

Run rhino, run!

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Run rhino, run. Run for your life. Your time is running out. Your life is not worth much, but to many people your horn has magical curative properties and your horn looks good on a Yemini djambia handle. One only needs to look at what happened to the rhino that used to live in Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, to realise that rhinos may become extinct in the wilds within 10 to 20 years unless something positive is done on an international scale.

The average South African game rancher thinks or believes that rhino horn is an aphrodisiac and finds it amusing and upsetting that Oriental people would use it for this purpose. In as much the same way that the average Chinese person knows very little about Africa, its people, its different tribes each with its own and varied traditions, beliefs and traditional herbal remedies, its different religious beliefs and customs, so we South Africans know very little about China, the Chinese, their beliefs, religion, politics and even less about their traditional Oriental medicine.

My recent trip to China, the real China, the Peoples Republic of China to attend a symposium on deer and deer products, was a revelation and caused me to question many things. The answers unfortunately do not bode well for the rhino's future in the long term. Some of the questions are:

- What do we really know about traditional oriental medicine and the use of rhino horn?
- What do rhino horns, ginseng and deer antlers have in common?
- Will a legalized trade in rhino horn eventually save the rhino from the extinction that is predicted?
- If trade was possible (with the blessing of CITES) with whom do we



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trade - the Middleman, the conservation authorities in the Far East, the governments in Beijing, Seoul and Taipei or directly with the traditional healers? Please bear the following in mind: we do not have formal diplomatic relations with China or North Korea. We also know nothing about North Korea. We do know that South Korean doctors use and prescribe rhino horn and would prefer to have the horn trade legalized.

- Who needs and who uses rhino horn ?
- How much rhino horn is needed annually to supply the traditional

medicine trade not only in the Far East, but to every part of the world where Oriental people are settled? Bear in mind that wherever there is a resident oriental community, the people practice their beliefs and use their traditional remedies.

Very few South Africans can truthfully answer these questions. There is much misunderstanding and ignorance of what traditional oriental medicine really is all about and I doubt if anyone has made an effort to really find out. In a recent book written in English on traditional oriental medicine, rhino horn is prescribed for heart conditions and fever.

The question as to whether rhino horn works, should not be our concern because we are too late to change traditions. We should not question other peoples' beliefs and customs. I spoke to people who use rhino horn for treating fever, heart conditions and the flu. I met a South African who was treated for a cold with a concoction containing rhino horn and he claims that he felt better after a few hours. Telling a Chinese person to use aspirin instead of one of his traditional medicines would be very presumptuous and similar to expecting a westernized person to have acupuncture before visiting the family doctor and using western medicine.

The fact that rhino horn can be harvested under anaesthesia from a live rhino is unknown to people I met in China. Yet deer antlers from live deer are harvested and they have a flourishing pharmaceutical industry producing deer antler products. The New Zealanders, Australian and Russian deer farmers profitably export hundreds of tons of deer antler to the Orient. Why can't the same be done with rhino horn ? Perhaps it is not too late.

