

# Garamba

Conservation in Peace & War

*Edited by Kes Hillman Smith & José Kalpers  
with Luis Arranz & Nuria Ortega*

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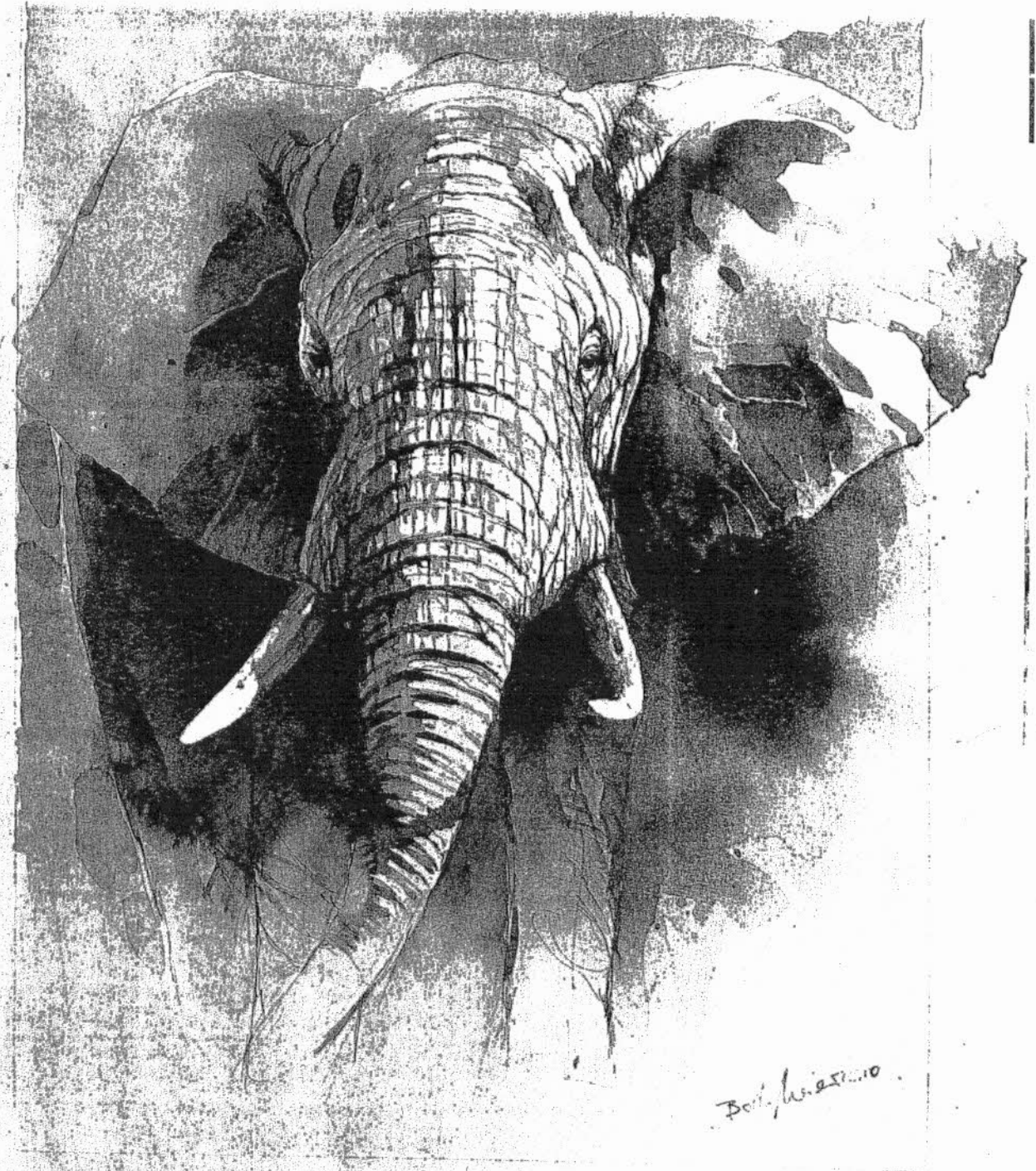
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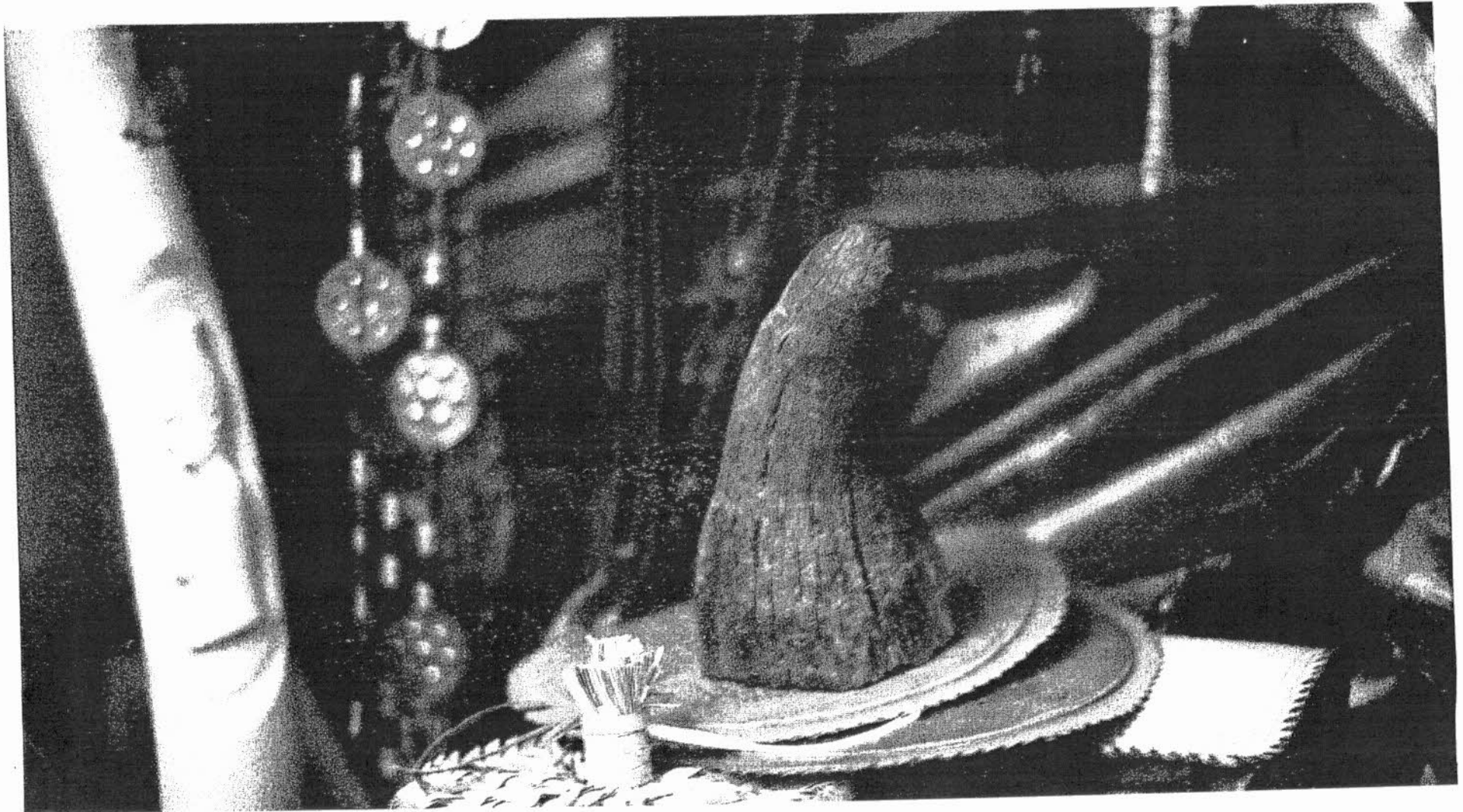
# Trade Routes in War & Peace

