

What the Death of the Last White Rhino Should Teach Us

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Featured image: Sudan, the last male northern white rhino, has died in Kenya at the age of 45, after becoming a symbol of efforts to save his subspecies from extinction, a fate that only science can now prevent. (File pix)

Rhinos do not normally make the headlines. But Sudan is special: he was the last male northern white rhino.

He breathed his last on Monday March 19 in the safety of his captive home: a zoo in Kenya.

And his death, though a result of infection, tells a lot about human apathy, and, disregard even, for animals generally.

Sudan was kept in captivity away from mean men who were after his prized horn.

There is even a name for such hard-hearted men: poachers.

Poachers have grown in sophistication, too. From subsistence hunters of yesteryears they have moulted into international syndicates, hawking their ill-gotten loot in cyber market.

The San Diego Zoo Global website entry in 2015 puts the number of rhinos roaming the earth at less than 30,000. And what is more heartbreaking, a rhino loses its life every 8 hours to poachers.

If this calculation is right, there will be no rhinos left by 2030.

That is just a dozen years away. To our children and grandchildren, the word rhinoceros may soon mean pretty much what tyrannosaurus means to us. Absolutely nothing.



Najin (L) and Fatu, the only two remaining female northern white rhinos. (File pix)

To Malaysians, this may read like a story being played out in a distant land. Do not be too comforted. It happens in this beloved land of ours, too.

Roadkill itself has claimed more than 2,000 animals in the last five years, according to one estimate. This is a tragedy we must learn to avoid.

By our bad driving habits we are decimating the population of tapirs, elephants, tigers, mountain goats, wild cattle and sun bears. Poachers take what remains.

We now know the Javan rhinoceros is gone for good. If human disregard continues at this rate, we will soon lose our Sumatran rhinoceros, too. And Malayan tigers will be next.

Perhaps the time is right to treat premeditated killing of animals as murder. We are in dire need of deterrence.

The death of Sudan is not merely about the end of a species of rhino. It is more. Sudan's death is an abject lesson on how we humans should and must live our lives better.

It is a judgment about the lack of respect we have for living things.

We must learn that for every action we take there will be a reaction. Flowers do not grow into a fruits because bees do not pollinate them. Bees do not pollinate them because pesticides kill them.

Such is the chain reaction. This is how the universe is designed. Planet earth is part of this big universe. We may have the false security that we still have planet Mars to go to should the earth die by our hands.

This is human folly writ large. If we cannot live our lives well in a planet which is made habitable for us, how are we going to do so in a less habitable environment light years away?

Besides, how sure are we our bad habits would not follow us? The best solution is to make this planet earth a liveable home, for humans, animals and other living things.

If we value our survival, we will love the environment and everything in it more.

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