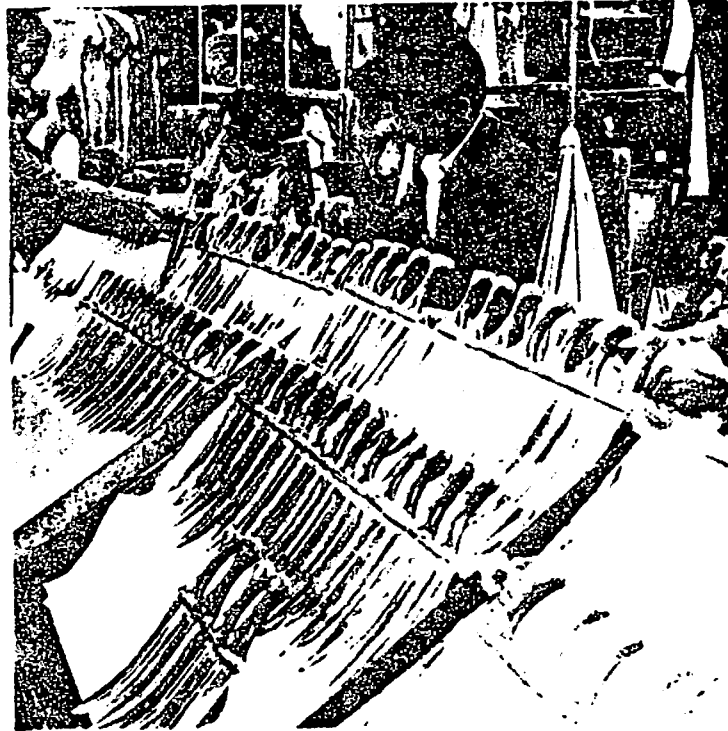


Clamp-down on Rhino-Horn Trade in North Yemen

Daggers on display
in the souk
in Sanaa

E. Bradley Martin



In two visits to North Yemen, in order to put pressure on the Government to stop the import of smuggled rhino horn, Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne were able to see two important Government ministers who expressed their warm support and determination to act. By the second visit only one of their recommendations had not been implemented, and that was in hand.

Until 1970, North Yemen was a very poor country, and only the élite rich could afford daggers (jambias) with rhino-horn handles as part of their traditional dress. But following the oil boom in Saudi Arabia, North Yemen gained new wealth and the demand for these handles soared. From the early 1970s until 1984, North Yemen imported almost half the rhino horn on the world market. International campaigns and adverse publicity led to the Government banning rhino horn imports in 1982, but considerable quantities continued to be smuggled into the country.

More pressure was required to enforce the ban, so in December 1986 certain conservation organisations funded Esmond Bradley Martin to visit North Yemen — his fourth trip — accompanied by Lucy Vigne. First, it was necessary to update trade information and second, to meet government officials in order to encourage them to enforce their law prohibiting rhino imports, and to suggest possible new legislation that could stop the trade.

All rhino horn in North Yemen goes to Sanaa, the capital city, and is carved into dagger handles in the city market or 'souk'. About 85 jambia craftsmen work in small shops lining some of the dark alleyways of the souk, filing water-buffalo horn, wood and even some plastic handles for daggers. Fewer than one in twenty jambias are made with a rhino-horn handle today. However, Martin and Vigne watched several rhino-horn handles being carved, quite openly. The craftsmen showed small bags of rhino horn shavings which they sell to businessmen who in turn export the horn to eastern Asia. They complained bitterly that rhino horn has become harder to obtain, so that they are having to use up their old stocks and have only a few hundred kilos left.

This decline in the availability of rhino horn was demonstrated by the major dealer in the horn, who handles over two-thirds of North Yemen's imports. He voluntarily showed his book of personal trade records for the 1980s. From 1980 to 1984 he obtained over 1000 kilos of rhino horn per year; in 1985 he received 475 kilos and in 1986 only 100 kilos. Most of today's horn has been coming via the Sudan, but much has been stockpiled in Burundi and the United Arab Emirates until there is an opportunity for it to reach North Yemen.

This sharp decrease has been largely due to the big reduction in smuggling. In the early 1980s, up to 70% of consumer goods were smuggled into the country, resulting in a major loss of revenue from import duties. Now the Government has increased the number of officials at border check-points and the problem is gradually being contained.

This is an important way the Government is trying to save its scarce hard currency. During the last few years, North Yemen has suffered a severe economic recession. Remittances from Yemeni workers in Saudi Arabia and donor aid have been cut by approximately half. The Yemeni rial decreased in value from 4.7 to the US dollar in January 1984 to 11.9 in December 1986. The price of rhino horn consequently increased from 4300 rials to 10,000 rials per kilo. With rising inflation, fewer people can afford to spend several hundred dollars on a dagger with a rhino horn handle. North Yemen's economic decline has thus been beneficial to conservation efforts in decreasing rhino horn imports and the trade in general.

But the most valuable two hours of the visit to Sanaa were spent first with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Abdul al-Karim al-Iryani, and second with the Minister of Economy, Supply and Trade, Mr Mohamed al-Khadam al-Wajih. In both meetings the rhino crisis and North Yemen's central role in it were discussed. The ministers were warned that if North Yemen did not stop the trade, there would be an international outcry in the world's press and a possibility that foreign aid from certain western countries would be reduced.