*By Esmond Bradley Martin*





*The demand for rhino horn for traditional dagger handles in Yemen and for traditional medicines in eastern Asia has led to the decimation of Garamba National Park's rhinos. The killing of elephants for their ivory has had a similar effect on the once dense elephant population. Close to shifting areas of civil conflict Garamba has been vulnerable to armed poaching and trans border incursions. This chapter examines how the trade routes for horn and ivory have changed as conflicts came and went.*



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# Trade Routes in War & Peace

## The effect of wars on poaching and trade around Garamba

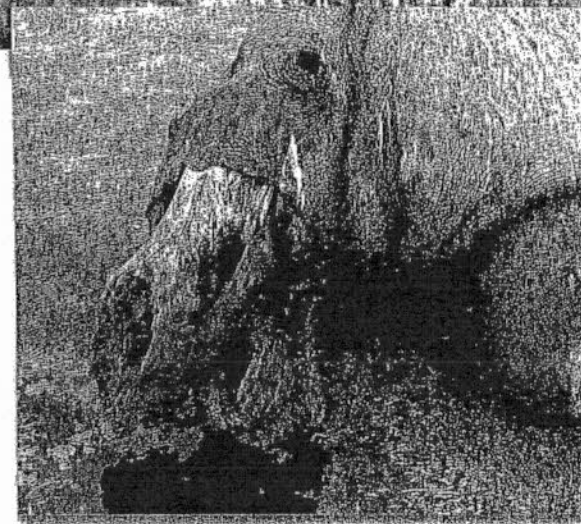
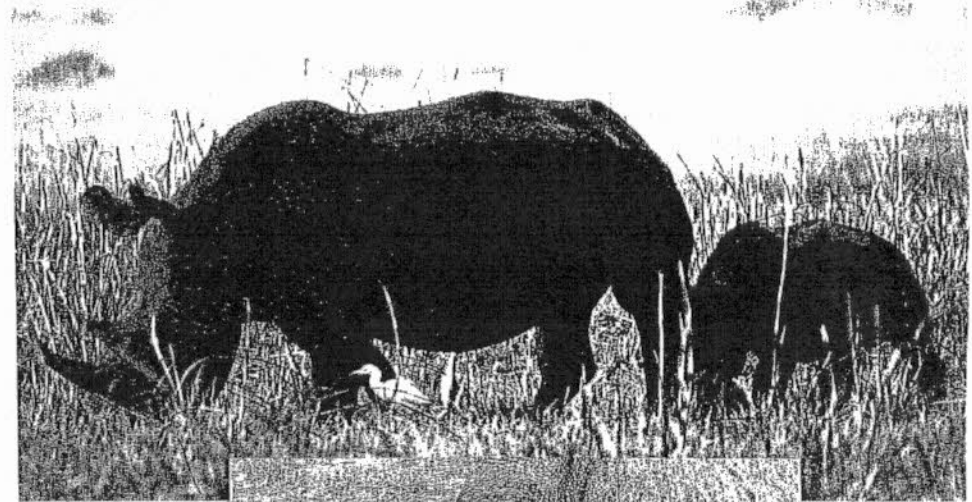
As recently as 2003, there were 30 Northern White Rhinos in Garamba (Hillman Smith and Ndey 2005). In 2006 only four could be confirmed alive (Emslie 2006), and by 2008 none were found during the survey, but patrolling was limited and some may still exist (Jerome Amube, pers comm. May 2008). There is only scant information on what the poachers were paid for the horns, but there is a very clear picture of the effects of wars on trade routes and poaching.

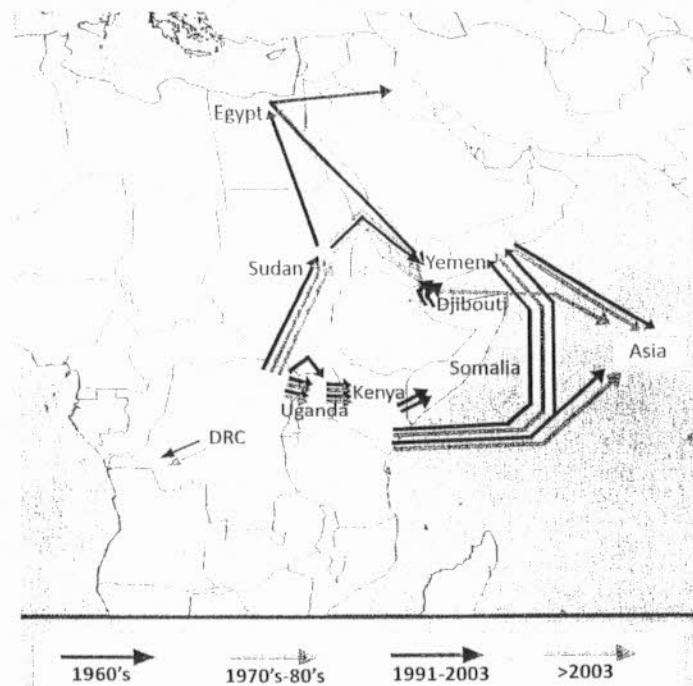
The three main routes from Garamba for rhino horn and ivory have been south via Kinshasa, east through Uganda or north across the border into Sudan. Within Sudan the route could either go north or east depending on the state of the civil war between the Arab north Sudan and South Sudan. All routes varied in relation to shifting power politics and areas of civil unrest. Serious fighting in northeast DRC or southern Sudan has been frequent over the last few decades and the trade networks have adapted to the changing circumstances.

