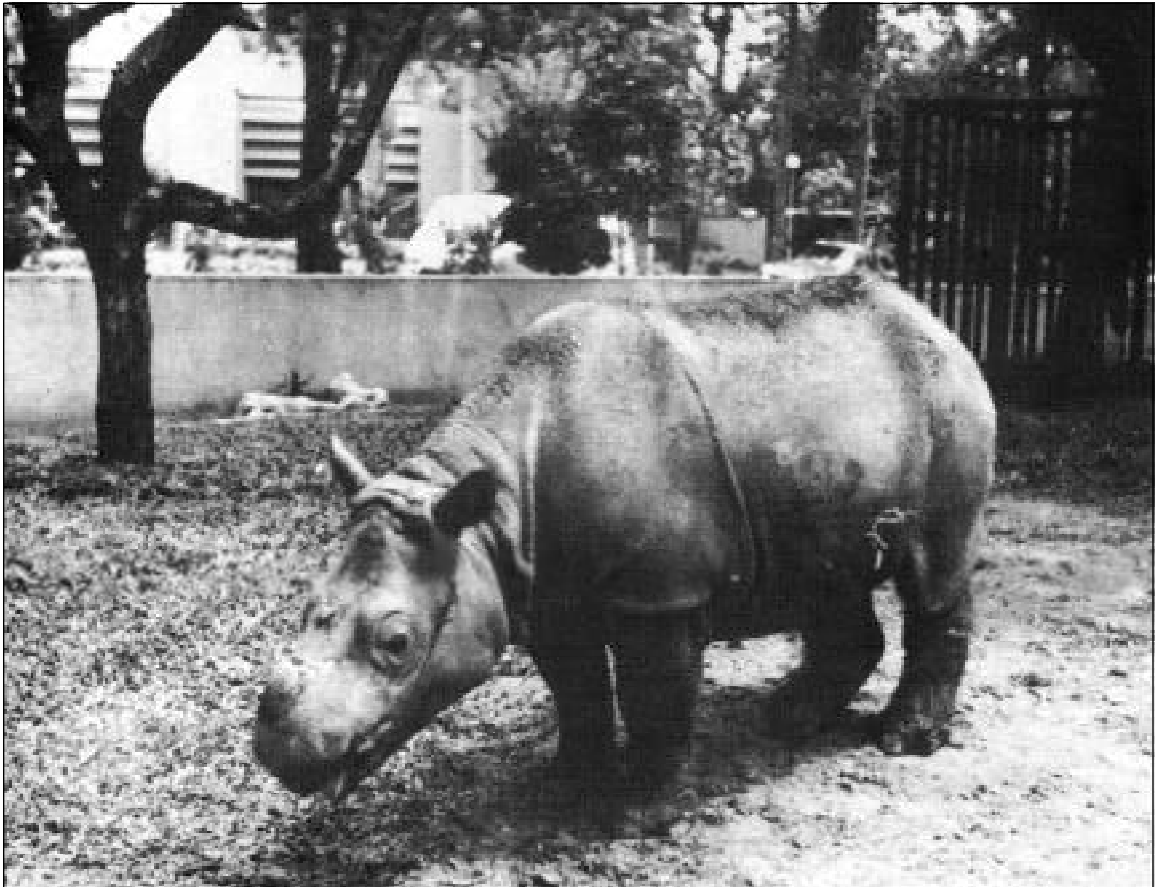

A Survey of Rhino Products for Retail Sale in Bangkok in Early 1992

Esmond Bradley Martin



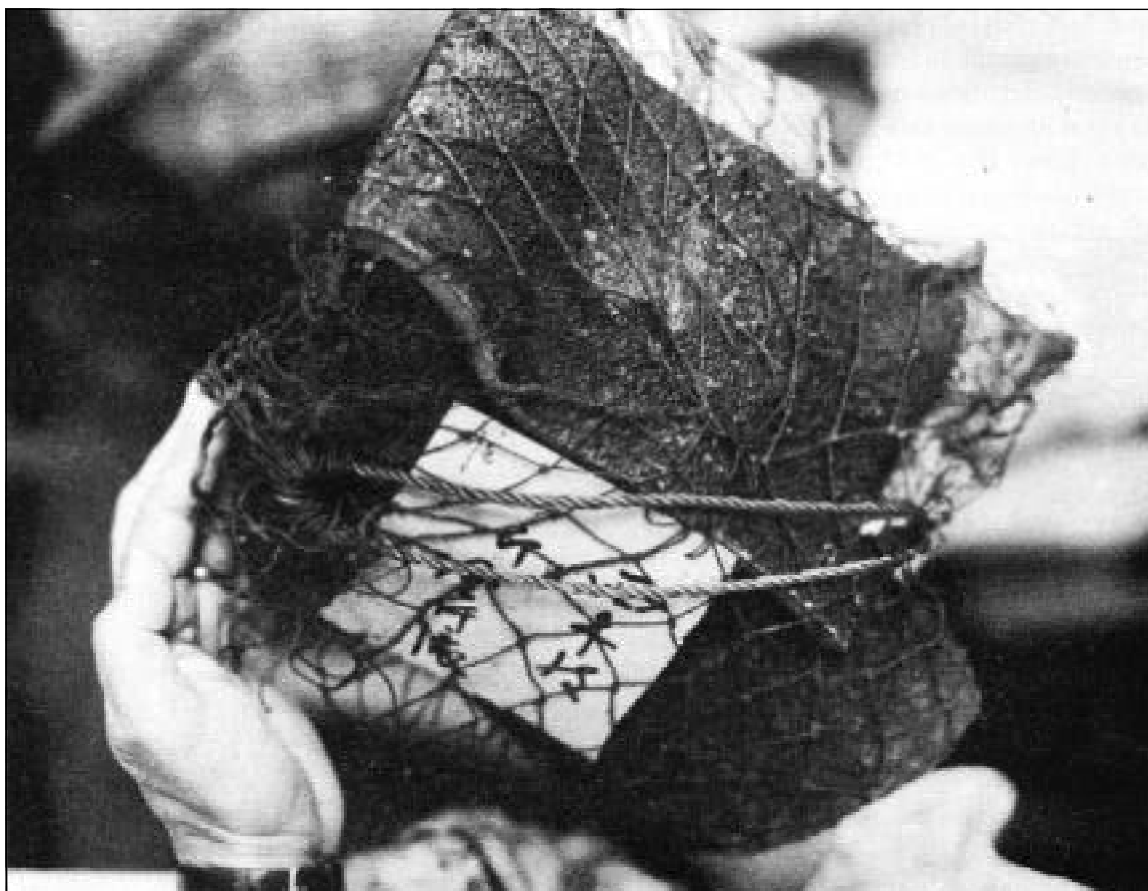
This Sumatran rhino was caught in Malaysia as part of Malaysia's captive breeding programme. However, she was given to the King of Thailand and sent to the Palace in Bangkok in January 1986. She died in the zoo a few weeks afterwards when she got her neck caught in the bars seen at the back of the picture.

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Bangkok has been for many years a major market for rhino products, including the horn, skin, nails and penis. However, in March 1992, fewer pharmacies were selling rhino horn and skin compared with my 1990 survey, and the prices had increased by less than 10% per annum during that time, despite the major growth in the Thai economy. This strongly suggests that consumer demand has not risen. This is good news for the rhinoceros.

As the main dealers were not available during my 1992 survey, it was not possible to learn if new rhino products have recently been brought into Bangkok, but most of

the rhino products for retail sale were the same pieces as in 1990. Some old stock has been sold; 24% of the pharmacies visited in 1990 offered rhino horn compared with only 14% in early 1992, a decline which has been continuing since the early 1980s (see Table 1). Also, less rhino horn was openly displayed due to the increasing awareness of the illegality of owning rhino horn from the Asian species, and because the medicine shop owners are worried that the government might inspect their businesses. During the period 1990 to 1992, the average price of African horn dropped from \$10,286 to \$5,341;



Sumatran rhino skin is still easily available in Bangkok's medicine shops.

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the average price of Asian horn rose from \$21,354 to \$31,275.

For rhino skin, all from the Sumatran animal, the retail prices for 1990 and 1992 are almost identical: \$1,717 versus \$1,721 (see Table 2). However, the percentage of medicine shops selling skin dropped from 46% to 27%. A possible reason for this apparent decline, which may also apply to rhino horn, is that some of

the pharmacists were more suspicious and may not have been totally honest about telling us of their rhino products sales. Shopkeepers realized they were selling prohibited items and consequently were more scared and unco-operative with my interpreter and myself.

The big surprise was the huge increase in the price of nails. All nails for sale are from the Sumatran species. From 1986 to 1990, their retail price rose from \$1,487

Table 1 : Average retail prices of rhinoceros horn in Bangkok

Year	Total number of pharmacies visited	Number & percent selling horn	Type of horn	Average price per kg in US \$
1979	23	12 52%	Most African	3,654
1986	44	15 34%	Most Asian	11,629
1988	52	17 33%	Most Sumatran	13,111
1990	46	11 24%	Asian/African	15,205
1992	44	6 14%	Asian/African	18,308

