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ELEPHANTS AND RHINOS

We are all aware of the millions of dollars spent by conservation organizations and of the enormous sacrifices in time and lives expended by the African States in their fight to protect the rhino – whose horn is sold today for the price of gold – from cunning poachers, encouraged by unscrupulous dealers.

The absurd aspect of this drama is this: it is not rich oriental potentates in need of aphrodisiacs, but Japanese chemists making traditional aspirin and nouveau riche Yemenites anxious to keep up with the fashion in wearing daggers with rhino-horn handles who “consume” the quasi-totality of this product! Only the southern African subspecies of the white rhino survives, and, for that matter, is thriving; the Equatorial and Northern subspecies “*Ceratotherium simum cottonii*” present by the hundreds a few years ago in southern Sudan, and which provided the unique attraction of the Garamba National Park in northern Zaïre, can today be considered as extinct; total extermination in Sudan; a dozen scattered animals in northern Zaïre – perhaps already slaughtered as these words go to print – are the last survivors, condemned without remission.

For the black rhinos - *Diceros bicornis* - massacred almost to the last remaining one: from Kenya, where only a few individuals survive in the rare islands of dense forest, the slaughter has spread to Sudan, the C.A.R., Tanzania, Zambia, respecting neither frontiers nor the lives of gamekeepers.

As far as the African elephant is concerned, if the species itself is not in danger – and is even overabundant in certain reserves – whole populations have been eradicated by these same poachers, armed by civil wars, on the immense open spaces of northern Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia, southern Sudan, Chad, the Central African Republic, with the massacre now spreading to the Congo and Zaïre. Ivory, still as easily convertible into cash today as it was in the past with the complicity of some African VIPs, is a source of revenue for the poachers to the tune of over 100 million new francs – enough money to buy plenty more arms and ammunition, carry on with the killing and maybe foment some new civil war somewhere!

Two very important events have taken place over the last few weeks regarding conservation of the most prestigious African game species: elephants and rhinos. In the face of the material impossibility of guaranteeing absolute protection in the field to surviving black rhinos, they have found their way to safety in escape: the first five rhinos have just been translocated by plane to the US and released into two large breeding enclosures in Texas. Their offspring are destined to be released into the immense stretches of Texas brush and will guarantee for further generations the survival of the species and the possibility of repopulating African Parks and Reserves when the conditions of their survival can be assured.

For their part, with the reaffirmed determination to stop commercialization of poached ivory, 24 African states, following their Arusha Resolution (see preceding Bulletin) have just confirmed their decision to apply and publicize annual ivory exporting quotas, and to officially request, with the support of the Technical Committee of CITES, that the 87 States Party to the Washington Convention refuse all transit or imports of ivory outside these national official quotas.

This decision is an immense step towards curbing international poaching.

Bertrand des Clers