Inter-tribal conflict has been a traditional way of life in much of Africa and civil wars and political unrest continue to be common. The spin-off has been widespread availability of arms and ammunition, and illegal killing of wildlife for commercial meat market or sale of ivory and rhino horn, often to buy more weapons. This has almost been considered fair game and international traders exploit the situation. It has been of vital importance, not only to try to conserve wildlife *in situ* but also to investigate and find ways to control the illegal trade.

I have been studying the markets for rhino horn in Africa and Asia since 1978. My work in tracking down the horn from Garamba's rhinos has been a difficult challenge and sometimes dangerous. This chapter will outline the movement and prices of these rhino horns from Garamba through Africa to Yemen and to China.

Garamba's northern boundary is a little used track that demarcates it from what is now South Sudan. The first major decimation of Garamba's rhinos and elephants occurred during the Simba rebellion of 1964 which followed Independence of the Belgian Congo. Both Congolese and Sudanese poachers had a fairly free rein, allowing rampant exploitation, with rhino horn and ivory being taken out and probably transported both north through Sudan and south or east through the Congo and east through East Africa. Some of the mercenaries that came to stop the fighting also helped themselves to Garamba's wildlife.





Changing Trade Routes for Rhino Horn and Ivory in relation to Zones of Civil Conflict

Hundreds of rhino horns were found in a store in the nearby small town of Faradje when Kai Curry-Lindahl came to investigate in 1966. When Kes Hillman Smith flew up from Kinshasa in 1982 with Samy Mankoto, the Scientific and Technical Director of IZCN, a load of ivory was being flown out of Isiro to Kinshasa. Later studies showed that this was a regular route for ivory and rhino horn during the 1970s, 80s and early 90s and IZCN worked to control it.

In the late 1970s and 1983 there was a lull in the chronic civil conflict between north and south Sudan that had become a way of life in southern Sudan; but arms were still readily available, and groups of northern militia were in Sudan's Southern National Park, living off wildlife while de-stabilising the region (Kes Hillman Smith pers. comm. 1984). There was at this time a strong trade route north through Khartoum.

Between 1984 (when the Garamba Rehabilitation Project started) and the early 1990s, serious poaching was stopped, but a certain amount of illegal off-take for meat, largely of buffalo and elephant and ivory continued in the north of Garamba and anti-poaching activity focused there to prevent it spreading into rhino and elephant concentration areas further south. Monitoring showed that 70% of the poaching groups were all or partly Sudanese; they were increasing in number and advancing south (Kes Hillman Smith pers. comm. 1991).

In 1991, when the civil war in Sudan was again well under way, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), the southern militia, took the Sudanese town of Maridi, close to Garamba, driving out armed government forces and civilians, who fled across the border into Zaire, many of them through the park. Soon there were about 80,000 refugees living on either side of the reserves surrounding Garamba and a free flow of people across the permeable Zaire/Sudan border. Now the Sudanese involvement in poaching was largely driven by the Southern Sudanese guerrilla forces who took meat for food and to sell and who had access to arms and ammunition including hand grenades and rocket launchers (GNPP reports). At this time the trade route through Khartoum was largely closed due to the conflict, but the SPLA had allies in Uganda and a more eastern route opened.

Commercial off-take was also managed by people (often mistresses) linked to the Zairian military forces stationed in this border area (de Merode 1998). This route was therefore to the south through Isiro and possibly also east as TRAFFIC reports showed ivory transiting through Rwanda which had no large elephant populations itself. Ivory and rhino horn were much more valuable trade commodities than bushmeat and despite well supported and managed anti-poaching, the SPLA-backed poaching advanced inexorably down through the park to invade the safer southern concentration area of the elephants and rhinos.

By 1996 the first rhinos were known to have been poached since the park's rehabilitation in 1984. Then in 1997 the "Liberation War" reached Garamba. Anti-poaching was completely stopped for several months, over 5,000 elephants and about five rhinos were killed and their products fed the trade routes (Chapters 7 & 12).