Both ministers were genuinely enthusiastic to enforce the 1982 ban on rhino horn imports. A six point action plan was drawn up which included new legislation aimed at stopping the trade, and both were eager to implement these as soon as possible. These points are:

1. The Government will encourage imports of water buffalo horn as a substitute for rhino horn by eliminating all import duties on water buffalo horn;
2. The Government will encourage the jambia craftsmen to use water buffalo instead of rhino horn when their new licences are issued for the year, by asking for an affidavit that they will not use rhino horn;
3. By decree the Government will prohibit the export of rhino horn shavings from North Yemen;
4. The Government will ask the major dealer in rhino horn to stop all trade in the horn immediately;
5. The Government will raise with Sheikh Zayed, President of the United Arab Emirates, the issue of controlling the illegal imports of rhino horn into the Emirates, since these horns eventually make their way illicitly into North Yemen.
6. The Government will discuss with the Grand Mufti the issuance of a fatwa, or religious edict, and/or the giving of a public interview on the importance of not totally eliminating an animal species as it is against the will of God.

Three months later, in March 1987, Esmond Bradley Martin again visited North Yemen to find out what had been accomplished. He found that all the six points in the action plan had been fully agreed by the Cabinet, and that the Prime Minister himself had met the major trader in rhino horn in North Yemen to ask him not to handle any new horn. Minister Iryani had talked to a senior official from the United Arab Emirates who had suggested that the authorities in the individual sheikhdoms should be approached about stopping rhino horn imports, and follow-up was underway. The Minister of Economy had passed an edict on 20 January, 1987 banning

the export of rhino horn and shavings. But the affidavit system, which is perhaps the best method of curtailing the trade since it would result in the loss of the craftsman's licence and the closure of his shop if he continued to use rhino horn, had not yet been implemented. However, at a meeting with the Foreign Minister, Dr Iryani, and the Deputy Minister of Economy, accompanied by the British Ambassador and the American Chargé d' Affaires, both Yemeni senior officials apologised for the delay in organising the affidavits, which had been held up while moving offices. They were both adamant that the system would be implemented by the end of the year and many affidavits would be signed by July 1987. They also agreed to implement the other two points in the action plan by July 1987: talking to the Grand Mufti and eliminating import duties from water buffalo horn.

The North Yemen government is to be congratulated for their willingness and keenness to stop this trade in order to save the rhino in Africa. Also, they should be encouraged in their efforts to meet the deadline by the end of the year to implement all the points.

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Butterfly Houses

Mike Morris

Few naturalists and conservationists can be unaware of the growth in numbers of butterfly houses in Britain during the 1980s. In order to assess the effects of the butterfly house industry, the NCC, DoE and WWF(UK) commissioned IUCN's Conservation Monitoring Centre to examine the industry, and particularly to advise on the effects butterfly houses might have on conservation of the butterfly resource. CMC's report, researched and written by Dr Mark Collins, *Butterfly Houses in Britain: the Conservation Implications* proves to be a rich and thorough source of information about most aspects of butterfly houses in Britain. It also contains an executive summary which includes 20 sensible and well thought out recommendations.

Some of these are straightforward — the recommendation that houses should work closely with the CITES management authority (DoE), for example. Others, such as the recommendations on federations, make positive proposals for bringing the many houses (there are now over 40 in the United Kingdom) into a body in which they can work together for conservation. Of particular value is the recommendation that, as a result of federation, the butterfly houses should develop and fund an effective programme of action to conserve butterflies and their habitats at home and abroad. Throughout the report, the emphasis is positive in recognising the educational value of butterfly houses and their potential for conservation, particularly in the countries of origin.

Dr Collins is understandably cautious in attributing appreciation of the resource and its

conservation needs to the producers of butterflies in the Third World. It is perhaps ironic that the country in which this appreciation is perhaps best developed and where 'the idea of a butterfly farm situated on the edge of an area of natural forest in a mutualistic relationship' is most closely realised, Papua New Guinea, does not permit the export of live material. Nevertheless, it may well be that conservation of butterflies in the tropics will depend increasingly on appreciation of the resource by local people. The development of a conservation programme by a federation of butterfly houses will demand understanding and tact, and the butterfly houses understand very well the need to deal sympathetically with their suppliers. Dr Collins's report does not emphasise the potential for the butterfly resource to provide material benefits for the rural poor in the Third World because it is not specifically part of his brief; for those who believe that an increasing standard of living is the best hope for future conservation success, this is an important point.

NCC, DoE and WWF(UK) can be well satisfied that their support has produced such an excellent result. Without being in any way uncritical, the report brings to our attention the positive benefits of this industry and demonstrates convincingly that it is a force for good. How satisfactory it will be if, in the next few years, visitors to the houses can be assured that a proportion of their entrance fee will be devoted to positive conservation in the butterflies' countries of origin!

Obtainable from CMC, 219c Huntingdon Road, Cambridge CB3 0DL, UK. £5 plus £1 postage.