

Rhino Horn in Taipei, Taiwan

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Under the 1989 Wildlife Conservation Law in Taiwan, all import, export, trade or display for sale of rhino horn was prohibited unless expressly permitted by the Council of Agriculture, the principal authority responsible for the protection of endangered species. In August 1990, anyone possessing rhino horn was required by the COA to register their stock; no permits have ever been issued to allow the sale of rhino horn, however. Nevertheless, surveys carried out by TRAFFIC and WWF researchers in Taipei showed that pharmacists continued to sell rhino horn in 1990 (Martin and Martin, 1991) and in 1991 (Nowell et al., 1992). In May 1993, TRAFFIC Taipei carried out a spot check to determine whether and to what extent rhino horn was being sold in Taipei following a public announcement in November 1992 by the Taiwanese Government to reaffirm the ban. This report records the findings of the survey and outlines recent measures taken by Taiwan to discourage consumption of rhino horn.

BACKGROUND

On 12 November 1992, WWF-US and the National Wildlife Federation filed a petition with the US Government under the Pelly Amendment to the *Fishermen's Protection Act, 1967* to impose trade sanctions upon Taiwan for failing to control the trade in rhino horn in compliance with CITES requirements. At the same time, a campaign was launched by UK environmental groups requesting the public to boycott Taiwanese goods for the same reason.

In response, on 19 November 1992, the Council of Agriculture (COA) of the Executive Yuan announced that permits to import, export or trade rhino horn would no longer be issued (although no such permits had ever been issued), amounting effectively to a total ban. This ban was widely publicized in the local media, as was the news of the seizure of a shipment of 21 rhino horns at Chiang Kai Shek airport, Taipei, in December 1992, and subsequently no rhino horns or rhino horn medicine could be seen openly displayed for sale in any of Taipei's pharmacies.

In spite of these measures, in March 1993, the Chairman of the CITES Standing Committee wrote a letter to the authorities in Taiwan noting that Taiwan had not implemented measures sufficient to meet the terms of CITES Resolution Conf. 6.10 aimed at stopping the trade in rhino horn. These included the prohibition of all trade, the destruction of stocks and the enforcement of a total ban. It was the first time that CITES had directly addressed Taiwan which is neither recognized as a nation state by the United Nations nor, therefore, a member of CITES.

INTRODUCTION

Surveys carried out in Taipei showed that 51% of pharmacists continued to sell rhino horn or horn pieces in 1990 (Martin and Martin, 1991) and 72% of pharmacists possessed rhino horn, pieces or powder in 1991 (Nowell *et al.*, 1992). However, these two surveys used very different methodologies, the first involving the physical examination of rhino horn, discounting all powder which claimed to be rhino horn owing to the impossibility of identification (E.B. Martin, pers. comm., 1993), and the second involving simple enquiry as to whether or not rhino horn was available. It is therefore impossible to draw conclusions about market trends from these two surveys.

Where previous surveys had relied on visits to pharmacists by foreign investigators or students, the heightened awareness of retailers to the rhino horn issue discounted such an approach for any further investigation. Consequently, any continuing trade had become very much more difficult to monitor. In May 1993, TRAFFIC Taipei, assisted by local Chinese residents, undertook a brief inspection of pharmacies and medicinal wholesalers to find out whether rhino horn was still available in Taipei and, if so, to compare prices with those recorded in 1991.

METHODS

Pharmacies in Taipei municipality were visited between 24 and 27 May 1993 by eight local residents, aged between mid-30s to over 60. Each asked either for "lin yang hsi niu shui" (a mixture of Saiga Antelope *Saiga tatarica* horn/rhino horn), or for rhino horn powder alone, both of which are used as remedies in the treatment of high fever. Prices for rhino horn and Saiga Antelope horn were ascertained separately where possible. Investigators also asked whether the rhino horn was "water horn" - a term used by the Chinese medical community to refer to African horn, or "fire horn", which comes from the three Asian species. The investigators selected 22 pharmacies in which to carry out their research.

