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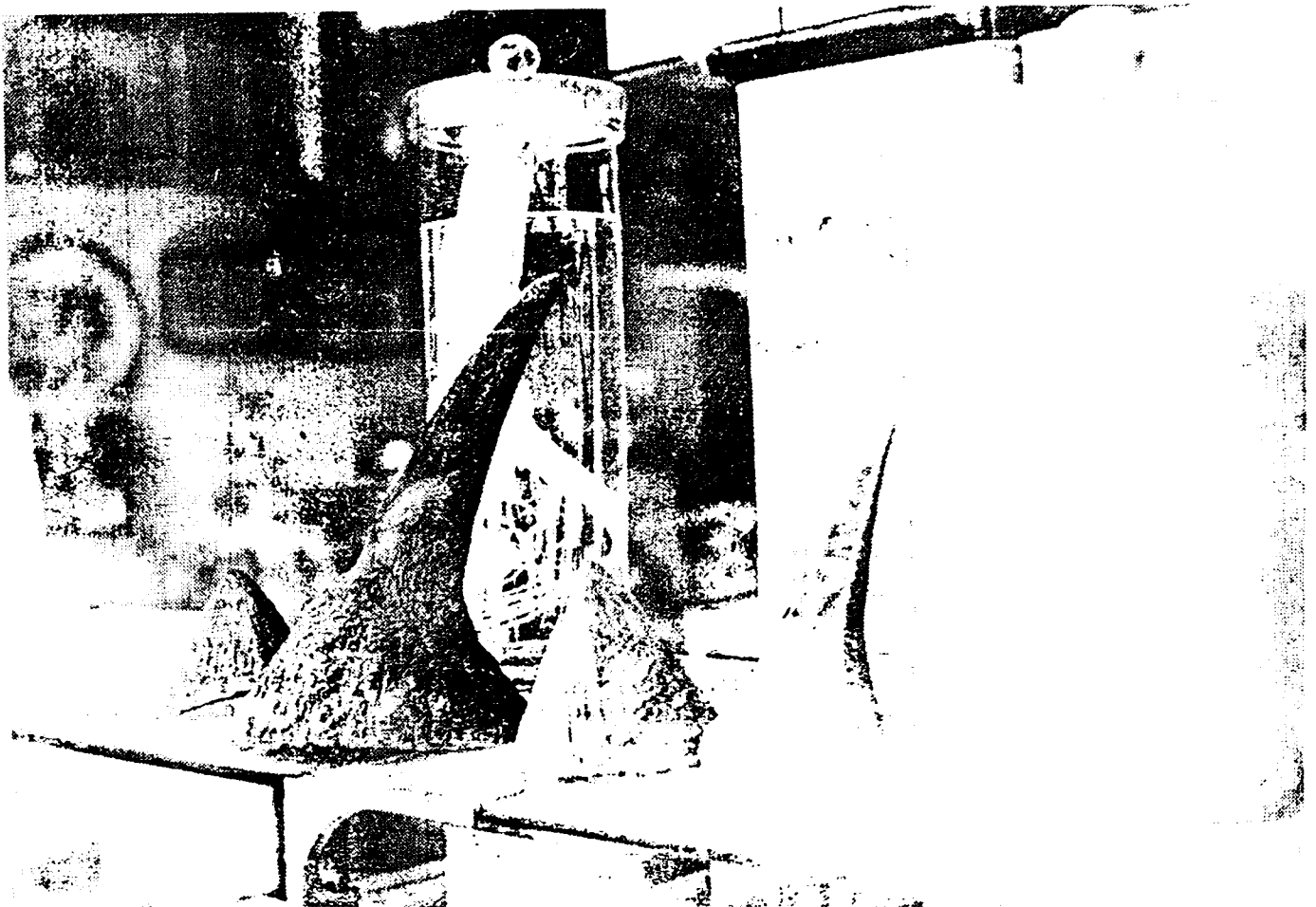
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JULY 1986

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THE RHINO HORN TRADE 1985-1986



Rhino horns in a Singapore medicine hall

Photo: WWF/Michèle Dépraz

Since 1970 there has been a catastrophic decline in rhinos, greater than that of any other large mammal, with numbers having decreased by 84% over the past 16 years. The main reason has been poaching for horns to make dagger handles in the Yemen Arab Republic and for medicinal use in eastern Asia. Dr Esmond Bradley Martin has been spearheading the effort to investigate the trade and to divert users to substitutes for rhino horn. This is his latest report.

