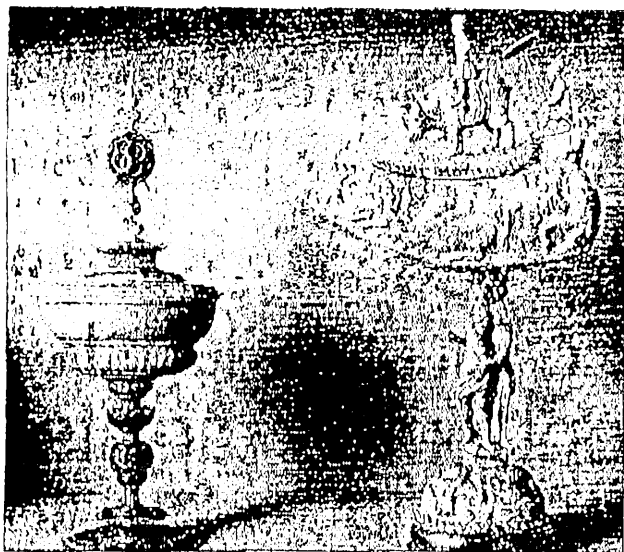


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Ornaments featuring rhinoceros horn carvings which once belonged to Archduke Ferdinand II

# Survival rests on a knife edge

pic 6.4.99 "The Guardian" (London)

Trade in rhino horns for daggers is wiping out the species, reports **David Gough** in Nairobi



Sula and her son Busela, a rare white rhino born in February

20-4-99  
To keep for Edward

**T**HE illegal export of rhinoceros horns from Africa to Yemen, where they are used to make dagger handles, threatens to wipe out the continent's rhino population, conservationists say.

In the past 30 years nearly 154,000lb of rhinoceros horn has been imported into Yemen. Based on an average horn weighing 8lb 6oz, more than 22,000 rhino have been killed since 1970 to meet the demand.

In response to appeals by conservationists throughout Africa, the wildlife trade monitoring programme Traffic is investigating preventive measures, including the use of sniffer dogs.

A survey by Traffic in 1997 found that outside southern Africa only 192 white rhino and 427 black rhino remained in the world.

Rhino populations are growing, but their recovery rate is slow and the black rhinoceros is listed by the

World Conservation Union as "critically endangered".

Rhino horns, which have been traditionally used in ornaments, are in high demand in Yemen, where they are used to make the handle of the Jambiya dagger traditionally carried by all Yemeni men.

A dagger with a rhinoceros handle is a prized accessory and daggers with antique rhino handles can fetch as much as \$1 million.

The senior programme officer for Traffic, Nina Marshall, said the trade in rhino horns had declined in recent years, but added: "This is only because there are so few rhinos left."

Edmund Bradley Martin, a conservationist who has spent years studying the trade in rhino horns, said the demand remained high in Yemen and the trade continued despite Yemeni government legislation in 1981 banning imports of rhino horn.

Mr Martin said that it was not clear where the horns were coming from, but he confirmed that

poaching continued in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to a lesser extent in Kenya and Tanzania.

He said there had been recent cases of rhinos being poached in the Masai Mara game park in Kenya and the Selous park in Tanzania. Sudan was a major exporter.

With an average price of more than \$1,000 (£625) a kilogram for rhino horns, the temptation to poach is obvious.

Tim Oloo, rhino project co-ordinator for the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), said his anti-poaching teams had been successful, but he admitted: "The threat of poaching remains very real."

He said KWS's limited resources meant that it was impossible to offer complete protection to the few remaining rhino: "The only way to eliminate poaching is to eradicate demand for the product."

While the source of the horns remains unclear, it is known that Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, the capitals

of Kenya and Tanzania, are leading centres for their shipment. Seizure rates in both countries are low, and poorly-paid customs officers are easy targets for bribery.

A Kenyan customs official said it was extremely difficult for his department to apply effective measures against smuggling.

As a solution, Rob Barnett of Traffic advocates the introduction of sniffer dogs into the customs service. "One dog can do the work of 35 men," he said.

Sniffer dogs have proved their efficacy in the fight against the international drugs trade, and they have been used in South Africa and Canada to detect trade in animal parts.

"One dog and its handler can search a passenger plane with 400 passengers in 20 minutes... It would take 36 men to perform the same task in the same time," Mr Barnett said.

"Sniffer dogs could make a real difference in the battle against the trade in animal parts."

5565