

# WILDLIFE

## NEWS

VOLUME 22 NUMBER 2

WINTER 1987

AFRICAN WILDLIFE FOUNDATION

## LATEST NEWS ON NORTH YEMEN

Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne

Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne have just returned from a ten-day trip to the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen), which was partly sponsored by the African Wildlife Foundation. The purpose of the visit was to find out how much rhino horn was still being brought into the country illegally and to discuss the matter with government officials in an effort to encourage them to enforce the 1982 law prohibiting rhino horn imports.

From 1980 to 1984 North Yemen was importing about one and a half tonnes of rhino horn per year, representing about half of all the horn put onto the world market. On account of the country's economic recession which became serious in 1984, and because of increased difficulties in obtaining rhino horn from African source countries as well as some attempts by the North Yemen government to curtail smuggling in general, the amount of rhino horn coming into the country has declined from about one tonne in 1985 to under half a tonne in 1986. During the past two years most of the horn has come mainly from the Sudan, exported illegally by Sudanese of Yemeni origin. The principle traders in Sanaa in 1986 were paying about US\$ 900 a kilo for good quality rhino horn, which is not much higher than in 1984, but due to the devaluation of the local currency, the price in Yemeni rials has gone up two and a half times, making it very expensive for would-be purchasers of daggers with rhino horn handles. They are now much more willing than previously to buy those with buffalo horn handles instead, and, in fact, only about five per cent of the daggers presently being made in North Yemen have rhino horn handles. The economic recession has, thus, been advantageous to rhino conservation.

On 13 December 1986 Martin and Vigne had a meeting with the Yemeni Deputy Prime Minister who is also the Foreign Minister; they were accompanied by both the American and British Ambassadors, in order to emphasize the importance of



*Djambia Dagger with Rhino-horn handle for sale in Sanaa Souk, North Yemen (Dec. 1986).*  
credit: Esmond B. Martin

the meeting. A six-point plan was drawn up and agreed to by the Minister; this plan would, hopefully, once and for all, close down the rhino horn trade in North Yemen. However, details must remain confidential for the time being.

Later, that same day, another meeting was held with the Minister of Economy, Supply and Trade; he stated that he was in full agreement with the six-point plan, but his Ministry would even go so far as to advise the closing of any workshop which handled rhino horn after January, 1987. The plan, with this additional point, was discussed in a full cabinet meeting of the Yemen Arab Republic on 31 December 1986, and the government confirmed its willingness to step up efforts to stop imports of rhino horn. It was also noted that the U.S.A. Embassy would follow

up the discussions and monitor the situation between now and Dr. Martin's scheduled return to North Yemen.

In setting up meetings with senior Ministers in the Government for Martin and Vigne, North Yemen showed its interest and willingness to tackle the problem of rhino horn imports. We believe, as do the American and British Ambassadors to North Yemen, that the Yemeni government will implement some, if not all, the points agreed. It is most likely that the continual pressure put on the North Yemen government to take action against the rhino horn trade has proved successful. In the near future we can expect a marked decrease in these illegal imports and, in turn, less poaching of rhinos in Africa.

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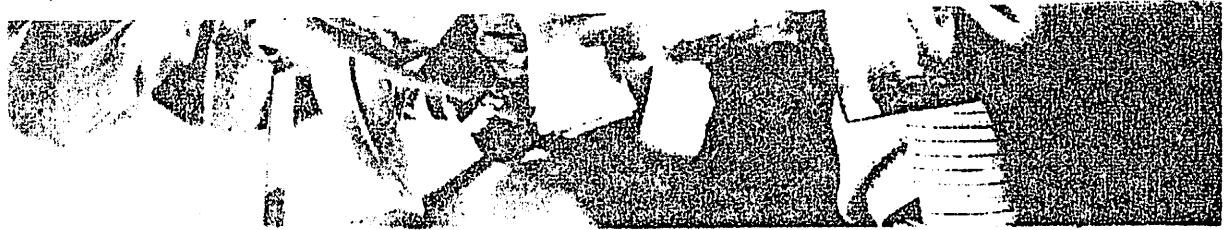
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