

# NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER

In this newsletter:

- 🐾 [Rhino Dehorning](#)
- 🐾 [Financing the next wave of wildlife-based land use](#)
- 🐾 [World Rabies Day](#)

Dear clients,

This is already our 90<sup>th</sup> newsletter, how exciting is that! In this edition, we would like to clarify that rhino dehorning, when done properly, is not painful to the rhino. Dr. Susan de Witt is researching how non-state wildlife enterprises are funded and what they need to thrive – your experiences and insights are important! Lastly, with World Rabies Day around the corner, we share some vital info on this disease, and prevention. Kind regards, Wildlife Vets Namibia team

## RHINO DEHORNING

Last Monday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September, it was World Rhino Day. A day to honour one of Africa's most iconic species. We are not supposed to have favourites, but working with rhinos is definitely high on our list!

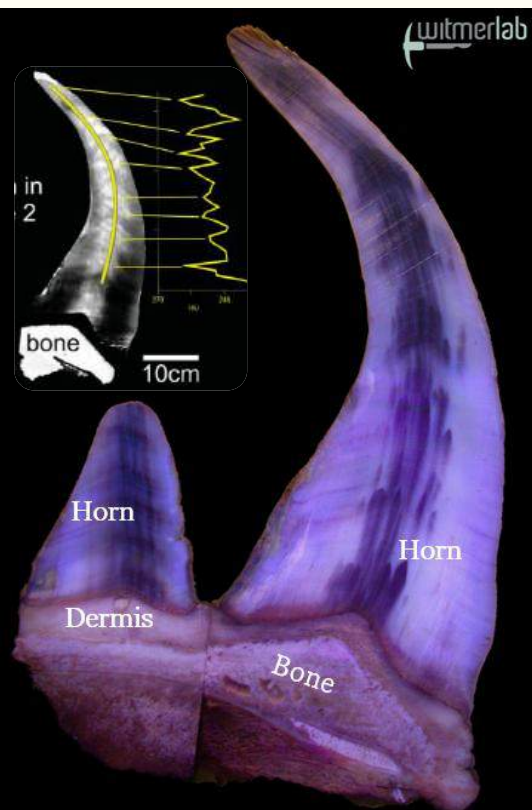
Poaching and the loss of available habitat continue to put an immense pressure on their survival. We have written several times about the difficulties that private rhino owners face. If you have not done so yet, we strongly encourage you to read (and share!) our article: [Struggling to survive: the challenges of the private rhino owner](#). Now we want to dig in a bit deeper about a topic that is often misunderstood; rhino dehorning. Often people think this hurts the rhino, but this is not the case.

Dehorning is a preventative measure against poaching. By removing most of the horn, the financial incentive for poachers drops, and the rhino thus becomes a less likely target. We are not saying that dehorning prevents poaching completely, but in many regions it has significantly reduced poaching rates.

The primary component of rhino horn is keratin (cornified epidermis or compressed hair), which is more or less the same material as your finger nail. Unlike antelope horns, rhinos do not have a bone in the centre of the horn. The horn grows from a tough fibrous layer of skin, called the *dermal* or *growth pad*, and is thus not attached to the skull. The outer part of the rhino horn does not have any blood vessels or nerves.

The growth pad is the only part of the rhino horn that is a sensitive structure. Unlike the outer horn, it has a rich blood supply and sensory nerves. Damage to the growth pad is painful and could lead to infections. The growth pad you could compare with the nail bed in humans. It is a delicate structure, and important for horn (or nail!) regrowth.

When we dehorn a rhino, we take great care to trim the horn well above the growth pad. The rhino is fully sedated during dehorning, and dehorning is not painful at all for the rhino.



Researchers cut a horn in half, and used a form of ultraviolet light to show the different chemicals in the horn layers. You can see that the horn is not attached to the skull. In the small picture, you see an image of a CT scan, again you can see that the horn is not attached to the skull. © [Hieronymus et al \(2006\)](#)

**Do you have rhinos that need dehorning? We are currently coordinating with several groups who are keen to join us on upcoming dehorning operations, and who are willing to sponsor a significant portion of the associated costs. Feel free to contact us!**

# FINANCING THE NEXT WAVE OF WILDLIFE-BASED LAND USE

The below text was written by Dr Susan de Witt, who is doing a research project to understand the financial performance and funding needs of non-state wildlife enterprises. Her research objective is to understand how wildlife businesses have been funded to date, identify enablers and barriers to accessing finance, and assess future investment needs of landholders. We hope you as a game farmer, landholder or conservancy manager can assist in this research! By sharing your experiences, you can help identify what is working (and what not). Ultimately the aim is to position wildlife-based land use as a credible investment opportunity, so your help is greatly appreciated!



