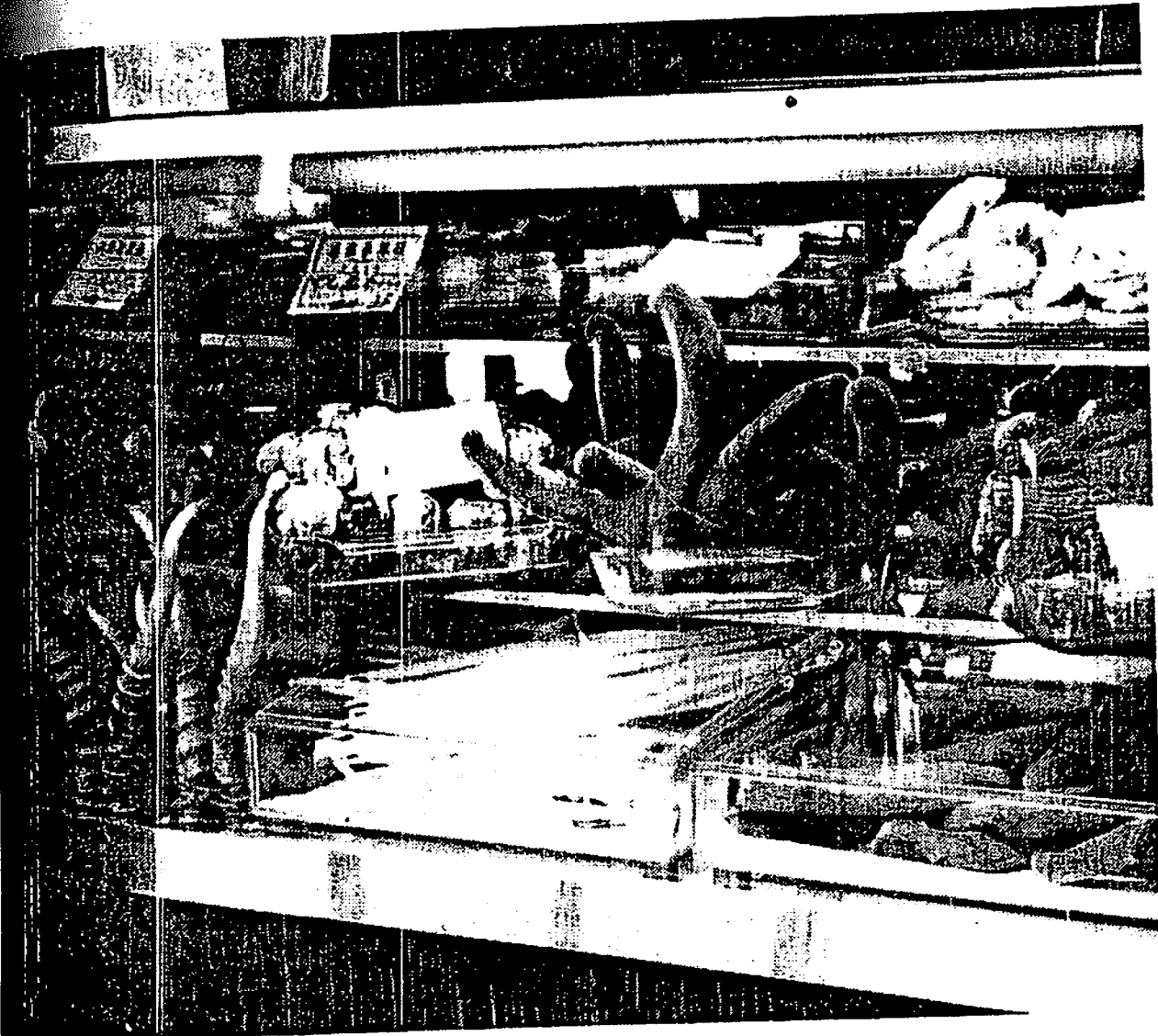


ENDING THE TRADE IN RHINO HORN  
An interview by Peter Jackson with Dr Esmond Bradley Martin



Deer antlers and saiga antelope horn  
replacing rhino horn in Chinese medicines

Photo: WWF/Peter Jackson

Esmond Bradley Martin has been assigned by WWF to tour countries in Asia which still import rhino horn, in a bid to put an end to all trade in the horn and save the world's last remaining rhinos. Numbers of rhinos in Asia and Africa have fallen from 70,000 in 1970 to fewer than 16,000 today. His mission is reinforced by recent letters sent by the Duke of Edinburgh, President of WWF, to the Premiers of Singapore, South Korea and North Korea, urging a ban on rhino horn trade. Before leaving on his tour, Dr Bradley Martin discussed prospects for success in an interview with Peter Jackson.

Dr Bradley Martin you have been specialising over the past few years investigating the trade in rhino horn. Now you are about to embark on a new project, which will involve considerable travel in Asia, in an effort to stem the trade. Can you tell us about your plans?

