

WILDLIFE CHAMPION

PATRICK ARYEE

In our series about people with a passion for a species, we ask biologist and film-maker Patrick Aryee why he loves the **northern white rhino**.

Interview by Jo Price

Why champion the northern white rhino?

What's not to love? It's powerful, yet strangely balletic. They're such magical creatures: in fact, rhino-lovers have come to know them as 'chubby unicorns'. But the reality for many rhinos is a far cry from the charming fairy tale their nickname may suggest. This Critically Endangered species is in desperate need of our help as, like all rhino species, it has been targeted by poachers for its horns. Right now, there are only two female northern white rhinos left, Fatu and Najin, and as they're unable to reproduce without a male (Sudan, the last male, died in March 2018), the species is functionally extinct.

Have you met Fatu and Najin?

Yes, I've been working with UK charity Helping Rhinos, which arranged for me to visit Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya, in 2019. It was a really special experience because it was born out of an admiration that

I've always had for wildlife rangers who put their lives on the line to protect the world's most endangered



“The species is functionally extinct - right now, there are only two females left.”

species. It's hard to put into words how I felt when I walked into the boma where Fatu and Najin are kept under surveillance for their protection.

What will help stop the illegal trade in rhino body parts?

For me, the best tactic is to get to the root of the problem. The big players of the illegal wildlife trade rely on the desperation of locals and use the promise of life-changing amounts of money to hook them in.

We need to stop telling these individuals what to do and find out what they

need: sanitation, education, economic stability and opportunities to create their own businesses is a sure-fire way to stop the illegal trade in its tracks.

How did you go from studying biology to presenting?

I knew that a job that could combine public speaking with my love of science would be the perfect fit for me. I started as a runner at the BBC Natural History Unit and I saw every interaction as a chance to learn, grow, and get closer to my goal. Eventually, maximising on each opportunity led to a screen test to check out my skills on the other side of the camera, and the rest is old news.

Can wildlife documentaries help to save species?

Wildlife documentaries are perhaps the single most important way to inform the public about the issues that wildlife faces across the globe, giving people a view into different worlds that they otherwise might not have known about. The ability for documentaries to encourage a spirit of passion and compassion is what stirs us to act. 🐾

PATRICK ARYEE is a biologist and wildlife filmmaker. Listen to his podcast, *30 Animals That Made Us Smarter* (series one), on BBC Sounds. Series two will air in 2020.



The expert view



A third viable northern white rhino embryo has been developed using IVF technologies by an international collaboration called BioRescue. This is an encouraging milestone and an example of what working together can achieve. The three embryos are now stored in liquid nitrogen and efforts to select a southern white rhino (a related species) surrogate are underway.

Jan Kirsten, Head of Global Business Franchise for Fertility, Merck