



RAOUL DU TOIT

Zimbabwe

2011 GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE RECIPIENT
FOR AFRICA

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Raoul du Toit coordinated conservation initiatives that have helped to develop and maintain the largest remaining black rhino populations in Zimbabwe.

Rhinos in Zimbabwe

Faced with shrinking habitats and the ever-looming threat of poaching, Africa's black rhinos remain critically endangered. The promise of catching a glimpse of these iconic animals draws international tourists to private game parks, bringing much-needed income to several countries in southern Africa. But in Zimbabwe, tourism withered during a decade of political strife, and a small group of conservationists were left to work against all odds to protect the country's remaining rhinos.

Currently home to the fourth largest rhino population, Zimbabwe has demonstrated a series of successes and failures in its conservation efforts. Following devastating poaching in the late 1980s, a strategic consolidation of conservation efforts succeeded in increasing Zimbabwe's black rhino population during the 1990s. Rhinos were moved to areas in southern Zimbabwe as the flagship species for the conversion of cattle ranches into wildlife conservancies. Breeding projects were established and with the burden of rhino protection placed mainly on the private sector, rhinos showed exceptional population growth.

However, in 2000 the private sector strength of this initiative became its weakness as the government of Robert Mugabe turned ranching operations in Zimbabwe upside down. With the initiation of a radical land policy permitting the expansion of subsistence farming into the conservancies, some of the successful conservation projects collapsed

while others proposed new shareholding arrangements, which are still not resolved.

The subsequent reduction in law enforcement in the conservation areas coincided with a sharp increase in the number of rhinos slaughtered by poachers supplying the illegal trade in horn, which is a rare and prized commodity fetching high prices in Asia. Although discounted in western medicine, the alleged medicinal value of rhino horns has been culturally established in Asia over many centuries. The increasing presence of East Asians in Africa has shortened the supply chain, allowing high market prices to be paid closer to the source of the horns.

Motivation

Zimbabwean-born Raoul du Toit grew up with a strong conservation ethic, spending much of his free time in nature. He began his career studying the environmental impacts of hydro-power projects in southern Africa, but was then recruited into an international organization that coordinated rhino and elephant conservation work throughout the continent. From this position, du Toit saw how healthy populations of these species enhance biodiversity and wildlife-based development in Africa's semi-arid regions. He set out to promote innovative models for rhino conservation linked to rural development in his native Zimbabwe.

EMBARGOED UNTIL APRIL 11, 2011 AT 12:01 AM (PACIFIC DAYLIGHT TIME) / 7:01 AM (GMT)

As a central figure in the development of the conservancies in Zimbabwe during the 1990s, du Toit was one of the few professionals left to keep these rhino breeding projects viable during the turbulent 2000s. With shortages of basic commodities and the catastrophic devaluation of the Zimbabwean currency, many professionals left the country. Funding for conservation projects evaporated. Prioritizing the interests of the rhino species before political considerations, and convinced that a professional team could still promote these interests despite the adverse conditions in Zimbabwe, du Toit and his team met the challenges head-on.

Impact

Today, the black rhino population in the Lowveld region has stabilized thanks to the efforts that duToit has coordinated. Despite the turmoil that has threatened rhino populations in the southern part of Zimbabwe since 2000, there are now 350 black rhinos in the region.

The majority of these rhinos live in lands associated with the Lowveld Rhino Trust, which was established by du Toit in 2009 with support from the International Rhino Foundation and other donors to secure large swaths of protected habitat. These areas are now home to about 80% of Zimbabwe's total rhino population and contain both private game parks and publicly protected lands. Today, du Toit and his small team work in and around the large Lowveld reserves to monitor rhinos, address injuries, reinforce efforts to tackle poaching, and build community awareness of the need to conserve rhinos. He also advocates on the international level for rhino protection and has helped reintroduce rhino populations in Botswana and Zambia.

