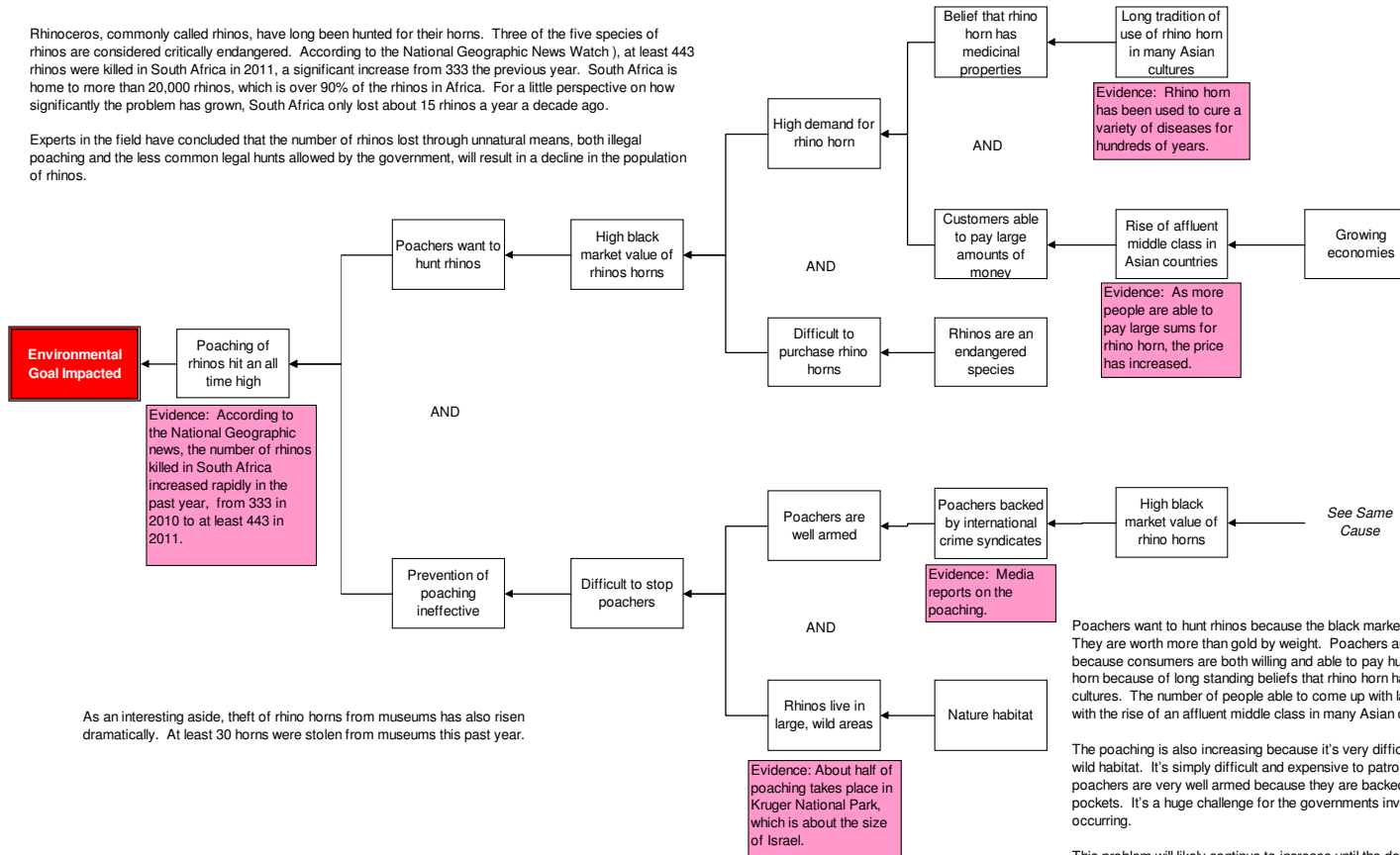


Number of Poached Rhinos Hits All Time High

South Africa
2011

Rhinoceros, commonly called rhinos, have long been hunted for their horns. Three of the five species of rhinos are considered critically endangered. According to the National Geographic News Watch, at least 443 rhinos were killed in South Africa in 2011, a significant increase from 333 the previous year. South Africa is home to more than 20,000 rhinos, which is over 90% of the rhinos in Africa. For a little perspective on how significantly the problem has grown, South Africa only lost about 15 rhinos a year a decade ago.

Experts in the field have concluded that the number of rhinos lost through unnatural means, both illegal poaching and the less common legal hunts allowed by the government, will result in a decline in the population of rhinos.



As an interesting aside, theft of rhino horns from museums has also risen dramatically. At least 30 horns were stolen from museums this past year.

Poachers want to hunt rhinos because the black market value of their horns is extremely high. They are worth more than gold by weight. Poachers are able to sell the horns for high prices because consumers are both willing and able to pay huge sums. There is a strong market for rhino horn because of long standing beliefs that rhino horn has medicinal uses, primarily in Asian cultures. The number of people able to come up with large amounts of money has also increased with the rise of an affluent middle class in many Asian countries.

The poaching is also increasing because it's very difficult to prevent it. The rhinos live in a large, wild habitat. It's simply difficult and expensive to patrol and defend such a large region. The poachers are very well armed because they are backed by international crime syndicates with deep pockets. It's a huge challenge for the governments involved to prevent the poaching from occurring.

This problem will likely continue to increase until the demand for the rhino horns starts to decrease. Modern medical research has concluded that rhino horn has no medicinal value, but as long as people are willing to pay big money for them, someone will find a way to meet that demand.

Cause Map High Level

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