**Can nature pay for itself?** In much of Southern Africa, it already does. Eco-tourism, sustainable hunting, and wildlife breeding have long supported biodiversity and livelihoods, usually without subsidies or carbon finance. As the world looks for scalable conservation finance models, our region's experience provides critical evidence.

We have lots of evidence proving the business case for wildlife-based land use. Check out this review of all published evidence [here](#). But we have yet to understand how farmers have funded their businesses, what the main barriers are to accessing finance are and what investment is required for sector growth. The [aim of this study](#) is to strengthen recognition of wildlife-based land use as a credible investment opportunity and to help unlock capital that is fit for purpose.

By participating, members will:

- 🐾 Contribute to building the investment case for wildlife enterprises;
- 🐾 Receive exclusive preliminary access to benchmarking data and best-practice insights (by first quarter of 2026);
- 🐾 Inform policy briefs advocating stronger government support;
- 🐾 Help shape investor engagement in the sector.

Participation consists of one online interview, lasting no more than one hour, to be scheduled in October or November. All interviews are voluntary, confidential, and anonymous.

Wildlife Ranching Namibia (WRN) has verified the independence and integrity of this research and confirms that it holds real value to the game ranching and hunting sectors. We urge members and other producers to participate and share this opportunity on your networks.

Principal Investigator: [Dr Susan de Witt](#) – veterinarian and impact finance specialist with over 10 years' experience designing innovative financing mechanisms across Africa. She is currently completing a PhD through Stellenbosch and Oxford Universities. Please contact her at WhatsApp [+27 83 225 1866](#) or [susandewitt@sun.ac.za](mailto:susandewitt@sun.ac.za) if you would like to participate.

# WORLD RABIES DAY

On 28 September it is World Rabies Day, a day to raise global awareness about rabies prevention. Rabies is 100% preventable, but it still kills ten-thousands of people per year in mainly Africa, Asia and Latin America. Many of these deaths happen simply because people do not know how to protect themselves, or do not seek treatment. World Rabies Day is celebrated on 28 September to commemorate the death of Louis Pasteur, the pioneering scientist who developed the first rabies vaccine.



## What is rabies?

Rabies is a fatal viral disease, which is caused by a group known as the Lyssaviruses. The virus attacks the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord). It is important to understand that this disease is almost always fatal once symptoms appear!

## Who can get rabies?

All mammals, including humans, can get rabies. Most of you know about dog rabies, and rabies in wild animals such as jackals, bat-eared foxes, mongooses, kudu and eland. But any mammal can get it, we have seen several positive rabies cases in for example rhino in Namibia, but also giraffe, sable, and even animals such as aardvark have been tested positive. In June this year the first rabies case of a Cape fur seal was documented in Namibia.

A rabies infection typically begins when an animal (or human) is bitten by a rabid animal. Rabies particles that are present in the saliva of the rabid animal contaminate the bite wound. From there, the virus travels along peripheral nerves towards the spinal cord and eventually reaches the brain.

## What are rabies symptoms?

In humans, the first symptoms look like flu symptoms. Later symptoms are fever, headaches, nausea, vomiting, agitation, anxiety, confusion, difficulty swallowing and excessive salivation. You might have heard of hydrophobia, which is fear of water. Rabies infects the brain and spinal cord, causing painful spasms in the throat and respiratory muscles. When a person tries to swallow water, these spasms intensify, making trying to drink very painful. Because swallowing water becomes so painful, people develop a fear of water. Once a human has developed these symptoms, the disease is almost always fatal!

**If you get bitten by an animal, or if you have been exposed to an animal that possibly has rabies, go to your doctor!! Timing is everything, if you suspect exposure, do not wait and seek help!!**

Unusual behaviour of animals is always a warning – this could be rabies! Domestic animals often seem to “become wild”, showing unexplained aggression whereas wild animals “become tame”, literally straying into towns, gardens and homes.

In domestic animals, the initial signs might be subtle. The animal becomes lethargic, has a fever, stops eating and has behavioural changes (restless, hiding). Then symptoms become more ‘typical’ for rabies, such as aggression, excessive salivation, difficulty swallowing or breathing, uncoordinated movements and vocal changes (e.g. hoarse barking).

Wild animals often lose their fear of humans and have nervous signs (e.g. staggering, hindquarter paralysis, drooling saliva), howling/bellowing. Cat species can become extremely aggressive. They rapidly loose condition due to dehydration and starvation and are then frequently found in close proximity to water – they are drawn by thirst, but cannot drink.