The authors also conducted interviews with wholesalers in the island's principal wholesale traditional medicine market, situated on Ti-Hwa Street, Taipei, in order to determine the wholesale price of rhino horn.

RESULTS

It should be appreciated when interpreting these results that a sample of 22 pharmacies is small in comparison with the total number of pharmacies in Taipei and is not necessarily representative.

Rhino horn powder is often mixed or substituted with cheaper ingredients such as Saiga Antelope horn or Water Buffalo *Bubalus bubalis* horn. During the survey, rhino horn powder, sometimes mixed with Saiga Antelope horn

| Pharmacy | African powder (US\$/g) | Asian powder (US\$/g) |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | - | - |
| 2 | - | - |
| 3 | 5.13 | - |
| 4 | - | - |
| 5 | 4.10 | unknown ¹ |
| 6 | - | 51.28 |
| 7 | 5.13 | - |
| 8 | unknown ¹ | - |
| 9 | 5.13 | - |
| 10 | - | - |
| 11 | - | 30.77 |
| 12 | - | - |
| 13 | - | - |
| 14 | - | (41.03) |
| 15 | - | - |
| 16 | - | - |
| 17 | - | unknown ¹ |
| 18 | - | - |
| 19 | - | - |
| 20 | - | - |
| 21 | - | - |
| 22 | (4.10) | - |
| Average | 4.72 | 41.03 |

Table 1. Retail price and availability of rhino horn in Taipei municipality, 24-27 May 1993.

¹Rhino horn powder was bought ready-mixed with powdered Saiga Antelope horn and the price for the rhino horn powder alone was not ascertained. Figures in brackets represent prices of rhino horn powder quoted by pharmacies where none was available immediately.

The wholesale price of African rhino horn in Ti-Hwa Street was reported to be US\$1600 a kg.

powder, or a substance which the pharmacist claimed to be rhino horn powder, was found to be readily available in eight pharmacies (36%) and a small quantity of powder (3.75 g) was purchased in five out of the eight. Only African horn powder/mixture was purchased. Asian horn was reported present in four pharmacies but not bought. Without conducting chemical analysis in a laboratory, facilities currently unavailable in Taipei, it is not possible to determine whether the powders purchased consist of genuine or fake rhino horn.

Two pharmacists claimed that although they had no rhino horn they would be able to obtain it within one or two days; these pharmacists were not included in the results of the survey. Pharmacies 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13 and 14 (see Table 1) are all located in or close to Ti-Hwa Street. Of these seven pharmacies, four were in possession of rhino horn.

The retail price of African rhino horn varied between NT\$400 and NT\$500 a "chien" (3.75 g), average NT\$460 a chien, equivalent to approximately US\$4.72 a gram. The price of Asian rhino horn ranged from NT\$3000 to NT\$5000 a chien, an average of NT\$4000 a chien, equivalent to US\$41.03 a gram (see Table 1). These data are based on a sample size of five African horns and three Asian horns.

Some pharmacists who said they did not possess rhino horn may not have been telling the truth. For example, pharmacy 16 claimed not to sell rhino horn any more but said he had done in the past. Pharmacy 10 claimed not to sell rhino horn because it is a prohibited substance. Pharmacist 20 was possibly suspicious and claimed not to have rhino horn although a wooden sign in the shop advertised "Saiga and rhino horn". Pharmacist 22 claimed to have sold rhino horn in the past, and could still get it if the buyer wanted, but no longer stocked it for fear of arrest. Substitutes to treat fever, such as Saiga Antelope horn, Water Buffalo horn and herbal mixtures, were recommended instead. The investigator returned two days later but the pharmacist still did not have any rhino horn in stock. One pharmacist (no.9) claimed to have ground a whole horn into powder for fear that the Department of Health might discover it.

