



MARK CARWARDINE WILD THOUGHTS

There's bad news for rhinos this month. With poachers in both Africa and Asia killing more of the hapless animals to meet an increasing demand for their horns, rhino poaching has just hit a 15-year high. South Africa, Zimbabwe, India, Nepal and other countries are experiencing the worst rhino poaching in many years.

We all remember the 'Rhino Wars' of the 1980s and early 1990s, when weak or frequently overthrown governments, a lack of effective conservation measures and the easy availability of guns left the door wide open for poachers. Not surprisingly, rhino populations plummeted. But conservation efforts have improved dramatically since then, and some species have been doing pretty well.

Nonetheless, the latest horrifying trend demonstrates that we'll never really be able to declare rhinos safe. And, unfortunately, the same applies to most other endangered species. The problem is this: there is rarely an end to conservation. The best we can do is to hold against the tide. We can never let our guard down and say, "Right that's one species saved, now let's save another." The same threats (or new ones) will always be lurking in the background.

This is why it's so much easier to raise funds for animal welfare than for animal conservation.

Suppose, for example, there are two campaigns for rhinos: one to raise money to rescue a badly treated rhino from a dilapidated zoo in Tenerife and the other to raise money for rhino conservation in India. I'll bet the captive rhino would raise more, much more quickly, than all the wild rhinos put together. The reason is simple: rescuing a sad-looking rhino in captivity is an easy concept that has a beginning, a middle and (most importantly) an end. Protecting wild rhinos in India is complex and endless.

The only way to stop rhino poaching is to eliminate the cause – the demand for rhino horn. Otherwise all we're ever doing is fire-brigade action. But just like raising money for rhino conservation, it is far, far easier said than done.



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Catch Mark and Stephen Fry as they seek out endangered species such as northern white rhinos in *Last Chance to See* on Sundays on BBC2.