



Zimbabwe Factsheet

Zimbabwe's Rhino Population

Zimbabwe is home to the fourth largest population of black rhinos in the world – and the country's population is in severe danger due to poaching for their horn. In 2008, Zimbabwe's black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) population numbered 490 individuals. The black rhino is classified as *Critically Endangered*, with a worldwide population of only 4,240.

During the last century, the black rhino has suffered the most drastic decline in total numbers of all rhino species. Between 1970 and 1992, the population of this species decreased by 96%. In 1970, there were approximately 65,000 black rhinos in Africa – but, by 1993, only 2,300 survived in the wild. Since 1996, thanks to intensive anti-poaching efforts overall numbers are recovering and still are slowly increasing. . The growing purchasing power of many Asian countries, combined with organized gangs of poachers who have an outlet for selling rhino horn on has kept the poaching threat great. To save the species, anti-poaching efforts must be continued and accelerated.

Zimbabwe was also home to 280 white rhinos in 2008 (*Ceratotherium simum*), the second largest population in the world. There are approximately 17,500 white rhinos worldwide. White rhinos are the least endangered of the living rhino species, classified as *Near Threatened*. The white rhino, along with the roughly equal-sized Greater one-horned (Indian) rhino, is the largest species of land mammal after the elephant.

In 2008, eighty percent of Zimbabwe's black rhinos and half of its white rhinos lived in the country's *lowveld conservancies* – low elevation wooded savannahs in the southeast of the country. These large tracts of land, converted from cattle ranches to wildlife management areas, were created to safeguard these highly threatened species. Despite recent losses, the lowveld conservancies, monitored by the Lowveld Rhino Trust and linked with Zimbabwe's Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, still hold 380 black rhinos and provide the best hope for their survival.

Zimbabwe's Economy and Society

The government of Zimbabwe faces a wide variety of difficult economic problems as it struggles with an unsustainable fiscal deficit, an overvalued official exchange rate, hyperinflation, and bare grocery store shelves. The government's land reform program, characterized by chaos and violence, has badly damaged the commercial farming sector, the traditional source of exports and foreign exchange and the provider of 400,000 jobs, turning Zimbabwe into a net importer of food products. The EU and the US provide food aid on humanitarian grounds. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe routinely prints money to fund the budget deficit, causing the official annual inflation rate to rise from 32% in 1998, to 133% in 2004, 585% in 2005, passed 1,000% in 2006, and 26,000% in November 2007, and to 11.2 million percent in 2008.

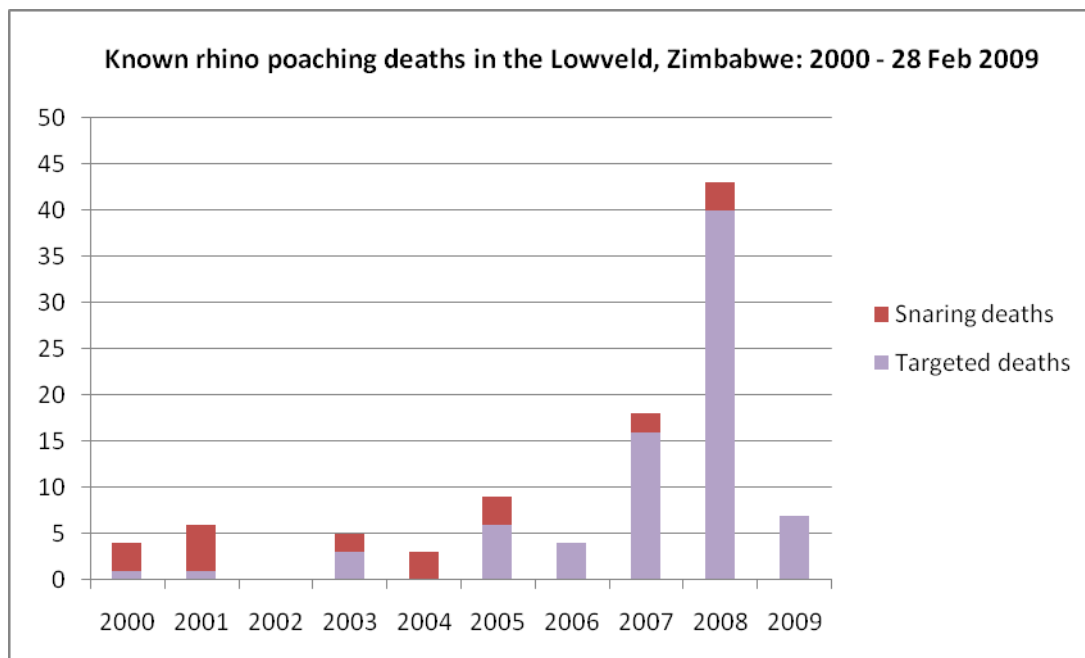
More than 80% of Zimbabwe's population is unemployed, and the average Zimbabwean earned only \$200 in 2008. The country's average life expectancy is 45, and more than 15% of the population is infected with HIV/AIDS.