Du Toit's program does not simply focus on wildlife conservation. Instead, he incorporates international policy, biodiversity in the larger context, and land use to make sure Zimbabwe is constantly

negotiating the balance between conservation and development. For du Toit, environmental stewardship and wildlife conservation are crucial aspects of Zimbabwe's path to development. To create economic incentives for local communities to conserve rhinos, the Lowveld Trust is assisting these communities to acquire rhino breeding stock in adjacent conservancies, so that the valuable progeny can be sold to restocking projects in the region and the proceeds used to fund local schools. For du Toit, the birth of every rhino is a heart-warming achievement in the struggle to save this species and the ecosystems it inhabits, especially if that birth represents some tangible gain for impoverished people upon whose attitudes the future of Africa's wildlife and wild places depends.

About the Goldman Environmental Prize

The Goldman Environmental Prize supports individuals struggling to win environmental victories against the odds and inspires ordinary people to take extraordinary actions to protect the world. The Goldman Environmental Prize was created in 1990 by civic leaders and philanthropists Richard N. Goldman and his wife, Rhoda H. Goldman. Both founders are deceased, and their children now lead the Board of Directors.

The Goldman Environmental Prize winners are selected by an international jury from confidential nominations submitted by a worldwide network of environmental organizations and individuals. Prize winners participate in a 10-day tour of San Francisco and Washington, D.C., for an awards ceremony and presentation, news conferences, media briefings, and meetings with political, public policy and environmental leaders.

Learn more at www.goldmanprize.org.



2011 Recipient for Africa: *Q&A with Raoul du Toit*



Q. Can you describe the rhino poaching situation in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular?

A. There is a huge range of rhino poaching activities in Africa. In South Africa, it's much more commercial and sophisticated with large private sectors. They have more elaborate, expensive techniques such as shooting rhinos from helicopters and poisoning their watering holes. At the same time, they have a larger rhino population, so the situation is not yet as dire as it became for us in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, there are two kinds of poachers: 1) Low level poachers, local opportunists with low intake and 2) Organized bank robber style criminals with vehicles and automatic weapons. They're not fancy, but they are effective. They take the horns to horn traders with Asian business ties. Poaching is an economic activity – it's a balance of reward and risk. When we look at poaching analytically, poachers risk being arrested or even shot but they risk this because the value of the horns is so great.

Q. How are the rhino populations improving?

A. We are winning this battle and stabilizing the rhino population again. There are currently about 440 black rhinos in Zimbabwe. In South Africa, poaching is going up, they have lost 260 rhinos this year but they have so many more – but it will eventually make an impact.

We're also working in other countries, restocking and rebuilding populations in Zambia and Botswana. We're not just trying to protect rhinos in Zimbabwe but help other regions as well so we can grow the population as a whole. In some cases this involves transplanting the animals from one region to another.

Q. When most conservationists have left the country due to the unstable political situation, what has made you continue to stay? Have you felt your own life threatened?

A. My life has not been more in danger than anyone else in the country. The work with rhinos is the same in war and peace. The country in itself is dangerous but not only for those who work in wildlife conservation.

People have had to make individual decisions to stay or leave. For me, to leave my project after 20 years would have left unfinished something my colleagues and I have committed so much time to. We have such a small pool of people that the withdrawal would be felt; there would be no one else to take over.

Q. Is the Zimbabwean government involved in the poaching?

A. I am often critical of the government but we do try to highlight the things that are positive, which is how we are able to work together. It's important to be fair and highlight the positive as well as what doesn't work. We have a lot of policemen here that really care and are committed. Without them we wouldn't have a chance.

A poacher that was arrested recently was an army officer. But in general the law enforcement agencies don't directly poach. More often the corruption is in taking bribes from the organized criminals.

Q. What's your personal motivation to continue your work?

A. We have fantastic animals in Africa that deserve to live and not be wiped out by greed. We have to save these animals for the future generations.



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