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## The illegal trade in rhino horn: Yemeni dagger handles

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Rhinos face two big threats: habitat loss (such as in Sumatra, see Tom Fooses' update on Way Kambas National Park); and poachers. Rhinos poached in Africa are targeted for their horns, while in Asia it is not just the horn but the entire carcass that is used. And generally speaking, the horn from rhinos killed in East Africa tends to end up in the Yemen, where it is made into ornamental handles for daggers (jambiyas) while horn from rhinos poached in southern Africa makes its way to the Far East where it is used in traditional medicine.

Since 1978 I have studied the illegal trade in rhino horn between East Africa and the Yemen, and since 1983 with my colleague Lucy Vigne. Making trips every two years, we have monitored the black market in rhino horn, the supply chains, the illegal workshops and the buyers of the finished jambiyas. Most recently, we carried out a research trip in January 2003, for which Save the Rhino contributed US \$2,000. Our main findings are summarised below.

Almost all rhino horn that entered the Yemen from 1998-2002 originated from rhinos killed in Kenya, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the late 1990s there was little recorded poaching in eastern Africa, but in 2002 Kenya experienced the worst poaching for over 12 years. An estimated minimum of 46 rhinos was killed between 1998 and 2002



in these three countries. From this figure we ascertain the potential weight of rhino horn which may have reached the Yemen to be an average of 29 kilograms per annum.

Poaching methods are mainly snaring and shooting by rifles. Most horns are smuggled to Djibouti and then by dhow to the Yemeni coast amongst consignments of alcohol, which are illicitly moved to Sanaa. The price of horn has increased from US \$519-650 per kilo when exported from Kenya, to US \$750 when it arrives in Djibouti, and US \$1,200 per kilo when it reaches Sanaa (2002 figures). The Sanaa US dollar price for horn has remained the same since around 1985.

It's difficult to find out how much poachers receive for each horn, but one porter working with a poaching gang confessed to receiving around \$150 for 3 weeks' work. For comparison, the lowest monthly wage in Kenya is around US\$26.

In 2002 the number of workshops, where rhino horns are made into traditional dagger (jambiya) handles, was 70 and the number of craftsmen 102. This has increased since 1985 as the population grows. Nearly all handles however are made of water buffalo horn, while the number of new rhino horn handles being made has fallen significantly. This is mainly due to the shortage of rhino horn on the market.

In 2002 the Yemeni government brought in proper legislation to implement CITES' ban on the rhino horn trade, and has expanded its staff involved in wildlife conservation at the upgraded Environment Protection Agency.

To help reduce demand for rhino horn, we produced an Arabic-language poster advising against the buying of jambiyas with new rhino horn handles and distributed it widely.

