

10 Minutes For The Planet

Rhino horn and the medicinal myths©

by Sarah Heath and Catherine Balter-Kendall

Stressed syllables are underlined and in **bold**.*



Hello! I'm Sarah Heath and you're listening to 10 Minutes for the Planet on EnglishWaves.

The words '**endangered species**' will often evoke an image of the **distinctive** outline of a rhinoceros and its **prominent**, but sadly **much-coveted**, horn. The second-largest land mammal on the planet, rhinos have been in **existence** for over 40 million years but since the turn of the 19th century, total populations have **dropped** from the one million **mark** to just 28,000 animals living **in the wild**.

All of the five species of rhino worldwide are **relentlessly targeted** by **unscrupulous dealers** to the point where there is a strong **chance** that, due to this **poaching**, rhinos may well become extinct within our lifetime. The International Union of Conservation of Nature has placed three of the five rhino species on the critically endangered list, meaning that there is a strong **likelihood** that the **animal** will become extinct in the near future. Today, there are around 20,000 African White Rhino, 5,000 Black Rhino, and a combined total of around 3,000 of the three Asian species, the Indian, the Javan and the Sumatran Rhino.

Poaching is **far and away** the biggest **threat** to the **survival** of rhinos. Even an animal which can weigh **well over** 3,000 kilograms, such as the African White Rhino, cannot **withstand** a **bullet** from a poacher's **rifle**. Earlier this year, the South African Department of Environmental Affairs revealed that the official total of poached rhino for the year 2018 was 769, an average of over two per day. The only **positive** is that it was 259 fewer than the **previous** year. These numbers can be better comprehended in the knowledge that there are around 20 poaching gangs working in the Kruger National Park in South Africa every single day.

endangered species (exp.) an animal at risk of extinction

much-coveted (adj.) in demand, desired

to drop (vb.) to fall

mark (n.) level

in the wild (exp.) in nature, not in captivity

relentlessly (adv.) without stopping continually

to target (vb.) to aim to attack

unscrupulous (adj.) showing no moral principles, corrupt

dealer (n.) a person who buys and sells goods

chance (n.) likelihood, possibility

poaching (n.) killing animals illegally

far and away (exp.) by a large amount

threat (n.) danger

well over (exp.) much more than

withstand (vb.) to resist

bullet (n.) a projectile fired from a gun

rifle (n.) a gun fired from shoulder level

So what is the irresistible and **dangerous pull** for poachers to kill such an unthreatening and beautiful creature? The unsurprising but tragic answer is, of course, money. Rhino horn **is** today **worth** in the region of €25,000 a kilogram. Five years ago, it reached €50,000 per kilogram. Such **huge sums** make it **worthwhile**, despite the dangers involved in the killing of the rhino but also despite the **increasingly harsh prison sentences** being **handed down** to those caught poaching. Unsurprisingly, dealers believe the profit **outweighs** the risk particularly as wild rhino horn is preferred over farmed.

This year, **customs police** in Hong Kong arrested two men **attempting to smuggle** 24 rhino horn through the airport. The horns weighed 40kg and were destined for the world's biggest **consumer** market of rhino horn – Vietnam. The street value for such a **haul**? €900,000.

The demand for rhino horn in Asia is based on the **grossly mistaken** belief that it has **powerful** medicinal **benefits**. Usually in powdered form, consumers take it to combat gout, nausea and inflammation among other **mild ailments** although it has also been **marketed** as an anti-cancer medicine. All of these claims are entirely false as has repeatedly been **backed up** by scientific **evidence**. Rhino horn is made from keratin – the same protein which makes up fingernails, hair and animal hooves. But practitioners of Chinese medicine are still absolutely convinced of its necessity as a pharmaceutical product.

The reasons for taking rhino horn as a **supplement** have become more complicated however, as the market now **leans towards** the emotional benefits it **allegedly** provides. This is mostly as a status symbol within Asian countries with new-found wealth to **shamelessly display** to their peers. Its use is now considered a sign of success among the educated elite not just as a frivolous magic potion by poorer, less-informed people. The wildlife trade monitor, TRAFFIC, suggests that rhino horn is now seen as an investment, much as an antique or piece of art, and the trafficking of it is **extremely** well-organised by criminal syndicates.

And Vietnam is where the growth of rhino horn sales has **exploded** in the past 15 years. There is little stigma over the provenance of the rhino horn among Vietnamese consumers, 69% of whom believed in the myth of its medicinal benefits when polled in 2014. With the help of celebrities such as Jackie Chan, campaigns to swing **opinion** have been gradually changing **long-held beliefs**: most recent **polls** show just 23% now believe rhino horn works medicinally. And the price of

pull (n.) attraction

to be worth (exp.) to have a value of

huge sums (colloc.) large amounts of money

worthwhile (adj.) worth the effort and danger

increasingly (adv.) more and more

harsh (adj.) severe

prison sentence (n.) time spent in prison as a punishment

to outweigh (vb.) to be more significant than

customs police (n.) officers responsible for controlling goods coming into a country

to attempt to do sth. (exp.) to try to do sth.

to smuggle (vb.) to pass goods illegally between countries

haul (n.) a quantity of sth, stolen or held illegally

grossly mistaken (exp.) very false

mild ailments (exp.) minor medical problems

to back up (phrasal vb.) to support

to lean towards (phrasal vb.) to concentrate more on

allegedly (adv.) supposedly

shamelessly (adv.) immodestly

to display (vb.) to show openly

rhino horn has consequently fallen to just half the price of gold and **slightly** under the price for cocaine.

Charities such as Save the Rhino, WildAid, the Frankfurt Zoological Society and the World Wildlife Fund work **tirelessly** to protect rhinos on every level. Education and anti-poaching marketing campaigns; training **rangers** to protect rhino in the wild and managing **breeding** and **re-introduction programmes**. But it is an **uphill battle**.

To give a **perspective** of the speed in which rhinos are disappearing, 59-year-old Mark Cawardine, an environmentalist and wildlife expert explained, "The scary thing is that within my lifetime, 95% of the world's rhinos have been killed".

Tune in next week for more stories on the environment, here on English Waves.

long held-belief (exp.) sth. many people have held to be true for a long time

poll (n.) survey

slightly under (exp.) a little less than

ranger (n.) person working to protect a park

breeding (n.) raising animals

uphill battle (n.) a difficult fight

***Tip!**

The main stress on three syllable words usually falls on the first

prominent, animal, positive, previous, dangerous, powerful, marketed, evidence, tirelessly, supplement

Or on the second syllable

distinctive, existence, consumer, extremely, exploded, opinion, perspective