Follow-up to stop trade in Rhino products in Asia

From 1979 to 1981, Dr. Esmond Bradley Martin carried out investigative research on the international trade in rhinoceros products, under the sponsorship of WWF and IUCN. in the reports he submitted, he recommended that steps should be taken to bring to a halt the international trade in rhino products and to decrease the demand by consumers for rhino horn, skin and hooves. He has recently returned from another trip to Asia, sponsored by WWF /I UCN, African Wildlife Foundation and African Fund For Endangered Wildlife, for the purpose of implementing measures to stop this trade, which still remains a threat to the survival of rhinos in the wild.

From October 1982 to February 1983, I visited ten Asian countries in order to discourage pharmaceutical wholesalers from further dealings in rhino products, to explain to practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine why they should no longer prescribe rhino drugs, and to publicise in the mass media the plight of the rhino in Africa as well as in Asia, so that consumers would be more willing to use substitutes. Also, I studied the present state of the international trade in rhino products to find out what additional efforts could be made to stop lt.

I discovered that despite a sharp decline in the amount of new rhino horn reaching the world market from 1980 to 1982, there has generally been only a small increase in its retail price in most Asian countries. If the demand for rhino horn had continued on the same scale as it was three years ago, there would have been substantial price increases relative to its lesser availability. Because this is not the case, the encouraging conclusion can be drawn that there is a significant decrease in demand among consumers in Asia for rhino horn.

Specifically, the quantity of new horn reaching the world market has fallen from eight tonnes per year between 1972 and 1978 to less than four tonnes annually from 1979 to 1982. Since the number of rhinos in Africa was reduced by half during the 1970 decade, poachers have now found it more difficult to locate rhinos; furthermore, some of the African countries which had been among the main suppliers of rhino horn (Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa) have initiated tactics which in turn have greatly restricted the movement of rhino horn across their borders.

Concerning the retail prices for rhino horn in Asia, on average they have increased by only 20% since 1979, about 8.5% a year, roughly the same as inflation. As for rhino hide, a kilo in Hong Kong has gone down in retail price from $423 in 1979 to $376, and its decrease in price in Singapore is even more spectacular during this period: from $923 to $635. Wholesale, average costs of rhino horn have remained the same since 1979: $550 for African horn per kilo C.I.F. South-East Asia, and $9,000 per kilo for Asian horn.

There are many reasons for the declining demand in rhino products today. First, and most importantly, Hong Kong and Japan have stopped importing them, in 1979 and 1980 respectively, and these two countries were the largest consumers of rhino horn for medicinal purposes. In Hong Kong, where pharmaceutical traders produce numerous books and brochures on traditional drugs, these now include explanations why rhino horn is no longer being imported; and in Japan, the government itself sent letters to pharmacists requesting that they promote the use of substitutes for rhino horn, Such actions are commendable: they have helped to lower domestic demand and, possibly, they will also discourage illegal imports. Secondly, saiga antelope horn is now much more widely used as a fever-reducing drug in Asia than it was, partly because of my own efforts to persuade importers, doctors and pharmacists in oriental medicine to use it instead of rhino horn; but, mainly, because it is a very much cheaper drug and is acceptable as a substitute for rhino horn in traditional medicine. The retail price for a kilo of saiga horn in Singapore, for example, is around $230, while a kilo of rhino horn is $9,876 for African species and $19,170 for Asian species. Thirdly, since Hong Kong is a major entrepot for most traditional Chinese drugs, and can now only supply to other countries stocks of rhino horn imported before the 1979 legislation, pharmacists elsewhere in Asia are aware that it will become increasingly difficult to obtain via Hong Kong. Moreover, because the traders in Hong Kong do not want to lose their rhino horn customers to foreign pharmaceutical firms which will supply rhino horn, they are doing their utmost to sell other drugs as substitutes. Fourthly, the sharp rise in the wholesale price of rhino horn which was $35 a kilo in 1972, led to the appearance of fake rhino horn shavings and tips of water buffalo horn being marketed under the name of rhino. This has made customers suspicious; consequently, some would rather buy a packet of dried herbs or saiga antelope horn when in doubt about the genuineness of the rhino product they are offered.

Figure 3. A typical Chinese Medical Hall in Penang, Malaysia.

