

July 28, 2012

Dear President Zuma,

My name is Carmen, and I'm writing to you because of my concern about rhino poaching. I've never had the chance to go to South Africa and see these beautiful creatures in their natural habitat, which is something I've always wanted to do. Seeing rhinos and other wildlife was once a common sight in South Africa and other parts of Africa. Now it is something that most people will probably see only once or twice in their life. I know that in parts of Africa the rhino is an icon to many tribes and countries. Do we really want to live in a world in which people talk about rhinos the same way they talk about dinosaurs?

Rhinos are poached for their horns, which many people mistakenly believe has medicinal value. What most people don't know is just how dire the problem of poaching is, and how few rhinos are left, and that the horns have no medicinal value at all. Not only do many people believe it does, but few people know about the cruel way in which poachers kill the rhinos. Some don't kill them when removing the horn. The animal is only sedated while they hack the horn with an axe or other such instrument. The animal dies in great pain from blood loss caused by the wounds on its face where its horn was hacked off. Rhinos are not the only ones who poachers kill. Many rangers have also been wounded or killed by poachers when trying to protect the animals.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.

Sincerely,  
Carmen

Below is a little story I wrote about a pride of Lions who grew up practically never seeing a Rhino because they are almost all gone. I hope you enjoy it.

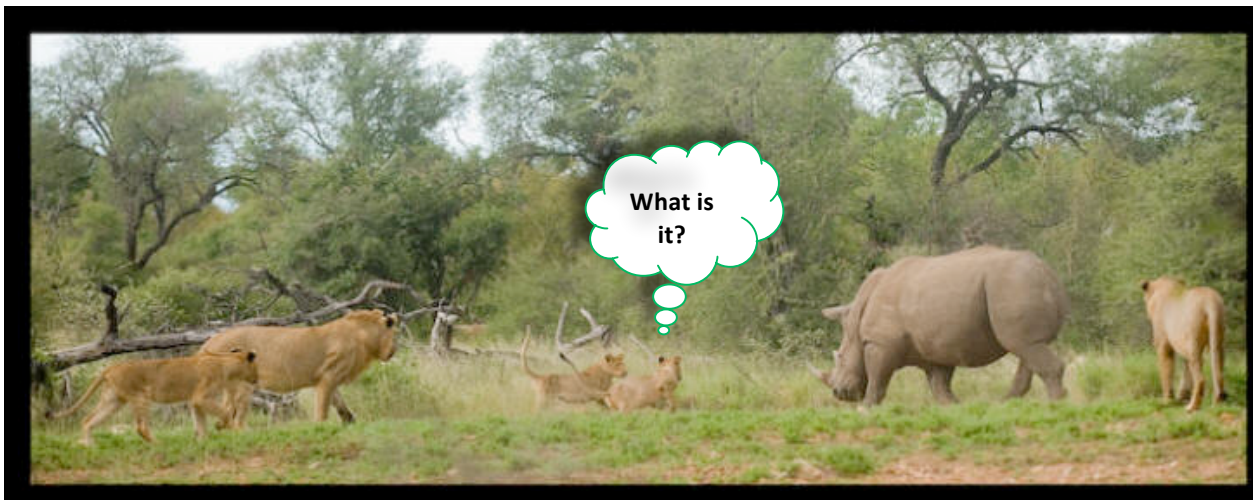
A pride of lions rested in the shade of an acacia bush close to the water hole. Pretty soon, the lionesses knew, the wildebeest would be arriving for a drink. They usually did around this hour.

“Mama!” exclaimed one of the cubs. “Look!”

The lionesses turned toward the water hole. Among the wildebeest was a most extraordinary creature none of them had ever seen.

“That’s no wildebeest!” exclaimed another lioness. “What an odd looking creature! I don’t think I’ve ever seen one!”

The creature that came to drink was like no other the lions had seen before. It was big, definitely bigger than any buffalo they’d ever seen. It somewhat resembled an elephant, with its grey coloring. It might well have been an elephant calf, if it wasn’t for its small ears, massive head, and its odd trunk. Instead of a long trunk like they’d seen on the other elephants this one had two much shorter ones.



“An elephant calf with two short trunks!” giggled a cub.

“No elephant calf,” said the oldest of the lionesses. “I think I’ve seen something like it before.”

“You have, Grandma?”

“When I was just a little cub. I haven’t seen another one since then. My mama told me they were a common sight once, but eventually, they began to leave.”

“Where did they go?”

“I don’t know, but I never thought I’d see one again.”

“Is it prey like the wildebeest?” asked a lioness.



“Oh, no. These animals are much too big and definitely difficult to kill than even the largest buffalo. Mama said it was possible to break your teeth trying to bite into that hide. You don’t want to hunt them unless it’s as a last resort. And then, you want to try to get a calf, because it’s unlikely you’re ever going to get an adult.”

The lionesses then began to discuss if it might not be a good idea to wait for a herd of zebra or buffalo, or perhaps go off in search of something else. They weren’t sure what this new animal would do.

“I’m going to go see what it is!” exclaimed the oldest cub.

“Auntie won’t let you. You might scare dinner away. And I’m hungry.”

The pride hadn’t eaten in a couple of days.

“No, I won’t. I’m only going to talk to the new wildebeest!” he said as he disappeared in the tall grass.

Some of the other cubs followed at a distance.

“Hi. I’m a lion cub. What are you? We’ve never seen anyone like you before, although Grandma said she did when she was a cub.” the cub asked, approaching the rhino.

“I’m a rhino.”

“Grandma said you left. Don’t you like it here?”

“I didn’t leave. Neither did anyone else. Almost the rest of my herd was killed. My mama, too.”

“Were they stampeded on by buffalo? We were stampeded by buffalo once. One of my cousins died, but the rest of us are okay.”

“We weren’t stampeded by buffalo. We were stampeded by something else. Suddenly, Mama couldn’t move or run, then they began kicking at her face and took her horns. Then they left and Mama died slowly.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. They did the same to almost all the rest of the herd. They always came back.”

“You mean you’re by yourself? Are you lonely?”

“I miss the rest of the herd, but the wildebeest adopted me. I even learned to call like one. Then when there’s danger, I can also alert the rest of the herd, but I miss my mama and

the other rhinos. I don't even know if I'll ever see another one again. Everyone died like Mama did."

"But why?"

"I don't know. It happened all the time there was one of those stampedes."

"It's not a wildebeest. It's a rhino." the cub told his brothers, sisters, and cousins.

"What's a rhino?" asked one of his cousins.

"The one that was with the wildebeest. She said they adopted her because the rest of her herd who were all rhinos were stampeded, but not by buffalo. By someone who ate their horns."

"They ate horns?"

"I guess they must have. Because they only took the horn, not ate the rhino."

"But Grandma said rhinos are too big and difficult to catch."

"Maybe not for the other buffalo."

"But buffalo eat grass, not horns."

"Maybe these are a different type of buffalo."

"Then I'm very glad we don't have horns."

The other cubs agreed.

"And I hope we never see one of those buffalo."





I've always wondered what it's like for other animals that haven't seen a rhino in generations, and for the rhinos themselves, seeing one of their own killed by poachers. Rhinos have few to no natural predators. Usually only calves are killed by crocodiles, lions, hyenas or other predators. The only predator adult rhinos have are humans.

I did read a bit about a rhino called Heidi who was 'adopted' by a herd of wildebeest, in *The Last Rhinos*. She was killed by poachers.

Sincerely,  
Carmen