

A life (gate) crashed by rhinos

If someone had told me that a tour with Nicholas in September 2013 would result in me deciding to tell my clients I only have a limited ability to work with them because of the **Breaking The Brand** project I would have never have believed it. But there you go, it happened, my life has been (gate)crashed by rhinos.

After launching the idea of Breaking The Brand, I spent most of 2013 researching and interviewing the primary users of rhino horn; namely **businessmen and affluent women in Vietnam**. The only two reasons they told me they would stop is if using rhino horn would negatively impact their health or status. This culminated in the design of adverts targeting these user groups. The first adverts were published on 15 September 2014. Since then more than 30 adverts have been placed in key publications; the total cost has been **\$58,000**.

The response to the first 6 months has been positive. By the middle of October 2014 Vietnam was ranked number 3 in the countries downloading information from our web site. It has remained in the top 5 for 6 months. In the same time frame Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi jumped to the second and third cities following us on Facebook and our posts get daily support from Vietnamese citizens. For more information on the campaigns: <http://breakingthebrand.org/campaigns/>

The vast majority of questions Breaking the Brand gets from the Vietnamese media and community are about **horn infusion**, the technique of pumping pesticides into rhino horn under pressure. Users also want to know the impact if they ingest poisoned rhino horn; as a result I decided to go and see the horn infusion process firsthand. During a visit to South Africa I observed 3 rhinos undergoing the infusion process. All indications are that the chemical compound travelled through the horn; within seconds of the toxin (and dye) being infused it was bubbling out of the horn several centimetres from the entry point. More information on horn infusion can be found at: <http://rhinorecueproject.org/>



The Vietnamese also showed an interest in the impact of losing rhinos on local communities in the rhino range countries. Given this interest, I took a 9 day tour to **Northern Kenya** to understand the current perceptions around rhino conservation in the remote communities that border rhino conservancies.

Showing people from Vietnam images such as the one talking to Maasai warriors, who lived in a community that had been impacted by poaching, and being able to tell their stories, has been very useful. It helped to highlight that there was some sense of shame in the Vietnamese people we interviewed. The shame was not about rhinos dying or the deaths of rangers, but the impact this had on the women and on children left behind. This was tested in our **Vietnamese Lunar New Year RhiNo Campaign: Will your luck run out?**



Key to my understanding of the rhino poaching problem have been visits to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in October 2014 and South Africa in February 2015.

While in Vietnam I stayed at a hotel on “Traditional Medicine” street, Lan Ong Street – featured on BBC Newsnight: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqclwkbqAQY> This visit highlighted the rapid growth of local wealth. The amount of restoration and construction in the cities is staggering and the number of luxury brands primed to enter the country is very telling about the increasing spending power. The next 12-24 months will be critical in undermining ‘fashion trends’ such as rhino horn use.

While in Vietnam I was able to discuss with people the perceptions of China’s re-emergence as a market for rhino horn. Apparently the laws in relation to rhino horn possession/consumption in China are clear-cut and the Chinese prefer to utilise loopholes in the law (of which there are many in the case of ivory) instead of directly engaging in illegal behaviour. So until recently most people on the ground in Vietnam and China believed that China was not a major market for rhino horn. It would appear that the recent dramatic increase in price has meant that more Chinese are now willing to break the law and get into the market, either from an investment perspective (betting on future price rises) or seeking high-value artefacts now that ivory has been dropping in price due to increased supply.

What came as a surprise was the impact that the **South African no-trade/pro-trade** debate was having. I was told that this debate is the key thing slowing the Vietnamese Government's response to tackling consumption of rhino horn in Vietnam. This makes perfect sense when you consider the following: Why would any government target its high net worth citizens, who are the primary users of genuine rhino horn, when:

1. These are the business people and entrepreneurs driving Vietnam's rapid economic growth and
2. What they are doing could be made legal in 2016 if the South African Government decides to take the pro-trade route.

This is terrible news for the rhino. Furthermore, if the decision on trade is dragged out until the CITES meeting in 2016, we are facing a long time to be in this limbo and rhino poaching will continue to grow.

As I am sure you can imagine a demand reduction strategy doesn't sit well alongside a legalised trade debate. From the pro-trade perspective increased demand is seen as a positive, it drives up prices. Certainly this mixed message is causing confusion in demand countries. A greater understanding of this debate was another reason for my recent visit to South Africa. The stand out observation from all the meetings was that **I didn't meet one person who understood the nature of the demand or the users of genuine rhino horn**. This is obviously very concerning given the intensity of the debate and that economists and conservation scientists are creating risk-benefit models to aid a decision based on incomplete information.

Breaking The Brand will continue its efforts and we will be **launching another campaign in Vietnam** in the coming months. Rhinos will remain my primary focus in 2015. My clients have nearly booked the limited number of days I have made available to them and many know we won't be on hand until February 2016! I hope this year will bring better news for rhinos.

I would like to take this opportunity to **thank Nicholas**

Duncan, the SAVE African Rhino Committee, Sub-Committee and SARF members, without your support this could not have been achieved.

These are the views of writer: Dr. Lynn Johnson, Founder, Breaking the Brand, SARF sub committee.



AGM

FILM NIGHT / SOCIAL NIGHT

Notice is hereby given that the Twenty Eighth Annual General Meeting of the Save African Rhino Foundation (Inc) will be held on Thursday, 2 July at 7pm, in the Education Centre at the Perth Zoo, Labouchere Road, South Perth.

AGENDA:

1. Acceptance of the minutes from the twenty seventh Annual General Meeting held on 2 July 2014
2. President's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Election of Executive Committee
5. Any other business

Nomination forms for positions on the Executive, together with proxy forms, are available by phoning 0417 937655 and nominations should be lodged at 229 Oxford Street by 7.00 pm on 27 June 2015. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be served during the evening.

ENTERTAINMENT:

As is usual on these evenings, we will bring you a presentation on the latest rhino operations and other conservation projects in Zimbabwe, as seen in our recent trip. Please feel free to bring your family, friends, and acquaintances along to this social event. Would you please ring us on 9444 6550 as an indication in numbers will assist with catering.

Nicholas Duncan
President



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