

Last One Standing – Now Fallen: The Extinction of Sudan

Julie Boyd, Manchester Metropolitan University

“It is with great sadness that Ol Pejeta Conservancy and the Dvůr Králové Zoo announce that Sudan, the world’s last male northern white rhino, age 45, died at Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya on March 19th, 2018”¹

‘Sudan, the Last Male Northern White Rhino, Has Died’ – that was the statement issued by the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in March 2018.²

It is now over a year ago since the death of Sudan. He died on 19th March 2018 at the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Kenya, where he had spent his last years, before a decision was finally made by officials and his veterinary team from Dvůr Králové Zoo, Ol Pejeta and Kenya Wildlife Service to euthanize the 45-year-old rhinoceros, due to his failing health. Sudan was the last male northern white rhino on Earth, the rest of his species had been poached to extinction in the wild.

Sudan was born around 1973 or 1974 in South Sudan and was only about a year old when he was captured from the wild and taken to the Dvůr Králové Zoo in the former Czechoslovakia. In 2009, he was trans-located to the Ol Pejeta Wildlife Conservancy in Kenya.

Sudan’s death leaves only two of the northern white rhino subspecies alive on the planet, both of these being females. Najin, Sudan's daughter born in 1989,

and Fatu, Najin's daughter born in 2000, reside in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in Laikipia County, Kenya protected by 24 hour armed guards. The death of Sudan was, or should have been a wake-up call, as his death no doubt has larger implications for rhinos and other wildlife species across the globe. Sudan symbolises a reminder that it was systematic poaching for rhino horn that led to the demise of the northern white rhino, which continues to decimate rhinos across the African continent.³

The poaching crisis of the 1970s and 80s, fuelled by demand for rhino horn in traditional Chinese medicine in Asia and dagger handles in Yemen, wiped out the northern white rhino populations in Uganda, Central African Republic, Sudan and Chad. The last remaining wild population made up of 20-30 rhinos in Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo succumbed during fighting in the region during the 1990s and early 2000s.

By 2008, the northern white rhino was considered by most experts to be extinct in the wild.⁴ Subsequently, by the 1990s, there were only a few dozen northern white rhinos that had survived in the Garamba National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁵ The International Rhino Foundation began intensive

¹Elodie Sampere, Press Release: Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Nanyuki, Kenya, (20 March 2018) <https://www.olpejetaconservancy.org/the-last-male-northern-white-rhino-dies/> accessed 20 March 2018

² Lynsey Chutel, ‘Sudan, the Last Male Northern White Rhino, Has Died’ (*Quartz Africa*, 20 March 2018) <https://qz.com/africa/1233133/the-last-male-northern-white-rhino-has-died/> accessed 20 March 2018

³ World Wildlife Organisation, White Rhino, Facts <https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/white-rhino> accessed on

⁴ Olivia Bailey, Fauna and Flora International, Rhino Near Extinction: How Did We Get To This Point? (20 March 2018) <https://www.fauna-flora.org/species/northern-white-rhino> accessed on 08 April 2018

⁵ Stephanie Pappas, ‘Sudan, the Last Male Northern White Rhino, Has Died’, (*Live Science* 20 March 2018) <<https://www.livescience.com/62068-sudan-last-northern-white-rhino-dies.html>> accessed 20 March 2018

involvement with northern white rhino conservation in 1995, investing millions of dollars in an attempt to save the subspecies with more of a decade of intensive engagement in Garamba National Park.⁶

However, the Second Congo War in the late 1990s and early 2000s caused massive instability and human suffering in the country. The plight of rhinos and the need for rhino conservation was not considered a priority and as a result of increasing conflict, instability and lack of protection for rhinos, this last stronghold for wild northern white rhinos deteriorated into a major conflict zone. As a result, the Garamba Park suffered from repeated incursions from various militias, who took advantage of the rhinos with large scale poaching of rhinos and elephants to feed the illegal market in Asia and to raise funds for their fighting. In 2005, the program had to be terminated due to the risk to the lives of the park staff.⁷

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Despite the International Rhino Foundation investing a significant amount of funding to protect the Northern white rhino in Garamba National Park the species was lost when the Park became a conflict zone and

⁶ Dr Susie Ellis, IRF's History With Northern White Rhinos, International Rhino Foundation, <<https://rhinos.org/tough-issues/northern-white-rhino/>> accessed 04 March 2019

