



NEWSLETTER MARCH

In this newsletter:

-  [Now I see you \(2#2\)](#)
-  [Namibia Stud Game Breeders Auction](#)
-  [Article: Challenges of the private rhino owner](#)

Dear clients,

We hope the recent rains have filled your dams and that your veld and animals are thriving! This newsletter begins with an article exploring the diversity of animal pupils. Mark your calendar for the first Namibia Stud Game Breeders game auction on the 10th of May - A fantastic opportunity to enhance your farm with excellent genetics! Lastly, we give a summary of our latest article; 'Struggling to Survive: The Challenges of the Private Rhino Owner.'

Kind regards, the Wildlife Vets Namibia

NOW I SEE YOU! (PART 2#2)

Last month we spoke about the location of the eyes in predators and prey. In general, predators have eyes in the front, which helps to have a better focus and accurately judge distances, while prey animals have their eyes on the sides, which gives them the ability to scan a larger area around them. Now let's go a bit deeper into this topic, all the way down to the pupil. Have you ever noticed that different species have different pupil shapes?

There is a clear link between the pupil shape and the way of life (ecological niche) of an animal. For example, humans, dogs and lions have circular pupils. The muscles in the iris are arranged in a ring that 'squeezes' evenly when it contracts. These pupils help to focus across the entire field of view (see our January newsletter) and see details clearly in bright light. Circular pupils are common in animals that are active during the day (diurnal species), and in predators that chase their prey instead of ambushing them.



Large predators, such as lions, have circular pupils © M. Bijsterbosch

 *A pupil is the opening in the iris (the coloured part of the eye). The muscles in the iris change the pupil's size, and determine how much light goes through.*

Some species have slit-shaped pupils. These pupils can contract and expand more than circular pupils, which is ideal for animals that are active both during the day and night. But the difference goes further... Some species have horizontal slit-shaped pupils, while other have vertical slits. In [2015, the University of California](#) found that having vertical or horizontal slit-shaped pupils depends (in most cases) on whether an animal is a prey- or predator species.

Species with horizontal slit pupils are usually prey animals, and have their eyes located on the side of the head; for example goats, antelopes and horses. These pupils give a wider peripheral view, and sharp images in front and behind. Then there is another cool feature... Many prey animals are grazers, and they obviously graze with their head down. As their head goes down, their eyes rotate in their head to stay parallel with the ground! This horizontal panoramic view gives them a better chance of spotting predators, while they can continue grazing.



Horizontal slit-shaped pupils in a goat. As always, there are exceptions to the rule in the animal kingdom. Mongooses and octopuses also have horizontal slits for example © [Flickr](#)

Different species have different pupil shapes. From left to right: humans have circular pupils, cuttlefish have circular pupils in low light, but w-shaped pupils in bright light, horses have horizontal slit pupils, some gecko species have string-of-pearl shaped pupils, and cats have vertical slit pupils © [BBC Science Focus](#)





Vertical slit-shaped pupils in a house cat. Cat's pupils open wider when it is dark, and contract when it's bright © M. Bijsterbosch

Species with vertical slit pupils are usually ambush predators, and are active day and night. Ambush predators need to be able to accurately judge the distance to their prey. The vertical slit-shaped pupils have a special depth of field effect. Vertical objects, such as a tree or prey animal, appear clear and sharp. On the other hand, horizontal objects, such as the ground, appear blurry at different distances. By interpreting the clear and blurry lines, they can accurately judge the distance of the vertical object (e.g. prey).

This only works though if the animal is close to the ground, so African wild cats and servals have slits, while large predators such as lions and leopards have circular pupils.

You see, now you know a lot more about the eyes. Isn't the body an amazing piece of work?!



NAMIBIA STUD GAME BREEDERS AUCTION - 10 MAY 2025

Grab your diary (or your phone 😊) and save the date! **Saturday 10 May** marks the very first **Namibia Stud Game Breeders Game Auction!**

After the recent rains, it is the perfect moment to boost your game numbers with the exceptional genetics that will be on offer.

The auction starts at 12:00, and will be held both online and on-site. The venue will be announced soon.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact:

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STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE: THE CHALLENGES OF THE PRIVATE RHINO OWNER (SUMMARY)



Did you know that most rhinos in southern Africa live on private farms? Despite this, hardly any donor funding reaches the private rhino owner. In our latest article, we dive into the challenges that private rhino owners face. It is quite a lengthy article, but we hope it will give you valuable insights into the struggles faced by private rhino owners and the reasons why we believe in the legalization of the rhino horn trade.

