

Poachers may wipe out rhinos in S. Africa, campaigner warns

March 18 2012, by Claudine Renaud



A South African protester holds a sign and a fake rhino horn during a demonstration in Pretoria in 2011. Rhinos will be wiped out from South Africa's wildlife parks by 2015 if poaching continues at its current rate, a campaigner fighting to save the beasts has warned.

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And corruption among officials is contributing to the ongoing slaughter, said veterinary nurse Karen Trendler.

In a career spanning almost two decades, 50-year-old Trendler has raised 200 baby rhino orphans at a wildlife sanctuary in Pretoria, earning the nickname "Mama Rhino."

She is planning to open a special treatment centre for them, warning that the situation has become critical.

Poachers nabbed 448 rhinos last year, and in the first three months of this year the toll stood at 109 -- in other words, a kill-rate of more than one a day.

While the poachers target the adult rhinos for their horns, baby rhinos often die too, unable to survive alone.

The sharp increase in poaching has raised concerns among experts that the animals could disappear from the wild within the next four years, Trendler said.

"You hate to sound alarmist, you hate to even consider that it could happen. But if the poaching continues at the current rate we could eventually see rhino go extinct.

"There are predictions that by 2015 we could have no rhino."



A veterinarian assistant holds a drip in place on a badly injured white rhino lying in a hollow on Aquila Game Reserve in Touws River, some 180 Km North of Cape Town, after poachers sawed off its horn in 2011. Poachers nabbed 448 rhinos in 2011, in the first three months of this year the toll stood at 109 -- in

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The problem has been exacerbated by the fact that some people working in wildlife conservation and [animal welfare](#) have been implicated in the lucrative poaching industry, Trendler said.

"There are some incredibly good guys in the business who are doing amazing things and who would give their lives for those rhino.

"But unfortunately we do have an element of corruption. There have already been prosecutions and arrests, where government officials are complicit."

The booming market for rhino horn and increasingly sophisticated poaching methods help explain the devastating death-rate, Trendler said.

"There is a growing economy in Asia, so there is more [disposable income](#) to pay for Chinese traditional medicine.

"There is easier accessibility, [poachers](#) have better technology, so using cell phones and GPS they can move the horn that much quicker through the process.

"On top of that there's the sinister part of it where it's actually being stockpiled against extinction.



South African protesters stand around a fake rhino during a demonstration in Pretoria calling to stop poachers from killing rhinos for their horns in 2011. Rhinos will be wiped out from South Africa's wildlife parks by 2015 if poaching continues at its current rate, a campaigner fighting to save the beasts has warned.

"So they just take up as much as they can get and it's held in stockpile for the time when the numbers drop and the value of the horn goes up," Trendler said.

Some private owners are even pushing to have the trade in rhino horns legalised, arguing that prohibition has done nothing to stop poaching, something that Trendler vehemently opposes.

She is busy building a rhino orphanage at a golf and leisure resort near Mokopane in Limpopo, in the north of the country.

Presented as South Africa's first non-commercial and non-tourist rhino orphanage, it will have an intensive care unit with incubators, drips and surveillance cameras.

A small team of carers will look after the baby rhinos, and human contact will be kept to a minimum because the aim is to release them back into the wild.

Once they are strong enough to leave the unit, they will be introduced to their "surrogate parents," a pair of adult [rhinos](#) who live in the resort's game park, Trendler said.

"We've had phenomenal success in the past with rhino who are naturally very nurturing or who have a lovely nature who'll take on calves and become a friend or a companion," she said. "Given the characteristics of the two rhino that are here, we believe they are probably going to form bonds with the calves."

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