⁷ Dr Susie Ellis, IRF's History With Northern White Rhinos, International Rhino Foundation, <https://rhinos.org/tough-issues/northern-white-rhino/> accessed on 04 March 2019

⁸ Save the Rhino, Can We Save The Northern White Rhino, The Path To Extinction, (1 March 2017), <https://www.savetherhino.org/thorny-issues/can-we-save-the-northern-white-rhino/> accessed on 19 April 2019

⁹ Stephanie Pappas, Live Science Contributor, Sudan, the Last Male Northern White Rhino, Has Died, 20 March 2018. <https://www.livescience.com/62068-sudan-last-northern-white-rhino-dies.html> accessed on 20 April 2019

¹⁰ African Rhino Conservation Collaboration (ARCC), Statistics and Current Crisis <https://www.arcc.org.za/crisis/statistics-and-current-status> accessed on 28 April 2018

¹¹ Garamba National Park, State of Conservation, Analysis and Conclusion by World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies

consequently the last rhino conservation programme in Garamba National Park effectively closed in 2006.⁸ In fact, the last documented sightings of northern white rhinoceroses in the wild were in 2006.⁹

The rhino-poaching crisis rapidly escalated between 2007 and 2015 when there was more than a 9000% increase in poaching in South Africa, according to the Kruger National Park poaching statistics.¹⁰ Tragically, the northern white rhino must now be considered extinct in the wild.¹¹

The survival of the world's rhinos is being seriously threatened by poaching driven by the demand for their horn in Vietnam, China and other countries of East Asia and the Arabian Peninsula.¹² Horn trafficking is undertaken by transnational organised crime networks, many of which are involved in other large-scale criminal activities, including trade in ivory, pangolins and big cats.¹³

In February 2019 the South African Department of Environmental Affairs, released the 2018 poaching numbers. Despite these numbers showing a decrease of 259, (1,028 rhino being poached during 2017), this should not necessarily indicate that rhinos are safe. It only highlights the fact that at least two rhinos were killed each day in 2018.¹⁴

The increasingly high prices fetched for rhino horn on the black market mean that ruthless criminal syndicates are heavily involved in rhino poaching. Unfortunately, this means that it is becoming

in 2016 <https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/3365> accessed on 28 April 2019

¹² Paula Kahumbu, 'Rhino horn sales: banking on extinction' *The Guardian* (London 25 August 2017) <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/africa-wild/2017/aug/25/rhino-horn-sales-banking-on-extinction> accessed on

¹³ Environmental Investigation Agency Trust, *Illegal Trade Seizures: Rhino Horn Mapping the Crimes*, <https://eia-international.org/illegal-trade-seizures-rhino-horn/> accessed on 22 April 2019

¹⁴ Department of Environmental Affairs, South Africa, *Minister of Environmental Affairs Highlights Progress on the Implementation of the Integrated Strategic Management of Rhinoceros*, <https://www.environment.gov.za/progressonimplementatoinofintegratedstrategicmanagementofrhinoceros> accessed on 12 April 2019



increasingly expensive for both state and private landowners to protect their rhinos from poaching; huge sums of money are needed for intensive anti-poaching and monitoring patrols, including ranger salaries, technology such as micro-chips and drones and transport such as helicopters and vehicles. In fact, several private landowners in South Africa are considering disinvesting in rhinos, as they can no longer afford the cost of protecting them.

Over the past few years, it emerged that Vietnamese criminal gangs were taking advantage of South Africa's legal loopholes in trophy hunting, by recruiting individuals with no hunting background to pose as trophy hunters. The proxy hunters then bring back the legally obtained rhino horn to Vietnam where it is then destined to illegal markets. Overall Vietnamese citizens have hunted more than 400 rhino legally on privately-owned properties in South Africa since 2003. In April

2012, South Africa formally suspended the issue of hunting permits to Vietnamese citizens, which has led to a marked decline in rhino hunting applications from South-East Asian citizens.

Some have argued that – given the high numbers of rhinos which are being poached every year in South Africa – trophy hunting should be suspended, in order to prevent further (legal) depletion of overall rhino numbers.