THE RHINO HORN TRADE 1985-1986

The most dramatic decline in rhinos has been that of the black rhinoceros, which has fallen from 65,000 in 1970 to 4,500 today. The black rhino has been either entirely or almost eliminated in the past six years from many African countries, including Mozambique, Angola, Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Chad, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia and Somalia. Recently, the relatively large populations in Zambia and Tanzania have been severely reduced by extremely heavy poaching.

The surge in the illegal killing of the rhinoceros in Africa is now nearly being paralleled in India, home of just over half of all Asia's rhinos. From the late 1960s to 1981 the Forest Department in Assam (over 95% of India's rhinos live in this state), had practically stopped all the poaching, but in 1982 gangs killed 44 of these animals, the following year 91, in 1984 44 and in 1985 54. In West Bengal the rhinos have been reduced to under 40. As for the Sumatran rhino, some very disturbing news has emerged from traders.

Since 1975 the main cause of the massive slaughter of the world's rhinos has been illegal killing for their horns. Habitat destruction, which used to be an important factor in the decline, especially for the three Asian species, has been relatively insignificant recently, compared with poachers' bullets.

Local government departments dealing with wildlife matters in Africa and Asia have poured in many millions of dollars in valiant attempts to save the rhinos by expanding anti-poaching patrols, increasing manpower, modernizing equipment, purchasing more vehicles, lorries and aircraft and obtaining modern weapons, but overall the efforts have failed, and it was not until early 1979 that even the most basic facts became known concerning the trade in rhino products. Conservationists were unaware that the single largest market for rhino horn is the Yemen Arab Republic or North Yemen, where it is used for making dagger handles, and they had still to learn that rhino horn is never

consumed by the Chinese as an aphrodisiac, but instead is used throughout Southeast Asia as a fever-reducing drug.

Following this first investigation of the trade, a further monitoring project was carried out in 1982, when prices for rhino horn were documented and trade routes disclosed. It was then realized that if the demand for rhino horn in Asia were not reduced, there would be little hope of saving rhinos. As long as the demand stayed high, illegal hunters, supported by well-funded and clever middlemen, would kill rhinos for economic gain. An important aspect of the project then was to encourage the use of substitutes for rhino products which, in my opinion, is probably the single most important endeavour to be initiated for rhino conservation.

In early 1985, under the auspices of WWF, with support from IUCN, the New York Zoological Society, the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife, Columbus Zoo and the International Trust for Nature Conservation, I embarked on another one-year project. The main terms of reference were as follows.

- 1) Obtain the latest information on the smuggling routes from Africa and within Asia for rhino products and document their present-day prices.
- 2) Examine how widely rhino products are consumed in Asia and ascertain if there have been any significant changes since 1982.
- 3) Put the maximum pressure on those governments which still allow legal trade in rhino products across their borders to change their laws to prohibit such commerce: South Korea, Hong Kong (for "old stocks" of rhino horn), Macao, Taiwan, Brunei and Singapore.
- 4) Encourage further use of substitutes for rhino products by importers, wholesalers, heads of pharmaceutical associations and traditional doctors.
- 5) Initiate a major public awareness

campaign in Africa and Asia on the deteriorating status of rhinos, on the significance of conserving all five species, and the importance of using substitutes for various parts of the rhinoceros.

China was my first stop, and I spent one month visiting some of the largest cities in the country. Only in two cities, Guangzhou and Xian, was rhino horn available in the medicine shops. In Xian, half the shops offered it for sale at an average price of US\$ 2,413 a kg; in Guangzhou 17% of the shops sold it at an average price of US\$ 18,722 a kg. The main reason for the higher price in Guangzhou was that the horn was still being imported from Hong Kong and world market prices were being paid for it, while in Xian no new horn was coming in.

