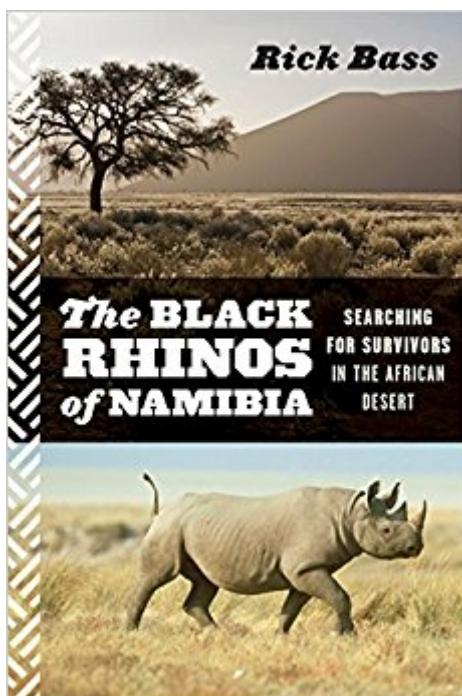


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# The Black Rhinos Of Namibia: Searching For Survivors In The African Desert



## Synopsis

From one of our most gifted writers on the natural world comes a stunning exploration of a unique landscape and the improbable and endangered animal that makes its home there. Rick Bass first made a name for himself as a writer and seeker of rare, iconic animals, including the grizzlies and wolves of the American West. Now he's off on a new, far-flung adventure in the Namib of southwest Africa on the trail of another fascinating, vulnerable species. The black rhino is a three-thousand-pound, squinty-eyed giant that sports three-foot-long dagger horns, lives off poisonous plants, and goes for days without water. Human intervention and cutting-edge conservation saved the rhinos—for now—from the brink of extinction brought on by poaching and war. Against the backdrop of one of the most ancient and harshest terrains on earth, Bass, with his characteristic insight and grace, probes the complex relationship between humans and nature and meditates on our role as both destroyer and savior. In the tradition of Peter Matthiessen's *The Tree Where Man Was Born*, Bass captures a haunting slice of Africa, especially of the "black" rhinos that glow ghostly white in the gleaming sun.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A well-known nature writer travels to the Namib Desert, one of the oldest unchanged landscapes on earth... an exciting adventure." —Kirkus

An extraordinary exploration and meditation... [Bass] transports us along on this wonder-filled tour, full of hardness and hope, into an otherworldly place that mirrors our own. "National Geographic

"Traveler" Black rhinos are not actually black. They are, however, giant animals with tiny eyes, feet the diameter of laundry baskets, and horns that are prized for both their aesthetic and medicinal qualities. Until recently, these creatures were perched on the edge of extinction, their numbers dwindling as they succumbed to poachers and the ravages of civil war. Now their numbers are rising, thanks to a groundbreaking new conservation method from the Save the Rhino Trust: make sure that rhinos are worth more alive than dead. Rick Bass, who has long worn the uneasy mantle of both activist and hunter, traveled to Namibia to find black rhinos. The tale of his journey provides a deeper understanding of these amazing animals and of just what needs to be done to protect them. Bass provides a singularly thoughtful portrait of a unique animal, and a meditation on mankind's relationship to both it and the natural world as a whole. *"Minneapolis Star Tribune"* --This text refers to the Digital edition.

Although it gets quite "wordy" at times, I really had no trouble visualizing his words and experience. I think it helps to have a map of the area he is talking about to appreciate the book more. We are headed to Namibia in a few days, and I feel that this book will enrich that experience. He doesn't really encounter the rhino until 3/4 of the way through the book, but that is half of the fun. His descriptions of the other humans in his story are rich. I felt there was quite a bromance going on with one of the characters, in the end you find out why. You will be moved. Mr. Bass shifting his writing between his concern for his grizzlies in the USA and that of the black rhino in Namibia really drives home the need for our concerns for the environment and conservation.

I agree with previous reviews that said there is not much about rhinos or Namibia but plenty about the author's feelings. Definitely not a good source for anyone who is interested in Namibia or rhinos. Indeed, a rhino sighting doesn't even occur until page 150. I trudged through or skipped numerous sections filled with philosophical soul searching and rhetorical questions.

This was an interesting and informative read, a must for anyone travelling to Namibia or interested in the plight of the rhino.

This is a philosophical treatise with the Namibia black rhinos as a central theme.

I've read and enjoyed some of Rick Bass's previous books, and I was really looking forward to this Vine selection. I have to say, I am a bit disappointed. Bass is as much a philosopher and poet as he

is a nature writer, and there are passages in this book that are beautifully written. No surprise there. But the narrative kind of drifts around and never really builds any momentum. Bass goes to Namibia--an awesome, but unforgiving, environment--to seek out black rhinos and the people dedicated to trying to preserve them. Except for the fact that their horns aren't really horns, I knew nothing about rhinos when I opened this book, and I don't know much more now. OK: they're near-sighted, and they easily consume plants that are poisonous to humans. Every fifty pages you come upon those kinds of facts. And just as chimps have Jane Goodall, rhinos have their champions who understand the importance of developing the species profile into that of a "glamour animal," so that people (with money) realize the value of these magnificent animals before they vanish completely. I applaud Mr. Bass for helping that cause. Although Bass does embed some of his personal politics into this narrative. Like, you know all those greedy colonialists who invaded Africa and enslaved/killed millions of people to loot natural resources, then plunged the continent into decades of violent civil war, illiteracy and grinding poverty, and then set the stage for entire villages to be wiped out by AIDS? Bush's fault. Aside from that, Bass is duly impressed by the world that brought forth the rhino. If you LOVE either Rick Bass or rhinos, this is the book for you. But it won't draw you into "rhinoworld" the way John Vaillant's "The Tiger" brought those big cats to life. I don't know if there's a title like that out there, but there should be, because rhinos are truly amazing. This book did make me want to go to Namibia....for about a second. Then I remembered that I am not at all good with travel out in "the bush," as I prefer mid-range hotels near bowling alleys. And THEN I remembered that I live in Chicago, which has black rhinos at both the Lincoln Park AND Brookfield Zoos....so problem solved!!

Rick Bass has quite a few books under his belt, a few which I have read. My most recent book by him that I have reviewed is "The Wild Marsh," a poetic collection of prose describing the monthly changes in the Yaak region of Montana. In that book he writes about the grizzlies, the elk and other native wildlife. Reading that book I could "feel" and "see" the cold, brutal yet beautiful landscape of far northwestern Montana. He is able to lure readers into his own experiences of living there. But this book is disappointing in many ways. This book isn't about the black rhino specifically. It's more of an unorganized collection of left-leaning rants and flashbacks to his Montana's grizzlies, interspersed with his description of his journey to Namibia in search of the black rhino. It's all hard to follow. I don't want to be preached to, even if I do believe in his politics. I want to be able to dive into the life and struggles of the black rhino and learn all I can about the attempts to protect the few remaining free-roaming rhinos there are in that desolate piece of arid land. Just when I was able to follow this

rambling train of thought, he'd break out into a rant that had nothing to do with the black rhino. Rick Bass is passionate about his environmentalism and passionate about saving the black rhino. But I don't feel this book comes across in the manner in which he had intended: to educate his readers on the struggles of preserving the black rhino. His political rants come across too sternly, and for many readers this may be a turn-off to a book whose thesis is important but whose delivery falls far off its purpose.

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