

Earlier Times – Conservatively 500 000 White Rhino

In earlier times, as mentioned by Alan Paton in his foreword of Dr Player's book, *The White Rhino Saga*, the white rhino was found from the coast of Africa in the north to the coasts of the Cape, Natal and Zululand in the south. We can only guess there were probably half a million white rhino from the Cape up into Zimbabwe says Dr Player.

Dr Player sweeps us through the history with perfect detail and timing.

Hunters from Europe came to



humans. *Will it be relegated to become a silent statue?*

1893 – European Hunters Enjoy an Orgy of Killing

Dr Player takes us through another few decades.

“At the end of 1893 a few white rhino were said to inhabit the tsetse fly haunted country between the lower courses of the Black and White Imfolozi Rivers in Zululand. In Southern Africa they were extinct. The slaughter was surpassed only by the extermination of the bison in North America.”

“However, in 1894 a shooting party in

**“When I first visited
Imfolozi Game Reserve
in 1952 it was like
entering a deserted
world.”**

Southern Africa and an orgy of killing began. The white rhino was the easiest of prey grazing in open grasslands, passive, and sought after for its hide, horn and flesh. Billiard balls were the order of the day. *Little has changed, just the purpose.* It was also the vogue, says Dr Player. The killing was a sport

One of Africa's most ‘famous’ hunters, FC Selous, talks of hunts where 90 rhino are shot. Black rhino were difficult to hunt as their habitat was in dense bush and they'd charge in an instant.

The European hunters employed black hunters to hunt for them, equipped them, and soon the numbers of white rhino started falling. The value of the rhino horn and hides increased. *Sound familiar?*

Dr Player's personal assistant walks in to give us all a time check. *Am I going to lose my chance to get to my questions?* The lounge is dimly lit once again, the sun is no longer pouring through the windows. A rhino statue at one end of the lounge sits squat on a low coffee table silhouetted in the shadows and stares out of the window. It has no natural predator, only

Zululand shot some white rhino at the junction of the Black and White Imfolozi rivers. The news stirred the authorities and the Governor of Natal, Walter Hely-Hutchinson, had sympathy with the preservation of wildlife. Magistrates were stopped from granting applications to shoot rhino, and an area of Zululand containing the white rhino's habitat to be beaoned off as a game reserve was proposed.” *At what point will legal hunting have to be suspended. Maybe it's time for the professional associations to step in and help, now, somehow.*

“In 1897 a proclamation was issued declaring Hluhluwe, Lake St Lucia and Imfolozi as game reserves. Imfolozi Game reserve was 72 000 acres. Everything we have, all that came about is because of the white rhino. The white rhino was the catalyst for the first game reserve in Africa.” *If we lose the battle for this species, are we not giving up more than just white rhino?*

Dr Player is in fact answering questions. He knows it too.

1914 – 50 White Rhino left

By 1914 there were between 20 – 50 white rhino left. The game needed constant protection from poachers but farmers became the real threat. Cattle were dying by the hundreds surrounding the reserve because of the nagana-carrying tsetse fly. Farmers blamed the game and vegetation in the reserve for the breeding of the fly. It didn't kill the game. However, man soon saw to that.

1930 – 150 000 Most Disgraceful Period in South African History

What followed was a massacre of game that Dr Player would describes as “one of the most disgraceful periods in South African history”. *Will someone, someday, write about 2008 – 2020 as the most disgraceful period ever when white rhino were poached to extinction.*

The infamous Nagan Campaign begun in earnest. The Imfolozi Reserve was handed over to the Division of Veterinary Services, and for two decades the systematic killing of game took place. 150 000 game animals destroyed. Natural bush was cleared. The white rhino's precarious situation ironically was a saving grace as it was protected during this campaign.

“From 1942 – 1950 everything except the white rhino was shot in the buffer zone and in the game reserve. This was blood lust and it reveals the strange excuses that men will use to kill in the name of progress. The destruction of game did not eliminate the tsetse fly. It took DDT and aeroplanes to do this.” *So, the right people sometimes make the wrong decisions.*

Dr Player takes an urgent call from the television crew, they're going to be very late. Thank goodness they are coming to do a story on the Duzi Marathon which he pioneered. The rhino statue is bathed in light now; I see the detail of the beautiful bronze.

1952 – Ghostly Imfolozi Game Reserve

The opening of Dr Player's book sets the scene for the next chapter of history.

“When I first visited Imfolozi Game