

Rhino ranching: a manual for owners of white rhinos

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As Clive Walker correctly states in his introduction, much of the future of the rhinoceros in Africa will depend upon private landowners. As the human population of Africa increases, less money becomes available for nature conservation, making it increasingly difficult for official conservation bodies to look after our wildlife heritage. Most prospective private rhino owners know little about rhino behaviour or requirements. Many mistakes are made, often with disastrous consequences. The appearance of this manual is therefore timely. This is the first attempt to bring together expert information in the various fields of rhino conservation in a practical manner that is understandable to laymen.

The introductory chapter, containing the 'Ten commandments of rhino ranching' tells the prospective rhino owner what he is taking upon himself, and advises him about potential pitfalls and how to avoid them. The second chapter, 'Why rhino ranching?', emphasises the commercial potential of the enterprise. Chapters 3 (habitat requirements), 4 (social behaviour) and 5 (reproduction) contain essential background information, with very important practical implications for the rhino rancher, to equip the prospective buyer to plan his introduction properly from the outset. Chapter 6 deals with management, and indicates practical implications of various practices that are very important from a genetic and reproductive point of view, including purchase and replacement of breeding stock.

Chapter 7 deals with capture of white rhinos. The introduction emphasises the need for expertise and specialised

equipment. There are definite potential problems with the drug dosages and even usages, and it would be preferable for laymen to seek expert assistance. The precautions given in this chapter are, however, very important. Chapter 8 deals with mortality, and includes some background information about poaching. The politics of rhino conservation are briefly discussed in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 indicates how expensive it is to maintain and conserve rhinos properly, although with the present price trends the returns may be worthwhile. In this chapter, the author also debates the legalisation of trade in legal rhino horn.

Appendix I lists all the organisations that have been and are currently involved in rhino conservation. Appendix II lists the names of specialists in the various fields of rhino conservation who can be contacted for advice and assistance. Appendix III lists all the provincial nature conservation authorities whose cooperation is necessary and from whom one can obtain the necessary permits.

To sum up, every prospective rhino rancher should read this manual to become aware of all the options open to him but also the pitfalls that await him if he is not adequately prepared. For further information, there is a bibliography that includes the sources consulted and suggested further reading. The manual should also be read by everybody involved or interested in rhino conservation, as it addresses all of the issues, some highly controversial, pertaining to rhino ranching and utilisation.

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