It is not surprising that new stocks of rhino horn have been coming to Guangzhou. The Cantonese, more than any other people in China, have a great fascination for all sorts of animal products. Besides rhino horn, the traditional medicine shops in Guangzhou sell rhinoceros hide at US\$ 146 a kg, water buffalo horn as a substitute for rhino horn, geckos as a sexual stimulant for US\$1 a pair (one must consume a male and a female), elephant ivory for treating liver problems, sea horses as another aphrodisiac, snakes for the relief of leg pains, deer penises at US\$ 300 a kg (which may be soaked in Chinese wine or brandy that is drunk before sexual intercourse), and monkey bones and meat (US\$ 1,200 a kg) for the purpose of increasing the appetite of small children. The predilection of the Cantonese for consuming exotic animals has given rise to the popular saying in China that the Cantonese will eat anything on four legs except the kitchen table.

Imported rhino horn (almost all of African origin), is now mainly used in manufacturing patent medicines - and even these are rarely found on the domestic market. Large factories in Beijing, Shanghai, Tientsin, Chengdu and Tsingtao produce items such as "Rhinoceros and Antelope Horn Febrifugal Tablets", "Dendrobium Moniliforme Night Sight Pills" and "Laryngitis Pills". These are exported in large quantities all over eastern Asia and earn the factories hard currency. Although China is a signatory to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which bans all international trade in rhino products, the import and export of manufactured medicines containing rhino horn continues to be allowed because of the difficulties in identifying small quantities of rhino horn powder in pharmaceutical products consisting mainly of other compounds.

At a couple of the medicine factories I visited, I was told by senior staff that if they stopped using rhinoceros horn and took it off the list of ingredients on the labels of their medicines, then sales would decline. However, at others I met with great success. I explained to Mr Yu Yun, the Deputy Manager of the China National Medicines and Health Products Import and Export Corporation, that selling medicines abroad with rhino horn in them encourages further use of rhino products and in turn puts more pressure on the remaining live animals. He agreed to look for suitable substitutes and promised to eliminate rhino horn from the medicines his company makes in the near future. The Director of the Shanghai Medicine Company said that he had started using some water buffalo horn in place of rhino in 1984 when the Chinese government prohibited the use of rhinoceros horn in any newly devised medicines. Moreover, even though it is still permitted in those which have been marketed for some time, this Director also said that the Shanghai Medicine Company, which employs 14,000 people, planned to phase out entirely the use of rhino horn in all its medicines.

The new rhino horn that came into China in 1985 was bought from Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore and Thailand, according to traders abroad. One exporter in Bangkok told me that he personally carried 11 kg of African rhino horn by air to Beijing and sold it to one of

the main pharmaceutical factories - which was a government-owned enterprise!

Hong Kong had been the main importer of rhino horn from the end of World War II up until 1979 when the government agreed to conform to the principles of CITES and banned further imports. At that time, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries requested that all stocks of rhino horn be registered, 2,167 kg were registered. During the next six years most of this large stock of horn legally left the colony, but in allowing it to do so the government was abetting the trade.

My next stop was Taiwan, formerly a large importer of rhino horn. Between 1980 and 1984 an annual average of 83 kg was legally brought into the country, but to avoid import taxes, there was a considerable amount of smuggled horn as well. Taiwanese fishing boats go into international waters to meet mainland Chinese, with whom they exchange watches, radios and other electronic gadgets for many kinds of raw medicinal products, liquors and fish. In addition, there is smuggling of goods from Hong Kong into the largest port of Taiwan, Kaohsiung. Taiwanese government officials are aware of these activities and are trying to clamp down on them. My survey showed that 76% of the medicine shops in Taipei and 90% of those in Kaoshiung offered rhino horn for sale in December, 1985.

Because Taiwan was still one of the largest importers of rhino horn and hide in 1985, a great deal of external pressure was put on the government, especially by Tom Milliken, Director of TRAFFIC, Japan. Fortunately, one of the Ministers of State, Mr Chang Fengshu, also the head of the local Society for Wildlife and Nature, was extremely concerned and lobbied other ministers and heads of government departments. In mid-1985, the Duke of Edinburgh, President of WWF, sent a letter to Minister Chang, encouraging the government to close down this commerce. Within a few days of its arrival, the Taiwanese government stopped the legal

import and export of rhinoceros products. This was on 17 August 1985.

