

Daggers Cut Down Rhinos

MIDDLE EAST

A WWF investigation in Yemen reveals an unexpected surge in rhino horn imports



Equipped: Yemeni men in Sanaa with some rhino horn-handled jambiyyahs.

Last April, WWF sent Esmond Bradley Martin, now UNEP's special envoy for rhino conservation, and his associate Lucy Vigne to Sanaa, Yemen, to investigate the rhino horn trade. They were shocked to learn that rhino horn imports had apparently risen from an annual 300 kilograms in 1990 to about 500 kilos. Stall after stall offered jambiyyahs – traditional daggers – with rhino horn handles.

The reason for the rise? Yemen's unification has increased the country's largely unpatrolled borders, opening the country up to smugglers en route from eastern Africa and perhaps Zimbabwe, where poachers are hitting hardest.

Yemen's renewed rhino horn use is partially responsible for the continuing drastic decline of Africa's wild rhinos. Sanaa's biggest rhino horn dealer told a WWF informer that he had purchased more than 750 kilos of horn from August 1990 to March 1992 – equivalent to about 260 dead rhinos.

Martin and Vigne discussed tactics to reduce the rhino horn trade with Foreign Minister Abdul Karim Al-Iryani. The result: in May 1992



One of many dagger stalls in Sanaa's souk.

the Grand Mufti, Yemen's religious leader, issued a decree against killing rhinos for their horns and urged their protection.

Then in December, the government banned domestic trade in raw rhino horn – an important step if enforced. A short film in Arabic on the rhino's plight will be broadcast in Yemen. Martin and Vigne had suggested these measures in 1990, but the unification of North and South Yemen and the Gulf war put the rhino horn issue on hold.

Reported by Lucy Vigne, who has worked with Esmond Bradley Martin on WWF-supported wildlife trade projects since 1985.

Jørgen Thomsen, Director of TRAFFIC International, started his working life with the Danish Ministry for the Environment. The ornithologist then moved to the United States, to work first with WWF and then with TRAFFIC USA, before taking on his current position. And what is TRAFFIC? Sarah Russell quizzed Thomsen in the office on the outskirts of Cambridge, where he and his team coordinate the activities of the TRAFFIC network.

Trade



Jørgen Thomsen with an eminently marketable hyacinth macaw.



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Cover: Because of intensive trade, all *Paphiopedilum* orchids, or lady's slippers, are listed on Appendix I of CITES. Photographer Gerald Cubitt found this *P. spicerianum* growing in Sikkim, India. See page 3 for more on the plant trade.

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The Wildlife Trade: Looking Back to Move Ahead

Presumably people do not want the planet to lose 1,500 species every day. Nevertheless, it is we who are responsible for this sad statistic. After habitat loss, the main cause of high extinction rate is overexploitation of wildlife.

To curb the potentially destructive effect of the international wildlife trade, and to provide a solid basis for regulation that could benefit both nature conservation and people, the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) was signed 20 years ago.



CITES entered into force in 1975. TRAFFIC Records Analysis of Flora and Fauna in Commerce was founded almost immediately afterwards and became an essential source of information on wildlife trade. TRAFFIC's studies help make control measures are followed up on the possible threat to species concerned.

Needless to say, CITES and TRAFFIC have worked very closely ever since. Successes include bringing the vicuña back from the brink of extinction by helping to replace poaching with sustainable trades in skins and The TRAFFIC Network – which extends from Monte Carlo to Taipei – has been a great support to CITES. TRAFFIC's governmental structure allows it to penetrate illegal trade whether of the 27,000 tiny orchid species that are listed in CITES appendices, or the rhino horn trade.

Unfortunately, even with TRAFFIC and CITES support, the rhino still needs help. I myself feel no species deserves more attention than another. But you do not kill a species if the rhinos go, what happens to cacti, songbirds, snails. That is why we can only hope that all states – Parties to CITES – will do everything in their power to save the rhinos.

The last 20 years have seen many developments that affect the work of CITES and TRAFFIC, such as new breeding techniques, artificial plant propagation, new consumer patterns. Remembering lessons of the past, organizations are preparing for the challenge of a changing world. This is all in the hope of helping to stop, over the next 20 years, the steep decline of that divine wealth – the biological diversity.

Izgrev Topkov

Secretary General, CITES

WWF - World Wide Fund For Nature is the world's largest private international conservation organization with 28 Affiliate and Associate National Organizations around the world and over 5.2 million regular supporters. WWF aims to conserve nature and ecological processes by preserving genetic, species, and ecosystem diversity; ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable both now and in the longer term; and promoting actions to reduce pollution and the wasteful consumption of resources. WWF continues to be known as World Wildlife Fund in Canada and the United States of America.

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