DISCUSSION

Although rhino horn is still available in Taipei, it would appear that the retail price of this commodity has fallen considerably since the last survey was conducted in 1991: from an average of NT\$876 a chien (US\$8.98 a gram) in 1991 (Nowell *et al.*, 1992) to NT\$460 a chien (US\$4.72 a gram) for African horn, a reduction of 47% (Figure 1) and from NT\$6320 a chien in 1991 (Nowell *et al.*, 1992) to NT\$4000 a chien (US\$41.03 a gram) for Asian horn, a reduction of 37% (Figure 2).

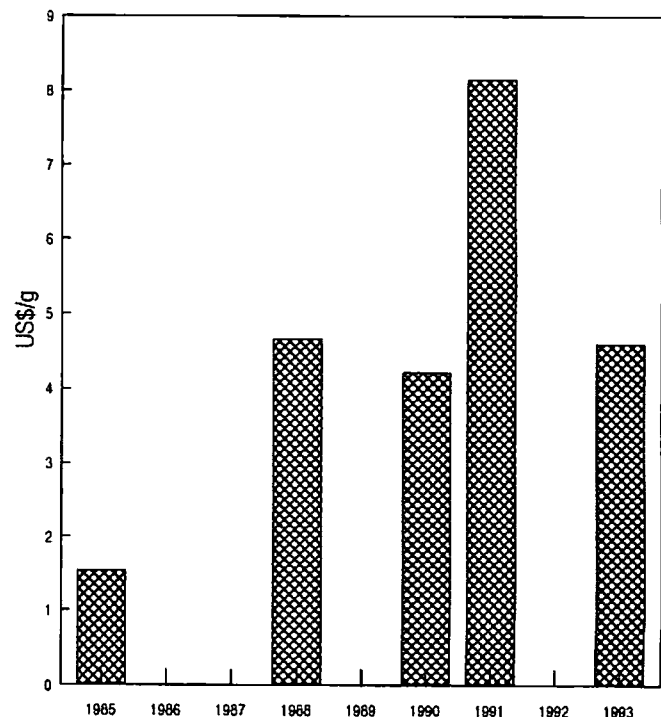


Figure 1. Retail price of African rhino horn in Taipei.

Sources: 1985-1990: Leader-Williams, 1992; 1991: Nowell *et al.*, 1992; 1993: survey by the authors.

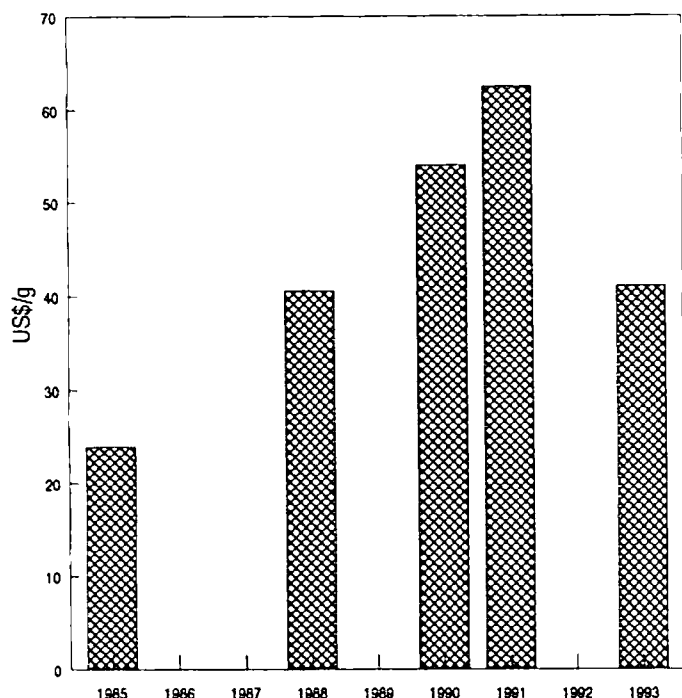


Figure 2. Retail price of Asian rhino horn in Taipei.
Sources: 1985-1990: Leader-Williams, 1992; 1991: Nowell, et al., 1992; 1993: survey by the authors.