A similar type of international pressure was put on South Korea which, like Taiwan, was a major consumer and had official statistics showing only a small portion of the total imports. In 1982 I had approached the head of the Korean Oriental Doctors Association and requested that the Association encourage the use of a substitute for rhino horn, but I was strongly rebuked because rhino horn is an important ingredient for the ubiquitous Chung Sim Hwan balls that are used to cure a wide variety of ailments, such as high blood pressure, nose bleeds, paralysis, body pains and "contaminated blood". In 1983 I widely publicized the fact that South Korea was still importing large quantities of rhino horn and, at least partially on account of this adverse publicity, the Korean Ministry of Health and Social affairs issued an order in November, 1983, demanding the elimination of rhino horn from all medicines. The Ministry of Trade and Industry followed this up with a directive prohibiting all imports and exports of rhino products that came into effect in 1984. Final legislation on this was passed in 1985.

The Oriental Medicine Clinics, the purchasers of the raw horn, were consequently deprived of new sources, and when I visited them in early 1986 the pharmacists were very annoyed and blamed me for the situation. However, over the past couple of years, scientists at the Kyung Hee University have accepted water buffalo horn as a substitute for that of rhino in the Chung Sim Hwan balls and are encouraging its use. The government has also stopped some of the smuggling.

The Japanese government banned the international trade in rhinoceros products in 1980 and actively promoted the use of saiga antelope horn as a substitute. The results have been very satisfactory, especially in Tokyo. In a 1980 survey in the capital city, 44% of the larger pharmacies were found to be selling rhino horn, but by early 1986 this had dropped to 17%. In Osaka,

a more traditional part of Japan, the percentage fell from 90% to 76%. The importers of herbs and animal products for medicines said that little rhino horn was being smuggled into the country because people had generally accepted saiga as a replacement. The remaining problem, and it is only a small one, is that a major manufacturer of medicines is still having one of its products, "Kyushin", which contains rhino horn, sold in some pharmacies. The manufacturer has agreed to stop using rhino horn, but in January, 1986, original "Kyushin" was still available.

In 1984, Macao, a tiny Portuguese enclave, became one of the world's largest rhino horn importers, because by then most Asian countries had prohibited the international trade but there was still a considerable demand. Traders found Macao an ideal entrepôt: rhino horn could be brought in and taken out legally; it was close to Guangzhou and, by jet foil, only 45 minutes from Hong Kong. Even though both Portugal (which administers Macao) and China (which has sovereignty over Macao) are CITES members, the regulations have not been applied here.

According to the CITES Secretariat, 160 kg of rhino horn were taken from Portugal to Macao in June and July, 1984. Another shipment of so-called "old stock of Mozambique horn" was exported from Portugal in November 1984 to Macao. More horn was sent to Macao in 1985, including a large shipment of 100 kg from Lisbon, declared to customs as "old black rhino horn from Mozambique". I pressed a trader to reveal where most of this horn was going from Macao. At first he did not want to discuss the matter, but after I told him that I knew his supplier's name and the exact quantities of horn imported, he became curious. He wanted to find out how I had come to know about the trade. He made several phone calls, attempting to discover whether I was a police officer, a fellow trader or an overly inquisitive academic. For four hours we bartered information and I was able finally to confirm what officers in the Agriculture and Fisheries Department in Hong Kong and the CITES

Secretariat suspected: most of the new rhino horn is re-exported to Hong Kong and mainland China.

Towards the end of 1985 some members of the government became embarrassed over Macao's tarnished international reputation as an entrepôt for elephant ivory, which was mostly smuggled out of Africa. They also began to wonder about Macao's possible connection with endangered species trade. To avoid further criticism, the government decided to refuse any more requests for import licences for rhino horn as of 19 December 1985, but traders did not know this until Macao officially published the text of the CITES on 22 February 1986.

Another small place importing rhino products is the Sultanate of Brunei, an oil-rich, newly-independent country on the north coast of Borneo. The demand for rhino products comes exclusively from the 50,000 Chinese residents, but they buy very small quantities, which come from Singapore. Exports of Sumatran rhino products are illegal, but the act does not refer to other rhino species. Thus, if the "Macao Connection" does close down, it would be possible, under present Brunei legislation, for the Sultanate to become the next major entrepôt in Southeast Asia.

Prince Philip, President of WWF International, has written to the Sultan of Brunei on the importance of conserving the rhinoceros.

