



# Supply and demand

## The illegal rhino horn trade

Trade in rhino horn has a long history, with the earliest records of use in medicine in China going back millennia. Rhino horns were also prized for their translucent appearance when carved and used to make cups and bowls, which were believed to have the added advantage of being able to detect alkaloid poisons. More recent demand for rhino horn during an earlier wave of poaching in the 1960–70s was primarily for use in the construction of ceremonial dagger handles, known as *jambiyas*, in Yemen.

Jo Shaw | Programme Officer – Large Mammal Trade, TRAFFIC East/Southern Africa Office

**T**his market has largely dissipated in recent years, primarily due to economic decline and social unrest in that region. Rhino horn has also been in constant demand in Asia as a constituent in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) with ever-shifting peaks of trade between China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and territories. By the mid-1990s, all the important rhino horn consumer countries in Asia had banned the substance in their TCM industries.

### Traditional Chinese Medicine

TCM uses herbs and animal products to create harmony and balance in

chewing fingernails' can imply denigration of Asia's ancient healing arts. Respect for tradition and the concept of face in front of one's peers plays a major role in Eastern culture, and specifically influences current attitudes and practices of rhino horn usage.



Rhino horn has been in constant demand in Asia, where it is consumed as medicine



### Viet Nam

Trade patterns detected by TRAFFIC indicate that the resurgent demand for rhino horn is driven primarily by users from Viet Nam. Increasing prosperity in the Vietnamese economy has led to increased levels of individual disposable income and, sadly, use of rhino horn appears to be a way to demonstrate one's affluence and high social status. Both traditional and modern preparation of rhino horn medicines typically involves grinding the horn into a powdered form, which is then placed in hot water to produce a white, cloudy liquid. In Viet Nam, special porcelain bowls with a rough serrated bottom for the home preparation of rhino horn are now widely available.

### Rhino horn consumers

Today, rhino horn consumers in Viet Nam are thought to fall into four main descriptive categories; habitual users are invariably wealthy, middle-aged, urban-dwelling elites who frequently use rhino horn as a detoxifying beverage and body-rejuvenating tonic. Belief in the detoxification properties of rhino horn, especially following excessive intake of alcohol, probably stands as the most common

the body. Rhino horn is believed to be effective in reducing temperature and has commonly been used to treat high fevers and convulsions, to control haemorrhaging and to assist the liver in cleansing the blood of toxins resulting from the intake of alcohol or poison. TCM often prescribes rhino horn in combination with herbs and other traditional ingredients. It has not, as is widely and falsely propagated, been prescribed as an aphrodisiac. The medicinal properties of rhino horn, and other TCM ingredients, have an ingrained cultural significance in the East and for Westerners to simply dismiss such beliefs as 'being like

TRAFFIC's report on **The Rhino Horn Trade Dynamic between South Africa and Viet Nam** is due to be launched in May 2012 and covers these issues in more detail. The report will be available for download from [www.traffic.org](http://www.traffic.org)

routine usage at this point in time. Associated with the above, rhino horns are purchased and offered as high-value, status-conferring gifts to important political officials and other socio-economic elites within the country.

Individuals suffering from serious illnesses such as cancer are also turning to rhino horn to cure or improve their condition. Although never described in the traditional medical literature, recent popular belief in Viet Nam seemingly promotes rhino horn usage as treatment, and possibly a cure, for life-threatening disease. As early as June 2009, TRAFFIC researchers were told stories of important individuals – an unnamed Minister or another famous person – who inevitably had cancer but were ultimately cured

following treatment with rhino horn. In reality, evidence strongly suggests that the promotion of miraculous curative powers for rhino horn represents a cynical marketing ploy to increase the profitability of the rhino horn trade.

TRAFFIC has also identified another consumer group comprising affluent, young Vietnamese mothers who keep small quantities of rhino horn for home preparation of medicines to treat high fever, especially for their children.