EBM - I have a 12-month assignment from the British Government to try to close down the rhino horn trade. I will go to those countries in Southeast Asia which have no legislation prohibiting rhino horn imports.

PJ - Are there many such countries?

EBM - There are four significant ones. South Korea is probably the most important, Brunei, Macao and Singapore are mainly entrepots, but Macao and Singapore also consume some rhino horn. I need to get the governments to bring in legislation, at present, rhino horn can be moved freely in and out of those countries. Singapore is the main port for Indian rhino horn. Over the last few years, 200 to 250 rhinos have been killed in and around Kaziranga National Park in Assam. According to traders, some of the horn has been going out through Calcutta to Singapore. I will also encourage other countries to enforce existing laws. The most important one is North Yemen, which probably takes about half of all the rhino horn in the world.

PJ - To make dagger handles?

EBM - Right. About half of all the rhino horn on the world market goes to North Yemen for dagger handles, and the other half goes to East Asia, where it is used mostly to lower fever.

PJ - Do some of the horn chips and shavings from Yemen also go to East Asia?

EBM - Yes. In the late 1970s, people used to collect the chippings and powder from the North Yemen carvers and send them to Hong Kong. When Hong Kong brought in legislation prohibiting this, the chippings were sent to China. China is the main country taking patent medicines from rhino

horn. A loophole in the legislation of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora) makes this trade technically legal.

PJ - Is this use of horn primarily a problem of Chinese people? Are there other people who make use of the horn in this way?

EBM - The South Koreans certainly do, but in the rest of Southeast Asia it is mostly Chinese people.

PJ - You made it clear as a result of your investigations that rhino horn is used generally not as an aphrodisiac but to reduce fever. But I believe you found some communities in India which use rhino horn as an aphrodisiac?

EBM - The only place where I saw rhino horn being used as an aphrodisiac was in Gujarat state in India and Bombay was the only place where I saw considerable amounts of rhino horn on sale. The people in Bombay handle only African horn, although there is Asian horn on the market.

PJ - People from the communities in that part of India settled in East Africa, so there has been something of a traditional trade there.

EBM - The Gujaratis have been trading with East Africa for hundreds of years. It also works in reverse. In the 19th century, a hunter called Pollock used to pay for his hunting trips in India by selling Asian rhino horn. He decided to import some African horn, but when the local people in Assam saw the horn they refused to buy it, since it was not what they were used to, and he abandoned all his horn in a teashop in Gauhati.

PJ - As a resident of East Africa and deputy chairman of the African Elephant and Rhino Group, can you sum up the status of the rhinos in Africa at the present time?

EBM - We have two species in Africa, the black and the white rhino. The latter has two subspecies, the northern

southern. The northern white rhino to exist in the thousands until 1960s. Now numbers are probably to only 50 or less. The only populations of which we are sure are 14 animals in Garamba National Park Zaire and some in southern Sudan. Understand they have completely disappeared in the Central African Republic and in Uganda. In the southern part of the African continent, the southern white rhino numbers about 1000 and is expanding well.

Yet the southern white rhino a few years ago was thought to be right on the edge of extinction.

- That is right. Around 1900 there were probably 25 or 30 left and they have risen right up in numbers. But recently the Mozambique Government announced that white rhinos are now extinct for the second time in Mozambique. This is extremely depressing and we will have to be more concerned if we introduce them there for a third time.

black rhino numbered perhaps 65,000 in 1970 and now they are down to about 100. There has been tremendous slaughter of the rhino in certain parts of Central Africa. In 1980 perhaps 100 rhinos were left in the Central African Republic and maybe 1,500 in Zambia. But there was a drought in 1983 and the black rhinos congregated around waterholes in the northern part of the country and were almost completely exterminated. The number now is about 100.

- Poaching tended to start in the 1970s around East Africa and then move south. This year I believe it hit Zimbabwe for the first time.

- Poaching started in those countries where transport was good and it was easy for poachers and traders to get access to the rhino population. Countries such as Kenya were heavily poached in the middle and late 1970s. Rhinos were eliminated in Uganda and southern Tanzania and Zambia was hit hard. In the Central African Republic rhinos were eliminated in the early

1980s. So by 1984 if poachers wanted rhino horn they had to go to the Selous in southern Tanzania. The only other population was in Zimbabwe and at the beginning of January 1985, the Zimbabwean authorities experienced their first serious poaching of rhinos. When I was there in September this year, they had found carcasses of about 55 animals, but more may have been poached. In the last two years, 62 black rhinos have been transferred from the Lower Zambezi area in Zimbabwe to the Hwange National Park. As in the Republic of Central Africa, it is foreigners who do the poaching. All those caught in Zimbabwe so far were Zambians. Since the rhino population in Zambia is down to 1,000 from perhaps 10,000 to 12,000 in the early 1970s, the poachers are having difficulty in finding any, so they cross the international boundary of the Zambezi River to poach in Zimbabwe. But they did not realize how efficient the Zimbabwe authorities were. Some of these poachers have been caught and given 11 year jail sentences - one of the toughest sentences that I know of anywhere in the world.