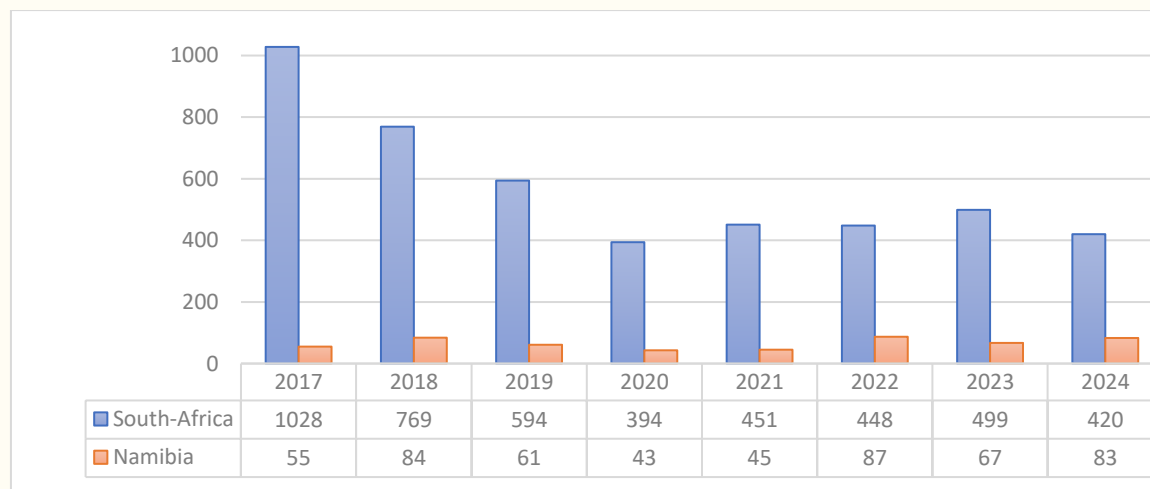
In the article we discuss the drivers fuelling the illegal rhino trade and current anti-poaching measures. We give an overview of current poaching statistics, and highlight the crucial role of the private rhino owner. Lastly, we touch on the thorny issue of the legal trade in rhino horn, where we provide rational arguments in favour of the legalised horn trade. Below you will find a summary of the article, you can download the full article [here](#).

💡 It is scientifically proven that rhino horn has no medicinal value!

Before we start, it is important to understand that rhino horn is made out of keratin, which is basically compressed hair. It has no medicinal value whatsoever.

Poaching for the illegal trade in rhino horn remains the main threat to the survival of the rhino. The excessive losses caused by poaching take a heavy toll on our rhinos, especially since they are slow breeders. The traditional trade in rhino horn between Africa and Asia dates back almost 2000 years. The biggest market for rhino horn is led by China and Vietnam, where rhino horn is mainly used for traditional medicine and as a status symbol. There are several educational programs running in Asia to reduce the local demand in rhino horn. But how can we break beliefs and traditions that are thousands of years old, within the few years left that we have for our rhinos?

The graph below demonstrates the **annual number of poached rhinos** in South-Africa and Namibia between 2017 and 2024.



The official number of rhinos poached in Namibia and South-Africa between 2017 and 2024. Actual numbers might even be higher. These numbers were retrieved from: [Stop Rhino Poaching, 2024](#); [Reuters, 2025](#); [Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, 2023](#); [Steynberg, 2024](#); [Namibia Daily News, 2025](#)

SANPARKS proudly stated a 49.74% decrease in rhino poaching in 2023. Good news? Well... one has to place these statistics into perspective. From 2013 to the end of 2022, the Kruger National Park rhino population decreased by 78% (!). The lower poaching rate does not indicate a success in the war on poaching... Instead, it **highlights the tragic fact that there are simply fewer rhinos to poach!**

The large role that private rhino owners play in rhino conservation cannot be denied. Private owners in South-Africa hold the largest number of white rhinos within Africa. In Namibia, about 75% of Namibia's white rhinos are privately owned. **While poaching remains the biggest threat, the second serious threat is that private rhino owners are forced to sell, or disinvest in their rhinos.**

Key challenges of the rhino owner include the increasing costs of anti-poaching measures and drought-related expenses for supplemental feed. In 2017 an average farm in South-Africa would spend around ZAR 1.5 million (+/- US\$ 80,800) per year to protect their rhinos. In 2021, this figure rose to an average of ZAR 2.2 million (+/- US\$ 118,500) per farm per year!

