



Photographers: Don't help the Rhino Poachers by using GPS tagging

## Description

# Geotagged Wildlife Photos help Poachers find and kill endangered animals



Good thing the poacher was a bad shot: This rhino and 3 other rhinos shot survived the attack but needed a year of medical care to heal

Photographers are unwittingly helping lead poachers right to rhinos and other endangered animals by posting photos containing GPS data or by naming specific locations where the photo was taken. Poachers can search for recent photos with geo tagged information then go right to the area where the rhino was seen.

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For the safety of the rangers and rhinos I have always asked that guests on my safaris not post geo-tagged rhino photos or mention the names of reserves. Now reserves and parks are beginning to post the same message. My lodge and photo safaris take place in one of the last rhino-rich areas in the world: Limpopo adjacent to Kruger National Park in South Africa. We have daily reminders of the impact of poaching in the form of security check points, random road blocks, stories of poaching attempts from ranger friends, shots fired in the night, and the sad news of successful poaching on reserves in our area.



A young white rhino sleeping

To avoid making the poacherâ€™s job easier, photographers should scrub the data from photos before posting or turn off the geo tagging feature. Safari travelers should also consider not posting rhino photos at all or not until well after their trip so as to avoid them being used to help poachers.

Photographers are getting a bad reputation for inadvertently helping poachers while poachers are also proactively using photography and geotagging to find victims. They have been known to send people with a GPS-enabled cameras on game drives into reserves or Kruger where there are rhinos. The

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accomplices take photos of the future victims. The exact coordinates are then attached to the pictures, allowing the poachers to come in after dark and track the animal. Stealing cameras containing tagged photos from safari guests is also a tactic employed by poachers.



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Black Rhinos are more scarce

Please be thoughtful when using the GPS feature on your camera and when posting photos to public places. The logical next steps for parks and private reserves will be to not allow cameras in areas where they might encounter rhinos or to not allow any access to areas with rhino.

I feel very lucky that we can still go out onto reserves in our area and see rhinos. What is sad is that many rhino custodians have chosen to dehorn their rhino as a preventative measure\*. As a photographer, I hate seeing mutilated wildlife even if it is in the name of conservation or research. Each time I see a rhino in full natural glory it is a very special moment. I hope they keep happening.

\* As prevention this has largely backfired because the tiny bit of horn taken off a cut rhino will still make the endeavor a financial gain – the price is that high for the stuff. It also seems to effect their mating. Obviously they have a horn for a reason and foraging, fighting, and display with the horn are important.

### **Category**

1. African Wildlife

### **Tags**

1. Photographers aiding poachers with GPS tagged photos
2. Poachers using GPS tagged photos
3. rhino poaching in South Africa

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