PJ - The rhino problem seems to have arisen because of the oil boom.

EBM - Yes. North Yemen takes half the rhino horn on the market because, with the development of oil in Arabia and the oil price increase around 1973-74, the Yemenis working abroad brought back a lot of money and were able to buy rhino horn.

PJ - But three years ago the Yemeni Government announced a ban on its import, in response to conservationist representations.

EBM - In 1982, there was tremendous criticism of the North Yemen Government for not having a ban. Conservation organisations, especially the African Wildlife Foundation in Washington, encouraged its supporters to write letters to the government. Apparently the government got thousands of cards. They brought in a law but, until 1984, they did not really enforce it. A lot of goods are smuggled illegally into

North Yemen. They cannot successfully stop the liquor coming in from about, it is more difficult to stop rhino horn. But we are trying to encourage substitutes. More than 90% of the daggers made in North Yemen are made out of rhino horn, but out of buffalo horn, cow horn, etc.

- Do the people who buy them know that?

- Yes, because they are much cheaper, as you can imagine. For 92% of the horn, people are using substitutes. We have to push that to the limit. In East Asia, people are also being encouraged to use a substitute to lower fever. The closest to rhino horn are various antelope horns, especially the saiga antelope.

- The saiga is imported, I think, from the Soviet Union.

- Yes. The saiga is a medium size antelope that lives in Siberia.

- Ironically, it was one which was almost extinct 50 years ago.

- At the turn of the century, they were almost totally extinct. Then the Russians stopped the hunting until the 1950s and the saiga built up from a very small population to well over a million in the 1960s and now the Russians have gone back to hunting it. They themselves have no use for the horns, which are exported. If you look at traditional medicine books in Asia, especially in China, you will see several pages on rhino horn but they also refer to antelope horn as a substitute.

They are saying, please use saiga antelope horn because the rhino is being hunted extinct in many parts of the world and it is much cheaper than rhino horn.

- How are you going to get to the people?

- We have been partly successful in the past. For instance, in November 1980, Japan joined CITES. Until then, Japan was one of the biggest importers of rhino horn in the world, averaging

about one ton a year in the late 1970s. We asked the Government if they would send a notice to the traditional medicine shops requesting them to use substitutes. People are now using substitutes and doctors are no longer prescribing rhino horn. The demand for rhino horn has sharply decreased in Japan. The 2,500 shops in Japan, and about the same number in South Korea, are all organized into associations. So we can go to the association, tell them the problem and ask them to cooperate. Traditional medical doctors are also well organized in most of Asia. Instead of going to thousands of individual doctors, we go to the association, which will suggest to the doctors not to prescribe rhino products any more.

PJ - Are you hopeful that this will have an effect?

EBM - I think we have no choice. The problem is that, of all the large mammals in the world, the rhino has been decreasing more quickly than any other over the last 15 years. We estimate that 89% of the rhinos have disappeared since 1970.

PJ - What price does the rhino horn fetch?

EBM - The wholesale price of African rhino horn is about US\$600 a kilo, and the price for Asian rhino horn is about US\$9,000 a kilo. People in Asia believe that because horns are smaller on Asian animals, their medicinal properties are stronger and they are willing to pay a higher price.

PJ - Apart from approaches to medical and traders' associations, what other methods do you propose to try to deal with the trade in rhino horn?

EBM - I have already begun a public awareness campaign through the international press on the importance of not killing rhinos, and I have been working with the BBC and various publications. But we also need organizations such as WWF to send strong letters, written by Prince Philip or people of that calibre, to heads of state, because we

ENDING THE TRADE IN RHINO HORN

do not have much time to save the black rhino in the wild.

PJ - Even less, the northern white rhino.

BHM - Taiwan in the middle of August 1985 banned the trade. And I think one of the main reasons was because Prince Philip wrote to the Government of Taiwan suggesting a ban.

PJ - Why is North Yemen interested in rhino horn daggers and not the other Arab countries?

BHM - North Yemen is more traditional than any of the others, the closest to it would be Oman. Omanis do wear daggers more often than most people in the

eastern part of the Gulf, but there is no tradition of rhino horn, they use either silver and gold. The earliest record I have found of large quantities of rhino horn going into North Yemen dates back to 1815. So we know it has been going on for more than 150 years. We have to put more pressure on the government to enforce the existing law and encourage them to bring in a law prohibiting the export of rhino horn. At present, it is legal to take the shavings and sell them to the Far East. We need to reduce the import duties on substitutes, on cow and buffalo horn, which now stand at 40%. We need to encourage more substitutes.

PJ - Well, I wish you and the rhinos luck.