



From the Jungle to Kathmandu: Horn and Tusk Trade

Esmond Bradley Martin

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FOREWORD

The Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros Unicornis*) is a national icon of Nepal. It is also a mysterious pachyderm. Legendary for its enormous powers, erratic temperament, feared for its extraordinary strengths, and prehistoric in origin, the rhino is inundated with contradictions. Celebrated in myths, religion, and song and yet slaughtered by poachers for its psychotherapeutic powers, the rhino survives in Nepal in greatest numbers in Chitwan National Park – a World Heritage Site. In the last two decades, a few have been translocated from Chitwan to Bardia National Park and Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve signifying Nepal's successes in conserving her natural heritage. Recently, Nepal has gone through an unprecedented historical upheaval that transferred the country from an ancient kingdom to a 21st century republic. Nature conservation now stands at the crossroad of the new Nepal, as there has been a momentous paradigm shift on governance, both in style and substance. However, the rhino's ranking as Nepal's iconic symbol of cultural dignity remains unchallenged—both within and outside the country—irrespective of political ideology or faith. Therefore, it is aptly pertinent that the Wildlife Watch Group (WWG), a leading environmental watchdog in Nepal, took upon itself to publish this book. This publication also reinforces the beliefs in the global community that the rhinos are significant not only to the people of Nepal but also to the whole world.

The author of this book, Dr. Esmond Bradley Martin, is an outstanding American scholar of nature conservation, and cultural geography. A scion of an aristocratic family from Old Westbury in New York, he was lured to Kenya by its history and its culture. Trained as a geographer and domiciled in Nairobi for four decades, he has traveled all over the world probing illicit trafficking and trade in wild animals, particularly trade in rhino horns and elephant ivory, both overtly and covertly. A man of vast vision and courage he ranks as the world's top most expert on consumption and trade in wild animals. He earned this honor not by sitting in a fancy office or a library in the West, but by trudging for more than three decades around the sleazy and glamorous shops in the streets of Europe, America, Asia, and Africa—and traversing the tropical jungles and grasslands of the world—studying rhinos, tigers, and elephants on foot, jeep or even on domestic elephants.

This publication aptly entitled **From the Jungle to Kathmandu: Horn and Tusk Trade** is an authoritative book on international trade in rhino horns, other rhino body parts and ivory. It illustrates Dr. Martin's continuing work on monitoring the underground trade in rhino body parts and ivory. Author of 20 books and over 250 articles, his publications are raved by conservationists both in the East and in the West. Though many of his publications probe the seedy side of the black markets in wildlife, a few illuminate conservation successes stories, particularly on Nepal's successes in bringing the rhinos back from the brink of extinction.

“Saving wildlife is not a science like physics or mathematics, but like politics it is an art, an art of the possible,” is an adage often quoted by conservation biologists operating in the field

of saving wildlife. Like politics, wildlife preservation is also shadowed by myths. The older the beliefs, the harder it becomes to dispel them. Busting old beliefs on sexual powers of wild animals or their body parts needs an unbeatable combination of commitment, perseverance, and at times personal risks to one's life. It also needs facts that are substantiated with hard science and empirical data to distill the facts from fiction. It needs a scientist with a missionary zeal and exceptional political valor to break centuries of beliefs. There are only a handful of those around even in the 21st century. Dr. Esmond Bradley Martin's rank is unrivaled in the list.

"If I was going to die today, my biggest contribution academically would be to show that except in the past for one small area in India, rhino horn has never been used by Asians for sexual purposes, not at all," once said Dr. Martin in interview on December 29, 2007 of the Weekend Edition of America's prestigious National Public Radio. He was lamenting about grossly erroneous statements in both Western and Eastern literature that linked the demise of the rhinos with the usage of rhino horn as an aphrodisiac by the Chinese. He based his statement on facts that he uncovered when he undertook an unprecedented study in the late 1970s and early 1980s on trade and usage of rhino horn and other body parts. Risking life-threatening wrath from rhino poachers and smugglers, he traveled for months. from the main streets of Sana'a in Yemen; to the back streets of Bangkok, Thailand and other cities in India, Indonesia, and Malaysia; to the remote provinces of China; and to the flourishing bright light districts in Korea, Japan and Singapore, studying the secret trade and usage of rhino parts. He was the first to prove the common belief that the Chinese use rhino horn as a sexual tonic was totally a myth. A few people have tried to trace the origin of this hearsay since Dr. Martin published his findings in his 1979 report entitled *The international trade in rhinoceros products*: a report for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. It is assumed that the origin of this myth could be traced back to the colonial era of the British Empire in Asia. It may have been triggered by some British tea-planters or hunters, who may have observed the rhino's ability to copulate for hours in the flood plains of the Brahmaputra in and around Kaziranga National Park. Some claim that it was a part of the anti-Chinese hysteria created by the Europeans to smear the Chinese.