Source: Surveys taken by the author

Table 2: Average retail prices of rhinoceros skin in Bangkok

Year	Total number of pharmacies visited	Number & percent selling skin	Type of skin	Average price per kg in US \$
1979	-	- -	-	-
1986	44	8 18%	Sumatran	395
1988	52	7 13%	Sumatran	1,254
1990	46	21 46%	Sumatran	1,717
1992	44	12 27%	Sumatran	1,727

Source: Surveys taken by the author

Table 3 : Average retail prices of rhinoceros nails in Bangkok

Year	Total number of pharmacies visited	Number & percent selling nails	Type of nails	Average price per kg in US \$
1986	44	5 11%	Sumatran	1,487
1988	52	7 13%	Sumatran	2,295
1990	-	- -	Sumatran	2,604
1992	44	7 16%	Sumatran	13,905

Source: Surveys taken by the author

a kilo to \$2,604 (see Table 3). This latter figure is about the same as that for Singapore in 1990 (\$2,528 a kilo). By 1992, however, the average price in Bangkok had soared to \$13,905 a kilo (see Table 3) with a huge range from \$1,043 to \$31,287. One explanation is that Bangkok's prices rose to equal those in other Thai towns such as Hat Yai (\$11,345 a kilo in 1988) and Phuket (\$16,000 a kilo in 1988 also). Some of the pharmacists explained that it was becoming harder to obtain these Sumatran rhino nails, so they have recently increased the price.

It is unfortunate that members of the Forest Department, who are responsible for controlling the

trade in endangered species, almost never inspect the medicine shops as they consider this to be a low priority. According to Boonlerd Angsirijinda, the Chief Law Enforcement Officer of the Wildlife Conservation Division of the Forest Department, during the past five years only one rhino horn has been confiscated. That was in 1987 when a horn from the greater one-horned or Indian rhino was seized in Bangkok's Chinatown.

Although it is encouraging that there are fewer rhino products for sale in Bangkok, conditions at any time could change, and the pharmacists would buy new products if they were available. For instance, poaching of the Sumatran rhino could increase in eastern Burma. Most of these animals are in the Tenasserim Range near the border with Thailand, where presently they are protected by the Karen military forces. The head of this rebel group, who has been fighting the Burmese government for many years, has stated on several occasions that if one of his men were to kill a rhino in the Karen area he would be punished by death. There is no doubt that rhinos still do exist in areas controlled by the Karens (Murray Watson, pers comm, April 1992).



These Sumatran rhino products were being offered for sale beneath the counter of a medicine shop in Bangkok: a penis, a horn on top of some slices of skin and two nails on either side
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Another potential source for Asian rhino products is the island of Sumatra for which Singapore has been a market and entrepot. There has always been a demand for these horns in Singapore for traditional medicine, and traders have also re-exported some to dealers in South East Asia. But in December 1991, the Singapore Customs Authority intercepted a consignment of Asian horns sent from Sumatra. This was the first major seizure of horn by the government since joining CITES in 1986. Following this recent loss, it is possible that the exporters of rhino products in Indonesia might choose to send the horns to a safer place, namely Bangkok.

For rhino conservation and the protection of rare species, the new Wildlife Act of 1992 is the most promising piece of legislation to be passed in Thailand for many years. Article 54 of this Act stipulates a maximum prison term of seven years and/or a fine of up to 100,000 baht (about \$3,910) for hunting endangered species such as rhinos in a specifically protected area. Concerning the trade, illegal possession and import or export of rare species and their parts, Article 47 states that a person who is found guilty of such an offence will be imprisoned for up to four years or shall be fined a maximum of 40,000 baht or both. Article 55 imposes the same penalties on accomplices who illegally obtain a protected species or its parts such as Asian rhino horn or skin.

The Act also makes it compulsory for people who possess undocumented rhino commodities to register their stocks with the appropriate government authority within ninety days from the day the Act became effective (28 February 1992). The owner can continue to keep the registered rhino products, but is not allowed to sell them. If the rhino products were legally possessed some time in the past and were recently registered with the Forest Department, a temporary trading permit may be issued to allow the trader to dispose of his commodities within three years. The trader, however, must send a monthly sales report to the Forest Department.

To make this Act effective for rhino conservation, the two African species and the greater one-horned rhino will have to be included in the endangered wildlife list. When the 1992 Act was originally promulgated, only the Sumatran and Javan species were included. However, all CITES Appendix I species will soon be covered by the Act (Boonlerd, pers. comm.). Regular inspections must be carried out to check that the pharmacies are not selling prohibited rhino products. This new Act is a major piece of legislation, but for it to be effective, it has to be enforced. Hopefully, the Forest Department, Customs and other government bodies will now give a higher priority to wildlife conservation and allocate the resources needed to enforce the new Wildlife Act. Otherwise, yet more public criticism of Thailand will have to be instigated.