

NEWS FROM WWF/IUCN

YEMEN ACTS TO HALT RHINO HORN DAGGERS; SCIENTIFIC TESTS FAIL TO SHOW RHINO HORN EFFECTIVE AS MEDICINE

The highly threatened African black rhino may have been given a new lease on life by the recent decision of the Yemen Arab Republic to ban the import of the animal's horn.

Yemen is the world's single biggest market for the poacher-supplied horns, which are carved into elaborate dagger handles. Considered a status symbol, these *janbiyyas* are proudly worn at the waist by 80% of the adult males and may cost up to a thousand dollars.

According to Dr. Esmond Bradley-Martin, who made a fact-finding mission to North Yemen on behalf of WWF/IUCN in 1978, North Yemen imported 22,645 kg of rhino horn between 1969 and 1977, equivalent to the deaths of 8000 rhinos, one of the world's most threatened large land mammals. Perhaps half the dagger handles are fashioned from rhino horn; the rest are made from buffalo and wild cattle horns.

Surprisingly, a 1981 mission by Faisal A. Izzeddin, Deputy Director of Al Areen Wildlife Park in Bahrain, advised WWF/IUCN that most traders and manufacturers of rhino horn dagger handles did not know which animal produced the prized horn and were unable to identify the source when shown photographs depicting a rhino, giraffe and antelope.

Pharmacological tests

In action to stem trade in rhino horn for its popular use in Asia as a pharmaceutical, WWF/IUCN have just released details of a special pharmacological study of rhino horn carried out for them by the international pharmaceutical concern Hoffmann-LaRoche & Co, which found no evidence that rhino horn has any medicinal effect as an antipyretic and would be ineffective in reducing fever, a common usage in much of Asia.

Tests also showed that rhino horn, which, like fingernails is made of agglutinated hair, has no analgesic, anti-inflammatory, anti-spasmodic nor diuretic properties, and no bactericidal effect could be found against suppuration and intestinal bacteria.

"This proves that rhino horn is of no use to anyone except the original owner", noted Dr. Arne Schiøtz, WWF Director of Conservation. "You would

get the same effect from chewing your own finger nails."

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CITES TIGHTENS WILDLIFE TRADE RESTRICTIONS

A proposal to regulate trade in harp and hooded seals was defeated in a secret ballot following a heated three hour debate at the fourth meeting of CITES (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) in Botswana.

Debate on the resolution, which proposed to control trade in all species of earless seals, was so intense that the Canadian government requested the member states cast their votes anonymously. The final vote was 23 for, 27 against and 6 abstentions.

And in a landmark decision, the parties also accepted, by a very large majority, a proposal to admit the European Economic Community (as a party) to the Convention during a special session held immediately following the regular meeting.

The meeting also beat back attempts to relax restrictions on trade in products of wolves, bobcats, lynxes, otters and certain ivory products and cacti.

Despite vigorous opposition from Japan, Peru, Brazil and the Soviet Union, six species of whales were also given the highest protection rating, including the minke, Bryde's and four bottlenose varieties.

The minke whale listing on Appendix I (a list of plants and animals for which trade is banned, except for scientific purpose) of the treaty will become effective from January 1986, coinciding with the beginning of the total moratorium on commercial whaling declared by the International Whaling Commission (IWC) last year.

These decisions give the full support of CITES to the growing international campaign to halt whaling until scientists can monitor and predict whale populations accurately enough to permit sustainable utilisation, without the threat of extinction.