On 13th April this year, the 5th Global March for Elephants and Rhinos (GMFER) 2019 took place in cities around the world, from London to Johannesburg joining in a huge Day of Action for endangered wildlife.¹⁵ The GMFER2019 was intentionally timed to take place before the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) Conference of the Parties (CoP18) in Colombo, Sri Lanka on 23 May to 3 June.¹⁶ The mission of the GMFER is to demand that

¹⁵ Global March for Elephants and Rhinos, GMFER's CoP18 Demands, (13 April 2019) <https://march4elephantsandrhinosaurs.org/> accessed on 15 April 2019

¹⁶World Wildlife Conference - the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES #CoP18), to be held from 23 May to 3 June 2019 in Colombo, Sri

world leaders take action to stop the poaching of elephants and rhinos and to end the trade in ivory and rhino horn. One of the key tasks for GMFER2019 will be to urge CITES delegates to vote at CoP18 for maximum protections for endangered species. These will include:

1. Exempt all animals listed on Appendix I and II from trophy hunting and trade in their body parts and live animals.
2. Demand that Japan and the EU close down their domestic ivory trade.
3. Ban animals with Appendix I and II status from captive breeding; their body parts/bones fuel the illegal wildlife trade and the demand for endangered species.
4. Vote in favour of proposals to up list elephants to Appendix I and giraffes to Appendix II.
5. Reject proposals by certain SADC¹⁷ countries to re-open trade in ivory and other elephant body parts and in rhino horn.
6. Establish greater transparency in CITES' issuing of permits, specifically permits for hunting trophies and export of live endangered species.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, there is no simple solution to solve the current rhino crisis. A combination of approaches and incentives is essential if there is to be any success in conservation of the remaining species. It is a multi-faceted problem, which requires multi-faceted approaches. The immediate priority must be increased security for rhino populations, whether in the wild or within the National Parks but this has substantial financial costs. In addition, there must be more engagement with the local human communities that live in the key rhino areas to ensure that they can benefit from education, employment, and training.

There has to be also proactive translocations to establish new breeding groups and maintain genetic diversity for the health of future rhino populations. There is also the need to for efforts to build capacity in

Lanka. PRESS RELEASE CITES CoP18 will be held in Colombo, Sri Lanka in May 2019
https://cites.org/eng/news/pr/CITES_CoP18_will_be_held_in_Colombo_Sri_Lanka_in_May_2019_14122017 accessed on 15 April 2019

African and Asian countries so that any conservation programmes can be employed efficiently and effectively. It is imperative that stronger and more robust political pressure is established to enforce international agreements and implementation of stronger legislation regarding wildlife trafficking which needs to be followed by proper deterrent sentencing for those convicted of rhino poaching and horn smuggling; and demand-reduction programmes in user countries, primarily Vietnam and China.

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The northern white rhino subspecies is now functionally extinct from this planet. Whether or not the remaining other rhino species can avoid extinction is hard to determine. The standard response that 'lessons will be learnt' is an empty mantra unless action is actively taken. The greatest lesson is that we can never let this happen again with any other rhino species and we have to prevent this happening with the rest of the animal species that share our planet.

"We on Ol Pejeta are all saddened by Sudan's death. He was a great ambassador for his species and will be remembered for the work he did to raise awareness globally of the plight facing not only rhinos, but also the many thousands of other species facing extinction as a result of unsustainable human activity. One day, his demise will hopefully be seen as a seminal moment for

¹⁷ SADC, The Southern African Development Community is an inter-governmental organization headquartered in Gaborone, Botswana. Its goal is to further socio-economic cooperation and integration as well as political and security cooperation among 16 southern African states.

conservationists world-wide," Richard Vigne, Ol Pejeta's CEO, in a statement on Facebook.¹⁸

Sudan did not die as a result of poaching or trophy hunting, but the fact is that his species was so threatened by poaching and trophy hunting that his demise must serve as a hallmark to remind us of other species who are threatened and face extinction due to poaching or trophy hunting such as the iconic Cecil the Lion who was killed in July 2015.¹⁹

¹⁸Matthew Taylor and Hannah Ellis-Peterson, Last male northern white rhino's death highlights 'huge extinction crisis', March 20 2018 Guardian Online <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/mar/20/last-male-northern-white-rhinos-death-highlights-huge-extinction-crisis> accessed on 28 April 2019

¹⁹ Paula French, Zimbabwe's 'iconic' lion Cecil killed by hunter (BBC News Africa 27 July 2015) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-33674087> accessed on 28 April 2019

Ashifa Kassam and Jessica Glenza, Killer of Cecil the Lion was Dentist from Minnesota, claim Zimbabwe Officials: Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force alleges trophy hunter shot one of Africa's most famous lions near Hwange national park The Guardian 28 July 2015 <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jul/28/killer-of-cecil-the-lion-was-american-zimbabwe-officials-claim> accessed 28/04/2018