

Citation metadata

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Date: Oct. 1998
From: Ecology(Vol. 79, Issue 7)
Publisher: Ecological Society of America
Document Type: Book review
Length: 1,091 words

Main content

Article Preview :

Cunningham, Carol, and Joel Berger. 1997. Oxford University Press, New York. 246 p. \$25.00, ISBN: 0-19-511113-3 (acid-free paper).

Africa's black rhinos are in trouble. With an estimated population of 100 000 at the beginning of this century, their numbers have declined precipitously to below 2500 today. While habitat destruction has been a contributing factor, the major reason is that they have been hunted to near extinction because of their "signature" horns. In countries such as North Yemen young boys are presented with "djambias" (decorative daggers) which they wear as signs of their maturity. While the handles can be made of many things, including camel hooves or cattle horns, dagger handles made from rhino horn are the most prized. Elaborately carved and studded with precious metals and jewels, some of the finest daggers can be worth more than \$10000. Still, Yemen's importation of rhino horn is dwarfed today by the Asian market where powdered horn is used for medicinal purposes and may command as much as \$16000 per kilogram. As a result, a single black rhino horn can be worth as much as \$40 000.

Concerned about their near extinction, several African countries tried different strategies to protect this "desert tank." Paramilitary operations against poachers proved ineffective, as was moving rhinos to "protected areas." Millions of dollars spent by these governments could not prevent the lure of riches which just one horn could bring to those living in such impoverished lands. Finally, a radical solution, dehorning, was implemented in the early 1990s. The logic was simple. If a rhino no longer possessed its valuable horn, there would be no reason for a poacher...

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Source Citation

Source Citation

Kuserk, Frank T. "Horn of Darkness: Rhinos on the Edge." *Ecology*, vol. 79, no. 7, 1998, p. 2572+. Accessed 27 Nov. 2020.

Gale Document Number: GALE|A21231403

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numbers dwindling from 100,000 at the turn of the century, to less than 2,500 today. The reason is that in places like Yemen, China, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand, the rhino's horn is more valuable than gold. The black rhino is nature's tank, feared by all animals. Even lions will break off a hunt to detour around one. And yet the black rhino is on the edge of extinction, its numbers dwindling from 100,000 at the turn of the century, to less than 2,500 today. *Horn of Darkness* narrates the authors' adventures while pursuing their field project. They are University of Nevada scientists who, accompanied by their baby daughter, spent a long period in the Etosha area of Namibia. They debate with fellow researchers the drawbacks to dehorning: will depleted animals be less successful breeders? They roam around the desert with their camp retinue, their vehicle gets burnt out, they encounter scorpions in their tents. Norman Myers is honorary visiting fellow, Green College, Oxford. *Horn of darkness: Rhinos on the Edge*. Author - Carol Cunningham and Joel Berger ISBN - 0 19 511113 3 and 513880 5 Publisher - Open University Press Price - £14.95 and £9.95 Pages - 246. Please login or register to read this article. *Horn of Darkness* presents a powerful argument for why such efforts should be made, and immediately. From *School Library Journal*. YA. The authors, field biologists, spent three years in Namibia studying the life of the black rhino, now on the edge of extinction, only to be denied a permit for the final leg of their research. Thus is the curtain drawn back so that readers can see how messy such international conservation work actually is. During their tenure, dehorning was the popular means of forestalling poaching in several African countries. Cunningham and Berger simply dared to raise the que