The tourism industry – formerly a major source of income in Zimbabwe, due to the country's wildlife and Victoria Falls, has completely collapsed. Tourism infrastructure still exists, but due to the country's instability and insecurity, tourists are reluctant to visit.

Poaching in Zimbabwe

Illegal wildlife trade is second only to the criminal drugs trade in value, and ahead of illicit international arms dealing, according to TRAFFIC-UK. And now, as the economic crisis in Zimbabwe deepens, we are witnessing a significant increase in poaching.

Rhino poaching in Zimbabwe has doubled in the past year. Eighty-eight of the country's nearly 800 rhinos – more than ten percent of the population – were brutally killed by organized gangs of poachers in 2008, just for their horn. Actual losses are likely higher – these are only the documented poaching incidents. Even in the rainy season, when wildlife does not remain near waterholes, and hunting is difficult in the thick brush, poachers persist. The slaughter has continued unabated this year, with at least seventeen black and two white rhinos already killed in 2009.



Most rhino horn is sold on the black market for use in traditional Asian medicine. Horn is used to reduce fever, not as an aphrodisiac, which is the popular belief. In some Middle Eastern countries, even though it is illegal, rhino horn is used for ornamental dagger handles – a status symbol procured at a terrible cost.

One of the unwelcome side-effects of the increase in poaching has been the rise in the number of orphaned, and sometimes injured, rhino calves that must be treated and rehabilitated. Calves are particularly vulnerable to being caught in snares set for bushmeat, while their mothers are targeted

for their horns. When their mothers are killed, rhino calves, still nursing and too young to survive on their own, are often left behind in the slaughter, sometimes with life-threatening injuries.

What IRF Is Doing

The IRF-supported Lowveld Rhino Project is working to save Zimbabwe's rhinos from poachers by translocating rhinos from high-risk areas to safer locations; treating rhinos with snare wounds and other injuries and returning them to the wild; helping authorities track, apprehend, and prosecute poachers; and intensively tracking and monitoring rhinos to ensure their safety.

The Lowveld Rhino Trust's rhino operations team anesthetized and treated 115 rhinos in 2008. Treatments ranged from wire snare removal and pre-emptive horn removal to reduce the risk of poaching, to translocations of animals to safer areas. The Trust is increasingly being forced to undertake emergency operations to rescue rhinos as poaching has increased. We plan to move as many as 50-60 rhinos out of vulnerable areas in 2009, to prevent rhino groups in some of the more vulnerable areas from being lost. Rhino translocations are no easy feat. These operations are very expensive, and require the support of a team of vets, rangers and monitors; air support from a helicopter and a small fixed-wing aircraft for tracking and immobilizing the rhinos; and large trucks fitted with rhino crates and mounted cranes for transporting the immobilized rhinos.

Ensuring the welfare of injured or orphaned calves is also vital -- their survival is imperative to keep Zimbabwe's rhino population growing. The rhino management operations by Lowveld Rhino Trust include the facilitation of drugs, vets, transport, and food for the animals that need intensive care.

Calves that are nursing are bottle-fed skimmed milk with special supplements, a process that often takes long hours of patient training. Any injuries are treated. The calves are socialized with others, and are kept in secure bomas (pens) overnight and let out into fenced paddocks during the day. The intention is not to create a permanent sanctuary of captive rhinos; rather, to rehabilitate and foster where necessary orphan rhino calves so that, once weaned and / or recovered from injuries, they can be released back into the wild populations.

There are currently five calves being raised under the Lowveld Rhino Trust:

- Lisa-Marie (female), born February 2007
- Carla (female), born March 2007
- Blondie (male), born April 2008
- Millie (female), born June 2008
- Sassy (female), born August 2008

There is still hope for the future. Fortunately, the number of rhino deaths in Zimbabwe has not yet exceeded the number of births, and the population is still growing. Intensive management will be required during this difficult time to ensure that Zimbabwe's rhino population continues to grow and survive. Our brave staff and partners continue to labor under incredibly difficult conditions to save Zimbabwe's rhinos.

[View and download photos from the Crisis: Zimbabwe photo album.](#)