The wholesale price of African rhino horn has also fallen considerably. Interviews with medicinal wholesalers by Nowell *et al.*, in 1991, revealed the wholesale price to be about US\$3000 a kg. The current wholesale price of US\$1600 a kg indicates a reduction of 47%, closely in line with the change in retail prices. One explanation for the observed data is that, as the Taiwanese economy grew and businesses prospered during the 1970s and 1980s, pharmacists would invest spare cash in a whole rhino horn if they earned enough to do so. A rhino horn represented an investment which could ensure future supply and

provide a steady, if modest, income because the horn was dispensed in small amounts as powder. Furthermore, a rhino horn has always been regarded, especially by the traditional Chinese medical community, as an exotic, semi-mystical object of considerable life-giving properties which, in some family-owned pharmacies, was handed down from generation to generation. A rhino horn was therefore a highly desirable commodity to those pharmacists who could afford it. By 1991, the total quantity of rhino horn possessed by retail pharmacists in Taiwan was estimated to be 4667 kg (Milliken *et al.*, 1993), an amount greatly in excess of the annual demand for rhino horn medicine, which is estimated to be in the order of 200 kg to 400 kg (Milliken *et al.*, 1993). As the rate of growth in the economy slowed over the past two years, however, fewer pharmacists have wanted to invest in rhino horn and consequently the wholesale price has fallen dramatically. The retail price, which was never demand-driven at its peak, has fallen in line with the wholesale price.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that despite the efforts of the authorities in Taipei, rhino horn is still available illegally. As has been noted, the authors cannot be certain that the powders purchased contained genuine rhino horn or, given the recent prohibition on trade, that each of the pharmacists visited was being candid regarding whether or not they were in possession of rhino horn. The fact that eight out of 22 were apparently in possession is indication however that rhino horn is still available on the Taipei market to some extent.

POSTSCRIPT

Since the TRAFFIC survey was conducted, and under the threat of trade embargoes by the USA and CITES, in June 1993 the COA agreed to implement a number of measures to improve the enforcement of the 1989 *Wildlife Conservation Law* (WCL), which it had been urged to take

Rhino horns seized at Chiang Kai-shek International airport, Taipei, in September 1993.



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Stickers have been issued by the Government to those pharmacists who have signed a written declaration that states that neither rhino horn nor Tiger products are for sale in their shops.

for a number of years by TRAFFIC and others. These include:

- the establishment of a specialized task force dedicated to the enforcement of the WCL;
- an increase in the fines under the WCL for trafficking rhino horn and other products or parts of endangered species, from NT\$30 000 to NT\$300 000, and an increase in the maximum prison sentence from one to three years;
- the offer of a reward of NT\$20 000 in return for information leading to the seizure of rhino horn.

The deadline by which Taiwan is required to meet the USA's terms under the Pelly Amendment has been extended to March 1994. At the time of writing it remains to be seen whether Taiwan will comply by undertaking those actions it has said it will take in order to avoid trade sanctions.

Apart from the promised new measures under the law, the police have taken a number of steps intended to lead to improved enforcement. Officers have been sent to South Africa, the principal source of African rhino horns entering Taiwan, to liaise with the responsible authorities in that country and a number of seizures have also been made recently: in September 1993, a Bhutanese princess carrying 22 Indian Rhino *Rhinoceros unicornis* horns in her suitcase was apprehended by Customs officers at Chiang Kai Shek International airport. She claimed that she had bought the horns in Bhutan, had been unable to find a buyer in Hong Kong and so had come to Taipei to sell them. She has been charged under the *Wildlife Conservation Law* and is likely to be sentenced to one year in prison. It is notable that four people found guilty of rhino horn smuggling last December have been charged with forgery of Customs documentation rather than contravention of the *Wildlife Conservation Law* as the penalties for such offences are more severe.

The Government is also making efforts to persuade pharmacists not to sell products containing rhino horn or Tiger parts and has issued stickers to those who sign a written declaration which states that such products are not for sale in their shops.

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