This book is also a product of Dr. Martin's quest, which is driven by needs to distill the facts from the fiction to design and implement an effective conservation program, including developing tools to enforce the International Convention on Trade in Endangered Species of Wild flora and Fauna (CITES) – a global covenant ratified by 174 countries. The signatories to CITES can only ignore his learned opinion at the peril of their wildlife conservation program. Nepal, as one of the earliest signatories of this international treaty, is no exception. The book reiterates that Dr. Martin's status as the world's leading authority on international trade in wildlife, particularly rhino horns and elephant ivory, remains undisputed.

I first met Dr. Martin in 1975 in Kinshasa, Zaire during the 12th General Assembly of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). He was the last person I would have expected to become the world authority on trade and trafficking on endangered species. Tall and slim, impeccably dressed, and sporting puffed-up creamy colored



hair, Dr. Martin resembled a Hollywood movie star or a model for top-of-the-line men's suits in glossy men's-wear magazines. He was nowhere close to the appearance of a hard-nosed scientist, as I discovered. His studies have revealed that there are two main uses for rhino horn. Many in Eastern Asia use powder or pellets to lower fever especially for children. "Mothers and parents will spend almost any amount of money to cure their child," he opined in his interview with National Public Radio. "So it's not a luxury item." Nevertheless, in most parts of Asia, the rhino has been long viewed in oriental medicine as a four-footed pharmacopoeia. Virtually all its products from toenail to blood, hide and even its urine are used to treat one or other kind of ailment. However, Dr. Martin's studies revealed, for the first time, that the small and impoverished Arab nation of Yemen had the most lucrative market for African rhino horns. He found out that for thousands of years the Yemenis have been making their top of the line dagger handles from rhino horns. The daggers are called Jambiyas. Bearing one is prestigious. Rich Yemenis give daggers with handcrafted rhino-horn handles to their young men, family members, and guests in a coming-of-age ceremony.

Nepal is the home to the second largest population of the Greater One-Horned Rhino after India. Since 1968, Dr. Martin has visited Nepal, befriending members of Nepal's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation, wildlife NGOs and those in tourism who rely on the rhino to sustain their trade and livelihood. He has spent days living with the guards and guardians of rhino sanctuaries such as the Chitwan National Park. He has spent hours meeting and interviewing poachers, traffickers, and other slimy traders dealing in rhino horn and other animal parts, a few of them behind the bars in Bharatpur jail in Chitwan District. He has also participated in rhino censuses in Nepal, mostly as an independent observer to ensure that the data are not fudged by overzealous government bureaucrats, as often is done in many developing countries.

During my thirty years of service as a wildlife conservationist, I have met many people in Nepal. Yet, there are few that we could truly call a Nepal-Wallah, denoting a true friend of Nepal who has remained my motherland's friend in both good times and bad times. Dr. Martin has been a constant partner in Nepal's conservation effort, sometimes on his own personal expenses, and has shared dust, sweat, and rains; treks, elephant rides and jungle drives; jokes, joys, and laughter; and above all words of wisdom on practicality and pragmatism for not only doing the right thing but doing the smart thing in saving the rhinos and tigers in Nepal. It may sound paradoxical, but, I do credit a few foreigners for enabling me to discover the values of my country's national treasure – the Greater One-Horned Rhinoceros. My old friend Esmond Bradley Martin ranks among the top of the list. It is also from his research and studies that my old friend the late Dr. Tirtha Man Maskey, our boss Mr. Biswa Nath Upreti, our colleague Ram Prit Yadav, many others, and myself benefited in our works in saving the rhinos in Chitwan or finding them new homes in Bardia or Suklaphanta.

This book is a fruit of thirty years of hard labor. It highlights a thorough and unparalleled investigative study on illicit trafficking of rhino products, especially the horn. Its findings are relevant to Nepal now, as they have always been for the past thirty years. I am certain that this

book will prove to be an asset to the present generation battling to save the rhinos in Chitwan, Bardia, and Suklaphanta.

Hemanta R. Mishra, Ph.D

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