TABLE I

AVERAGE RETAIL PRICE FOR RHINOCEROS HORN PER KILO IN LATE 1982/EARLY 1983

Place	Origin of Horn	Price per Kilo
Hong Kong	mostly African	$ 15,700
Japan	African	2,516
Osaka	African	2,243
Kyoto	African	1,934
South Korea		
Seoul	African	1,797
Pusan	African	1,930
Taegu	African	1,475
Macao	mostly African	7,797
Philippines (Manila)	mostly African	10,706
Brunei (Bandar Seri Begawan)	mostly African	6,895
Indonesia		
Medan, Sumatra	Asian	2,847
Semarang, Java	?	11,679
Singapore	mostly African	11,804
a)	African	9,876
b)	Asian	19,170
Malaysia		
Kuala Lampur	Asian/African	17,280
a)	African	9,876
b)	Asian	24,256
Georgetown, Penang	mostly Africa	14,582
a)	African	5,415
b)	Asian	27,557

Source: Survey taken by author.

Fifthly, already worldwide publicity about the decline in rhinos has reached the ears of city dwellers in Asia, through the mass media and even by word of mouth, with the result that many would-be customers of rhino horn are no longer asking for it when they visit their traditional pharmacies. From interviews I carried out, however, this is not usually because they appreciate the need for conservation, but because they don't believe there are any more rhino horns available.

While the demand for rhino products in Asia may be beginning to wane, curtailment of the trade is still a long way off. Efforts to cut it short arc hampered not only by those who flout laws prohibiting the movement of rhino horn across certain international borders, but also by loopholes in legislation and even the absence of restrictions in some countries. Without effective controls on this trade, rhino horn can continue to reach the main markets and if such supplies become substantial, the demand could escalate once again.

There is also the major challenge of North Yemen. Its location is close to African rhino sources, the demand for horn remains high there, and it is well known that even though the government made rhino horn an illegal import in late 1982, it is still coming into the country. Smuggling is nothing new to North Yemen: traders have managed to bring in and take out other illegal goods with impunity. Regarding rhino horn, traders are now arriving on scheduled airline flights to Sanaa with rhino horn from the southern Sudan in their baggage.

The role of Singapore as a legitimate entrepot for rhino horn is perhaps the biggest problem insofar as the trade in this product for medicinal purposes is concerned. Moreover, during the past few years there has been a definite increase in the amount of rhino horn and skin coming into Singapore from Sumatra because the Singapore dealers generally offer higher prices, and the horn can freely enter the country. There is not even a duty levied on rhino products. The simplicity of getting rhino horn on the market in Singapore is why Indian rhino horn is being smuggled out of Calcutta to this destination. Ominously, there has recently been an upsurge in poaching of Indian rhinos in Assam.

China is still exporting vast quantities of various manufactured tablets containing rhino horn. These are to be found in traditional medicine shops throughout Asia ——in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines as well as in Singapore, Hong Kong and Macao. In selling such manufactured medicines the traditional pharmacists continue to cater to the demand for rhino horn. Since the rhino horn is not readily identifiable in these drugs from China, they are technically allowed to be imported by countries which have ratified C.I.T.E.S.

Hong Kong traders are legally allowed to continue to export their old stocks of rhino horn; and since 1976, when they had to obtain licences for rhino horn, 2,535 kilos have either been consumed domestically or exported. Additionally, there are some stocks of rhino horn held in Hong Kong which have never been registered, and some of them are now being smuggled out, mainly to South Korea.

Figure 4. Rhinoceros hide, mostly from the white rhinoceros in South Africa, is used by the Chinese in Macao, I-long Kong, Singapore and Malaysia to cure skin diseases. In this photograph. a Chinese pharmacist displays on the left the underside of a dried piece of rhino hide and on the right the top side.

Today South Korea is one of the most important consumers of rhino horn. It is still legal to import the horn there if it is declared and the 42.5% tax levy is paid on it. In both Seoul and Pusan, the second largest city in the country, I found rhino horn for sale to the public. In fact, it was available in 62% of the 76 oriental medicine clinics I visited in Seoul. The official import statistics for 1981 record 142 kilos of rhino horn entering the country, but this is not the correct figure; the total annual imports were probably more than double that. Nor is the place of export given in the government's statistics correct; the vast majority of rhino horn imports — both legal and illegal — come from Hong Kong, not Indonesia.