While costs to maintain rhinos are increasing tremendously, the price of white rhinos that were sold on auctions in South-Africa have dropped by 75% (!) in 2020, when compared to prices in 2007. Despite many efforts to reduce demand and implement anti-poaching technologies, rhino poaching persists. Already in 2018 it was estimated that 28% of the private rhino owners in South-Africa sold part or even all of their rhinos.

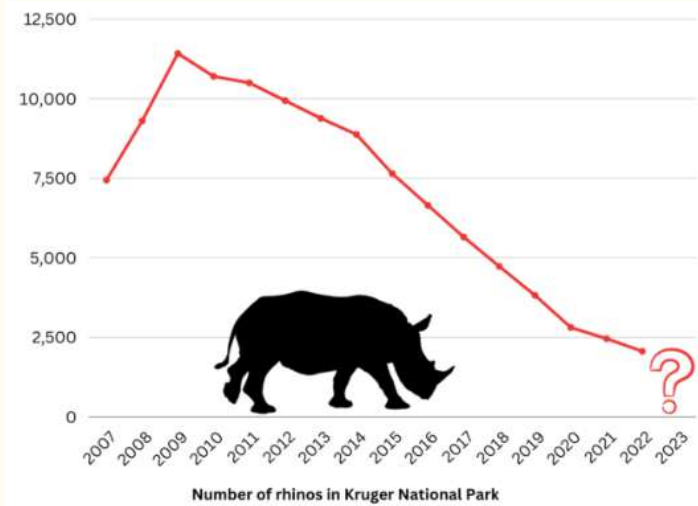
💡 Less farmers are willing to take on the risks associated with keeping rhinos, resulting in a downward spiral in the value of live rhinos.

The resulting dramatic divestment from rhino farming has, over the past few years, resulted in a **decline of 400,000 ha of rhino habitat** on private land in South Africa. We are seeing the same negative trend in Namibia, where game farmers try to sell part, or even their entire rhino population.

As rhino poaching escalated in the 1960s to 1970s, CITES placed a ban on the trade in rhino horn in 1977. However, rhino poaching increased following the turn of this century and continues at a staggering rate. The question therefore is, how successful is this international ban on rhino horn trade? Fact is that **a trade ban will never end a trade, it just pushes it underground.** The demand for rhino horn in Asia persists, despite all the educational programs. At the same time, rhino owners do everything in their power to protect their rhinos, and still rhinos get poached. The rhino currently holds no economic incentives for a farmer... on the contrary, it is a very high-risk species that costs a lot of money to keep.

There are currently vast stockpiles of horn all over the world, but the rhino owner is not allowed to sell or trade the horn. Why not put these rhino horns on a **strictly controlled market?**

💡 A rhino is worth more dead than alive!



The clear downward trend of the number of rhinos inside Kruger National Park from 2007 to 2022 © [Klarmann \(2023\)](#)



The fact that rhinos are worth more dead than alive needs to be turned around and fast! Some of the arguments for the legal trade in rhino horn are:

- 🐾 By introducing stockpiled rhino horn onto a strictly regulated legal market, the current imbalance in demand and supply in rhino horn on the Asian markets will be settled. This will **reduce the price for horn** and thus **decrease the incentive to poach** rhinos.
- 🐾 Why would current illegal operators take the risk to poach rhinos and smuggle the horn if the product is available legally and likely cheaper?
- 🐾 The legal trade will **generate funds** for rhino conservation efforts. This will enable farmers to enhance their ability to protect the rhinos, better maintain their farms, and even expand the land.
- 🐾 The rhino will instantly **change from a liability to an asset**. Its live market value will dramatically increase and previous rhino owners will reinvest in rhinos. This will not only increase the available rhino habitat, but also boost rhino populations.
- 🐾 Rhino horn can be **humanely and sustainably harvested** throughout a rhino's life. If it pays, it stays!

Legalizing the rhino horn trade would increase the value of live rhinos, once again making them worth more alive than dead. Money that comes from selling the horns would be reinvested in rhino conservation. Private rhino owners would afford better protection, potentially expand their land, and increase their rhino populations.

Poaching may never be entirely eradicated, but with legal trade, rhino owners would at least have a financial incentive to keep their rhinos. It is high time for action!



Please share [our article](#), spread the information, and keep the discussion going! If no significant action is taken, African rhinos could face extinction within a few decades.

We hope for an open discussion on this issue with readers who are pro- and anti-trade.

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