### How to prevent rabies?

Rabies is a disease which is 100% preventable by vaccination. **We strongly encourage all pet owners to have their pets vaccinated against rabies by a veterinarian every year.** Regular vaccination not only protects your animals, but also helps safeguard your family and community.

In Namibia, many steps have been taken over the years to try and limit rabies cases. According to government stats, human deaths have decreased from 23 in 2015 to 5 deaths in 2024. The primary source of human rabies infections are dogs, and vaccinations campaigns are conducted all over Namibia.

Namibia aims to eradicate dog-mediated rabies and eliminate human deaths by 2030.

For stray dogs that cannot be injected, there are interesting projects going on. One example is an oral rabies vaccination (ORV) for stray dogs in the Northern Communal Areas, where [researchers](#) used an egg-flavoured bait with vaccine. Over 90% of the dogs ate the bait, and nearly 73% was successfully vaccinated.

People with frequent exposure to animals, such as farmers, farm workers, veterinarians, wildlife professionals and animal handlers should strongly consider pre-exposure rabies vaccination. Vaccination not only reduces the risk of developing rabies, but also simplifies post-exposure treatment, buying valuable time in emergency situations.

### How to protect wildlife against rabies?

For wildlife, so far the most effective way to protect herds remains dart vaccination from the helicopter. Kudu and eland are very susceptible to rabies, and outbreaks can have devastating effects on a game farm. Considering the high demand and value of these animals, it is well worth your money to protect them against rabies.

Over the years, we have done dart rabies vaccination on numerous game farms, and the results speak for themselves. Farms that commit to bi-annual prophylactic vaccination support thriving kudu populations.



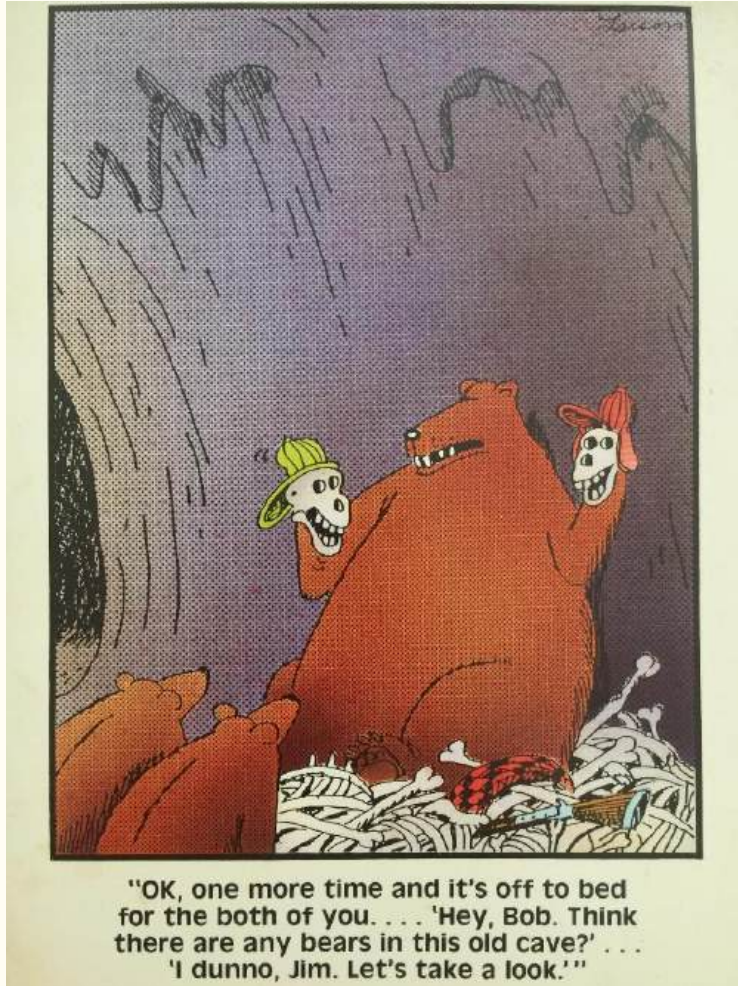
*Eland cow with typical rabies signs; drooling, bellowing, poor condition, and constantly being around water*  
© U. Tubbesing



💡 *What to see how rabies dart vaccination gets done? Check our [YouTube video](#).*

## What should you do when you, or your pet, gets bitten?

The rabies virus is highly sensitive for soap. If you or your pet have been bitten, immediately wash the area thoroughly with soap and water. After washing, contact your doctor or veterinarian right away. Preventative treatment is safe and effective, but only if started early.



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