The single greatest problem concerning the trade in rhino products in eastern Asia is Singapore, which still legally allows imports and exports of rhino products. A particularly unfortunate effect is that Singapore has become the largest entrepôt in the world for Sumatran horn. And, in Sabah, Malaysia, which has a Sumatran rhino population of between 40 and 70, a minimum of 12 of these animals have been killed since 1982, according to Patrick Andau, the Assistant Chief Game Warden. Poachers remove the skin and hooves as well as the horns and middlemen send them to Singapore via a syndicate in Tawau,

near the Indonesian border. One businessman in Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, told me that the Tawau smugglers put the rhino horns into sea cucumbers for shipment by air to Singapore. Furthermore, wholesalers of rhino products in Singapore informed me that they are still buying various rhino products from Indonesian sailors. This explains why the percentage of shops selling rhinoceros horn in Djakarta has declined from 27 in 1980 to six in 1986: Indonesian traders can make more money sending the Sumatran horn to Singapore for sale where people are willing not only to pay more for it, but also to pay in Singapore dollars, a hard currency.

Singapore is also the main market for Indian rhino horn. From 1982 to 1985 a minimum of 233 rhinos were illegally killed in the state of Assam, the largest number for many decades. Very, very little of this horn remains in India. Almost all the horn is sent to Calcutta for transshipment to Singapore, where it is either sold in the medical halls or smuggled to other countries. If it were not for this Singapore trade, the illegal killing of India's rhinos would be far less. There are no other main markets in the world where these horns can be legally imported and exported. In other words, Singapore's open market is responsible for the severe rhino poaching now taking place in Sabah, parts of Indonesia and in India.

Of the medical halls I visited in Singapore, 39% had rhino horn for sale (and most was Sumatran), 24% sold rhino nails (US\$ 554 a kg) and 15% rhino hide (US\$ 496 a kg). It is therefore important to note that Singapore is not only an entrepôt, but one of the larger consumers of Asian rhino products today.

In order to close down this trade and commerce in other endangered species, the CITES Secretariat has been urging Singapore to join the Convention. Singapore announced in 1984 that it might, but did not give a date. In November, 1985, Prince Philip wrote to Prime Minister Lee Yuan' Yew, informing

him of the rhino conservation crisis and how it could be redressed if Singapore would become a member of CITES. On 2nd December 1985 the prime minister replied:

"I share your concern for the survival of the rhinoceroses in Africa and Asia.

"Singapore has already decided to become a party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES). Legislation to implement this decision is being drafted. We are in correspondence with CITES Secretariat in Switzerland for their advice on the procedure and protocols for accession to CITES. I expect this to be finalised next year."

Thailand is also a major entrepôt for Asian rhino products, though, unlike Singapore, this trade has been illegal at least since 1972. I carried out a survey of the Chinese pharmacies in Bangkok during February, 1986, and discovered that 34% of them had rhino horn for sale (at an average retail price of US\$ 11,629 a kg), 18% rhinoceros hide (US\$ 395 a kg), and 11% nails (US\$ 1,487 a kg). There were, in addition, other rhino products which had recently been sold or were still available and which are rarely seen elsewhere in Asia. Dried rhino blood was priced at US\$ 230 a kg, it is used as a general tonic and had been obtained from a Sumatran rhino carcass. From other Sumatran rhino carcasses meat was sold for US\$ 19 a kg and bones, which are made into a poultice for treating sore muscles, cost US\$ 115 a kg. A proprietor of one pharmacy proudly showed me the dried, undigested leaves from the upper intestine of a Sumatran rhino, which he offered to me for US\$ 115 a kg (to relieve gastric pains).

But perhaps the rarest of all - and which I actually saw - was Sumatran rhino penises. Penises from other animals are fairly common in traditional Chinese medicine, and, with the exception of the elephant's, which is used for treating asthma attacks, are considered aphrodisiacs. The most powerful one is believed to be the fur

seal's and it is readily available in the large cities of Southeast Asia. Next in potency is the rhino penis, but it has been extremely difficult to obtain for many years; and, unlike the tiger's, it is not faked. One Chinese pharmacy in Bangkok had six rhino penises for sale - and all were Sumatran, with the distinctive crossbar (known as the palang). These were expensive, of course; the average price was US\$ 600, and the majority of the customers who would purchase one were overseas Chinese who boil them in water with ginseng or other ingredients.