### The future?

This diversification in use of rhino horn and broadening of acceptance throughout affluent Vietnamese society represents a concerning trend. However, testimonials are beginning to surface in the Vietnamese media from individuals who have experienced allergic reactions due to poisoning as a result of using rhino horn medicines. One wonders if there are not also distressed relatives of those who have died from serious illness, despite spending large sums of money on rhino horn as a treatment. Such tales of disappointment may ultimately provide the key to changing opinion on the medical properties of rhino horn and lead to a reduction in its demand.

# Save the Rhino's shiny new website

We are very excited to announce the launch of our new website! Over the past few months we have been working very hard to get ready for our launch. Hopefully you've caught up with this in your RhiNEWS and have had the chance to look around. If not, then I hope this inspires you to go and check out the new site!

You can find us at [www.savetherhino.org](http://www.savetherhino.org)

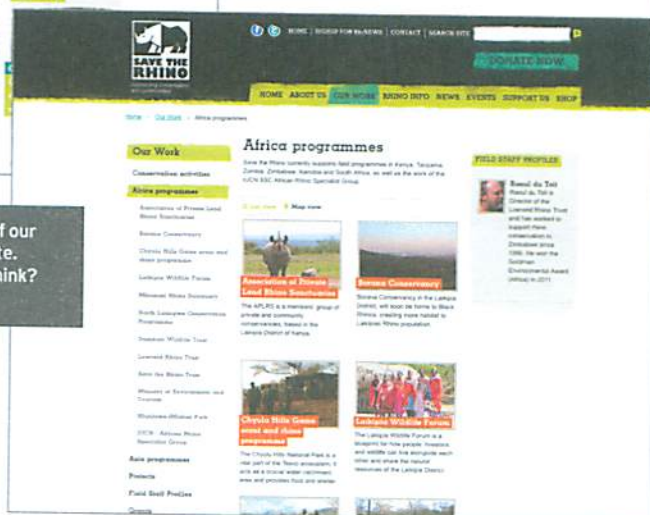
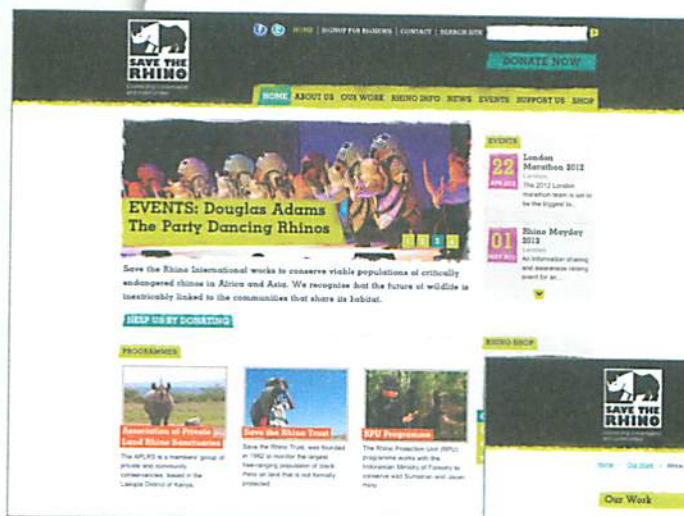
Laura Adams | Office and Communications Manager

The site features all of the sections that you know and love from the old site: you can read all about the programmes and projects that we fund, find out everything you need to know about your favourite rhino species, and keep up-to-date with the latest rhino news.

There are some changes though. We hope that it will be easier for you to get involved. You can comment on the latest news stories and share them through social media. We'll have posts tackling the 'thorny issues' of rhino conservation and will be posting updates on our blog.

We also have a fantastic new look design, which we believe is more user-friendly, and means that you should find what you are looking for more easily. Make the most of the search tools, there's lots of good information on there!

What's more, we would like to hear your feedback. Whether it's about any of the info that you have read, or any suggestions for content you would like to see, please go to our blog [www.savetherhino/news/blog](http://www.savetherhino/news/blog). We've put a post up there already that you can comment on: just search for articles tagged *The Horn*. We'll send a free eco-bag to the first 10 people to post a helpful comment!



Screenshots of our fab new website. What do you think? Let us know!

## Thanks

The team at TicToc who have helped us to produce the fantastic new site.