

Elephant skin graft gives mutilated rhino second chance

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A South African protester holds a sign and a fake rhino horn during a demonstration outside the Chinese embassy in Pretoria, South Africa on September 22, 2011, calling on the government to stop poachers from killing rhinos for their horns

A rhinoceros in South Africa that was mutilated by poachers for its horn is getting a chance to recover after receiving a skin graft from an elephant, a veterinarian told AFP Saturday.

The female rhino was attacked two weeks ago by poachers who removed one of its horns and also killed the rhino's baby.

The operation to treat the wound took an hour and a half and was funded by the NGO "Saving the Survivors" which rescues animals left mutilated by [poachers](#).

"This is the first time we are using elephant skin to heal a wound on a rhinoceros," said Johan Marais, the veterinarian who performed the operation in Pretoria.

Marais said that the procedure was not intended to reconstruct the horn, but simply to cover the wound.

The elephant skin came from an animal that died of natural causes, and was obtained from a taxidermist, Marais said.

The [rhinoceros](#) was treated last week, and it will take two to three weeks to know if the skin graft was successful, according to the veterinarian.

If all goes well, the technique could be used more often because only a small piece of skin is needed for the treatment.

Demand for [rhino horns](#), which are used in traditional Asian medicine, has exploded in recent years. In China and Southeast Asia, a kilo of rhino horn sells for more than 55,000 euros (\$61,000).

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