the end of the rhino horn market in Vietnam and China, thereby saving multiple species of the rhino. It could take years, and the number of rhinos in the wild will fall significantly. **But the end result from eliminating the demand for rhino horn will guarantee a continued existence on the planet for these magnificent animals and a huge victory for the world's future generations.**

If helping the rhinos isn't for you, I would encourage you to find another group or cause that, for whatever reason, doesn't always have a voice to help themselves. **You can be that voice.**

Thank you for reading and please share,
James