Although neither the demand nor price for rhino horn has significantly increased on international markets since 1979, the incentives for poachers to supply it from the remaining 16,000 rhinos in Africa and the 2,000 in Asia are still tremendous. Therefore, in order to relieve some of the pressure on rhinos in the wild further action must be taken against the trade. I suggest the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 . An important personality in the world of conservation should visit Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Brunei to urge the governments of these countries to ban imports and exports of rhino products. Each country has the infrastructure to enforce a ban, and this would deal a severe blow to the international trade. In the case of Singapore, which is presently unwilling to become a C.I.T.E.S. member, arguments could be presented to the government that their already enacted legislation to protect Birds of Paradise and orang-utans from international trade should be extended to encompass rhino products. It is unlikely that either South Korea or Taiwan would take over Singapore's role as an entrepot, but their use of rhino horn is so extensive that the closing of their doors to its importation is imperative. On the other hand, Brunei must stop imports not because it is a major consumer but because it could become in the future an entrepot for rhino products.

2. Continual encouragement of the use of saiga and water buffalo horn as substitutes for that of rhino should be given to the proprietors of traditional medicine shops in Asia. Also, the use of water buffalo hide as a medicinal product instead of rhino hide should be encouraged.

3. Publicity on the plight of rhinoceroses in Asia and Africa has proved effective in cutting down the demand for rhino products; therefore, it should be intensified in the English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Malay languages.

4. The Agriculture and Fisheries Department of Hong Kong should prohibit further exports of "old" rhino horn stocks.

5. In order to help the North Yemen government enforce its new law against rhino horn imports, someone familiar with the trade should visit this country for the purpose of ascertaining particulars on the present smuggling activity and how to curtail it. In addition, a strategy should be developed that will entice the carvers of expensive dagger handles to use a substitute for rhino horn.

Esmond Bradley Martin

TABLE II
AVERAGE RETAIL PRICE FOR RAW RHINOCEROS HIDE PER KILO IN LATE 1982/EARLY 1983

Place	Origin of Hide	Price per Kilo
Hong Kong	South Africa	$ 376
Macao	South Africa	360
Brunei	?	376
Singapore	Indonesia, Malaysia and South Africa	635

Source: Survey taken by author.TABLE III

AVERAGE RETAIL PRICE FOR RHINOCEROS HOOVES PER KILO IN LATE 1982/EARLY 1983

Place	Origin of Hooves	Price per Kilo
Singapore	Indonesia, Malaysia and South Africa	$ 2,329
Georgetown, Penang	Indonesia and South Africa	$ 1,968

Source: Survey taken by author.

TABLE IV

PERCENTAGE OF PHARMACIES HAVING RHINOCEROS HORN FOR SALE IN LATE 1982/EARLY 1983

Place	Total No. of Shops Examined	Rhino Horn	No. Having Rhino Horn	Percentage
Hong Kong	50		23	46
Japan				
Osaka	5		3	60
Kyoto	15		15	100
Nara	4		4	100
South Korea				
Seoul	76		47	62
Pusun	8		8	100
Taegu	20		16	80
Macao	14		9	64
Philippines				
Manila	17		4	24
Cebu	5	(total count)	0	0
Zamboanga	2	(total count)	0	0
Davao	2	(total count)	0	0
Brunei				
Bandar Seri Begawan	5	(total count)	2	40
Seria	3		0	0
Indonesia				
Medan	21		1	5
Yogyakata	4	(total count)	0	0
Solo, Java	2	(total count)	0	0
Semarang, Java	7	(total count)	2	29
Singapore	46		16	35
Malaysia				
Kuala Lampur	29		6	21
Georgetown	14		7	50

Source: Survey taken by author.

The Elephants of Gangala-na-Bodio

The first African elephant training station was set up by King Leopold in 1899 in what was then the Congo. In 1927, the station was moved to Gangala-na-Bodio, beside the present Parc National de la Garamba. In its heyday more than 35 trained elephants were present at the station. Initially, Ceylonese mahouts helped with the catching and training, but subsequently this work has been done by Belgians and Zairois. The elephants are trained with the help of older, reliable animals known as moniteurs. The latest wild caught elephant was captured in 1957.

Today there are only four elephants left, all females. One, *Luiro*, is trained as a moniteur. The elephants are no longer worked, but are kept in training by collecting fodder daily.

The potential for developing tourism around these trained elephants as part of a coordinated project to rehabilitate Garamba is clearly enormous. Indian wildlife officials have expressed an interest in redeveloping the project, and FAO is already actively involved. Such action may yet save Africa's only elephant domestication centre.

Robert Malpas