

# Rhinos are no dodos - yet

RHINOS have one enormous drawback in their fight for survival. Perched above their nostrils is a dense mass of hair compacted into solid keratin - the much prized horn.

Symbol of sexual potency and endowed with sundry magical properties (or so it is believed), the rhino horn commands a fabulous price in the quack medical markets of the Far East.

But rhinos in Asia are now so depleted in numbers that Africa has become the "primary producer" with the result that Africa's two rhino species are now under intolerable pressure. In parts of East Africa the black rhino population is 90% and even 95% down on just a few years ago.

Not all this horn, however, finds its way into the hands of the gullible and exploiters of the gullible in eastern countries. North Yemen has recently been importing (1976 and '77) a tonnage of horn equivalent to nearly 2000 rhinos a year.

This is a relatively new phenomenon arising from the new-found wealth of Middle East oil workers. The dagger or *jambia* is a status symbol in the Yemen. A prestigious dagger handle is one carved from rhino horn - which more and more young men are able to afford, even though it may cost up to \$10,000.

The Taiwanese demand for Indian rhino horn is so much greater than for the African species that it has driven up the price to phenomenal heights - averaging \$17,000 per kilo retail - and the shortage in supply exacerbates the situation.

Esmond Bradley Martin

Faced with what is a crisis situation IUCN and WWF have launched a *Save the Rhino Campaign* in an all-out effort to save this living relic of a distant age. As with the elephant the emphasis is on Africa and on those countries in Africa where the slaughter has been greatest.

An in-depth study *International Trade in Rhinoceros Products* has been conducted by Esmond Martin - consultant to the SSC African Rhino Group. And elsewhere in this *Bulletin* (page 5) Kes Hillman, Chairwoman of the Group, reports on the gravity of the situation and the corrective steps that must be taken.

For at least the past 15 years South Africa has been a major supplier of horn to the Far East. In 1978 Japan officially imported 350 kilos at just over \$300 a kilo and Taiwan 166 kilos at \$86 a kilo.

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Some corrective steps have already been taken. Thanks to highly successful fund-raising drives by many different conservation bodies - in particular a number of WWF National Organizations led by the Netherlands - anti-poaching squads in some of the most critical areas are now more realistically equipped to deal with "the enemy".

The enemy? The term is surely warranted. Those in the forefront of the fight to protect the big game of Africa may have to contend with armed gangs who do not scruple to kill

any person who comes between them and their lucrative prey. (On page 5 appears an obituary of Tanzanian game warden, Elias Lasher, killed by poachers. His story shows just what front-line conservationists are up against - and the price they may be called upon to pay.)

For game scouts and wardens the financial reward can never be commensurate with the risk. Nor would they wish it to be. These men are doing what they are doing because of their love of wildlife, not because of their love of money. All the same where wages are totally out of line with the value of the animals they are called upon to risk their lives for, turning a blind eye (for a "consideration") to the deeds of poachers must sometimes be a powerful temptation. The amazing thing is that so few succumb.

Next to the horn the most widely used part of the rhino is its skin. In Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and Thailand, people believe in its efficacy for curing skin diseases and occasionally for relieving rheumatic pains and blood disorders.

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Better equipment, more patrolmen, even higher pay - all will help boost the morale of those in the field. But the biggest and best morale booster of all is the knowledge of full-hearted government support - meaning that at no level is corruption tolerated and that at all levels the law is enforced with the courts imposing penalties intended to deter the poacher rather than (as too often at present) openly to encourage him.

Happily there are clear signs that governments are now genuinely supporting their field workers. Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia have all given total protection to the rhinoceros and made their positions very plain in recent ministerial statements. Kenya and Tanzania are now parties to CITES and so should no longer be exporting rhino horn. (Kenya in particular was formerly exporting

enormous quantities.) It is to be hoped that the courts will be similarly stern with offenders.

In determining action priorities on behalf of Africa's rhinos IUCN has adopted four main criteria: a government's willingness to act; the existence and enforcement of strong laws; the presence of a viable rhino population; the urgency of the need for action. Nine countries have accordingly been singled out for assistance: Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Mozambique, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia.

The family *Rhinocerotidae* has been around in one form or another for 60,000,000 years. During that time there have been 34 different species. Of these only five have emerged through the evolutionary mill as being "fit for survival". But of course evolutionary fitness is nowadays no guarantee of continued existence.

Will the rhino join the ever-lengthening list of animals which, though perfectly adapted to life and entirely secure within their natural domain, are made extinct by the "unnatural" actions of man? It is too soon to know the answer - but the species' survival prospects are certainly a whole lot brighter than they were.

During the first half of the 1970s the wholesale price of African rhino horn averaged \$33 a kilo. In 1976 the price began to rocket. That year it trebled to \$105 a kilo. In 1977 it reached \$190 and in 1978 \$300. By September 1979 the minimum wholesale price was \$675 - a 2000% increase in four years.

For Asian rhino horn the average wholesale price at this time (September 1979) varied between \$2200 a kilo in Thailand - "new stock" is smuggled in from Burma - and \$6500 in Hong Kong, where all rhino imports have been illegal since February 1979. The retail price in Hong Kong was then ranging between \$2000 and \$18,000 a kilo.

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## Canada's rhinos

THE rhino is normally a large animal. Not in Canada, though - not yet. There the tiny Rhinoceros Party contested the general election but no rhino candidate was expected to match the performance of the (alleged) spiritual founder of the party, a Brazilian rhinoceros who was elected mayor of Sao Paulo.

Nevertheless the party campaigned on a broad front - 3000 miles broad - and with high hopes of improving on the 62,000 votes it gained in the general election last May.

The party's democratic credentials are impeccable. In the cause of regional equality it proposes that the Great Lakes and the Rocky Mountains be redistributed among all 10 provinces. In the cause of linguistic equality it recommends three official languages, English, French and illiteracy - with retraining (where necessary) for those seeking illiterate fluency. In the cause of happiness equality (or equal unhappiness) it supports capital punishment -

all Canadians should spend one winter in Ottawa.

Certain political pundits detect a leftward drift in the party - exemplified by a 5-year plan (as in all good socialist countries) to change driving on Canada's roads from the right side to the left, beginning with heavy trucks and ending with wheel chairs.