I spoke to a least four traders and managers of Chinese pharmacies in Bangkok who told me that they had bought their rhino products from animals killed within the past five years in Laos, Burma and Thailand. One businessman said that he had been receiving one or two full Sumatran rhino carcasses each year; I carefully examined the products he had for sale in his shop at the time, and they were all genuine. He said that he pays between US\$ 3,800 and US\$ 7,600 for a carcass (excluding the horns), which are not even dried until they are brought to the city. The last he purchased was in April, 1985. If this information is true - and I have no reason to believe that it is not - then conservationists will need to revise their thinking on the protection of Sumatran rhinos.

From information supplied by various traders in Asia (including those in North Yemen) and from what few statistics there are on local trade, it appears that a yearly average of three tonnes of new African rhinoceros horn was put onto the international market from 1980 to 1984. Half the horn went to North Yemen, mostly from Khartoum, the United Arab Emirates and Djibouti, having originated from black rhinos killed in the Central African Republic, Sudan, Tanzania and Zambia. The remaining tonne and a half went to eastern Asia, shipped mostly from Burundi, Namibia, Portugal, the United Arab Emirates, Zambia, Tanzania and the Central African Republic.

In addition, from 1980 to 1985, ap-

proximately 40 kg of Indian rhino horn were put on the market on average each year, and about 10 kg of Sumatran rhino horn, which may represent five per cent of the population of this species. Singapore and Thailand are the main entrepôts and consuming countries for Asian horn. Although the amount of new Asian rhino horn on the market is minute when compared to that of African, the wholesale value per annum has been approximately US\$ 450,000, while the African horn is probably worth about US\$ 2,000,000.

The quantity of rhino horn put onto the international market from 1972 to 1979 was approximately an average eight tonnes a year, which means there has been a decline of about five tonnes yearly in the early 1980s. However, the wholesale prices for Asian and African horn (US\$ 9,000 and US\$ 650 a kg, respectively), have hardly increased. And, as noted above, supplies of horn are reaching Asia from a variety of places in Africa, Europe and the Middle East, so there is no monopoly position which might affect the stagnant price. Rhino horn is also readily available in many countries of eastern Asia, and internal trade in it is often still legal. Therefore, we can positively state that there has been a significant decrease in the demand for it - otherwise, the prices would have skyrocketed for the very considerably smaller supply.

Even North Yemen, the main consuming country, is showing a marked decrease in demand. Now, the vast majority of those people who wanted and had the means to buy daggers with rhino horn handles have them, and the younger people's demand for it is not so great as it was in the recent past because of increased westernization in the country. Moreover, in the south of the country rhino horn is no longer imported by the traders due to the decline in the demand, unlike in the north, few people there wear daggers because of change in fashion. Since 1982, the government of North Yemen, under pressure from international conservation organizations, has been attempting to discourage the making of

THE RHINO HORN TRADE 1985-1986

rhinoceros horn handles for daggers and has outlawed imports of this horn. A third factor, although very recent, is the sharp devaluation of the Yemeni currency, which has made rhino horn relatively more expensive than it was, domestic cow and buffalo horn are used more extensively now for the making of dagger handles than ever before.

In eastern Asia the demand for rhino horn has sharply decreased because young people do not believe so strongly in the efficacy of traditional medicine. But, even more importantly, those who would have requested rhino horn at their neighbourhood pharmacy some four or five years ago are now willing to rely on saiga antelope horn instead to cure high fever. Pharmacists no longer offer rhino horn so readily, they, as well as importers, wholesalers and doctors have been very strongly urged to deal in saiga antelope and water buffalo instead. Both of these are very

much cheaper, and they are acceptable substitutes in traditional pharmacology.

A WWF project initiated in 1982, in which I was involved, encouraged this trend, and there was also a concerted effort to outlaw rhino horn imports in many Asian countries. The news conferences, articles in the Southeast Asian press and television coverage of the rhino problems have made an impact. I think the strategies used to discourage the demand have been successful, but I feel they must continue. Any slacking could well swing the pendulum back, and a resurgence in the demand, like that which has recently developed in Thailand for Sumatran rhino products, could spell the final doom for African and Asian rhinos outside zoos and small holding grounds where the animals have to be fenced in enclosures and guarded day and night. Would the five species survive under such conditions?

Esmond Bradley Martin