During the second civil war from 1998 to 2002 Uganda was the main occupying or supporting force of the north eastern corner of what had by then become the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and were also allied to the SPLA on the Sudan side of the border. This area was also cut off from Kinshasa. The southern route was effectively completely closed. In 1998 the main trade routes for ivory and rhino horn were very clearly through Uganda, with horn being observed and offered for sale in the border towns of Aru and Arua and in Kampala (G. Malamas pers. comm. 1999). Some rhino horns were seized crossing the border from Uganda to Kenya (Kenya Wildlife Service pers. comm. 2000 and TRAFFIC EA pers. comm. 2000).

In 2003 there was a cease fire in Sudan. The buffer of the SPLA-held territory along the Sudan/DRC border was no longer defended and the fierce northern *Muharaleen* horsemen began to penetrate into Garamba and surrounding areas. The

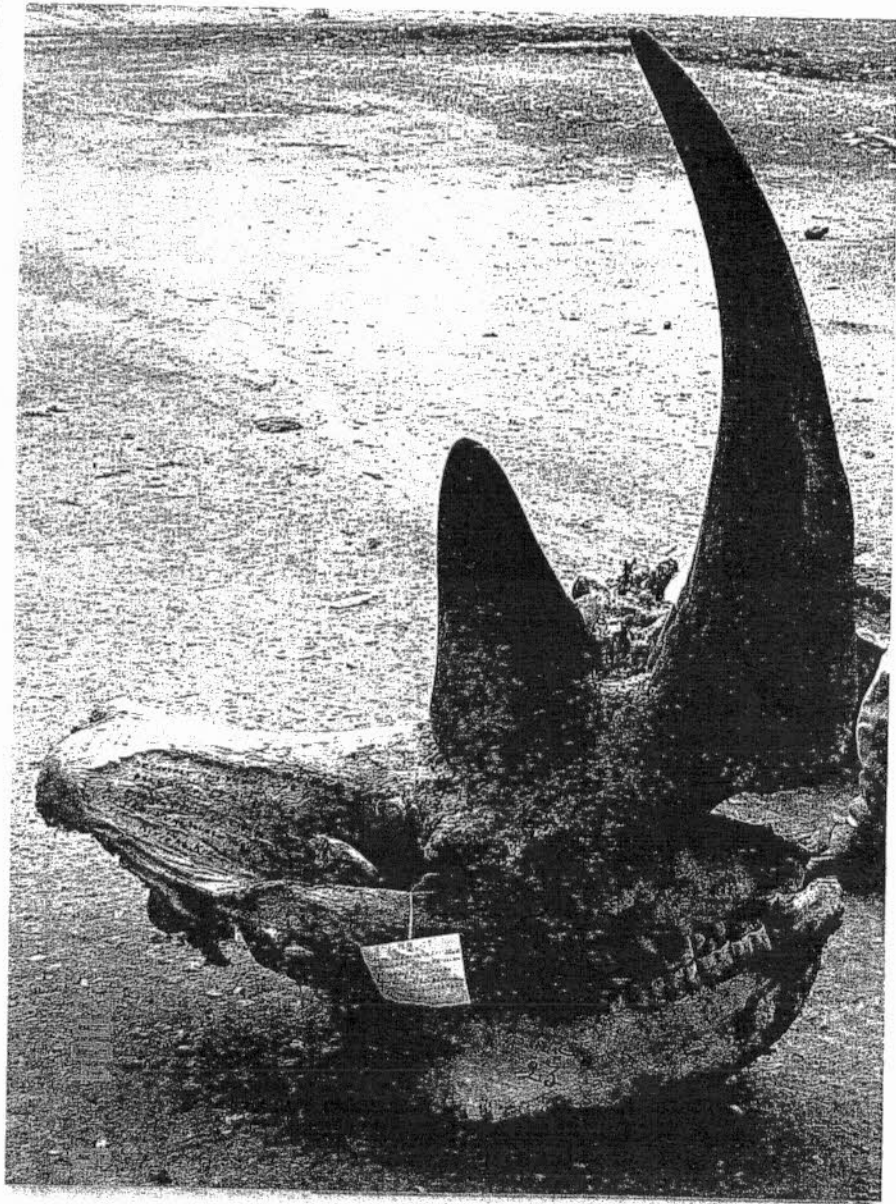


decimation of rhinos and elephants began again with the trade route now switched back to northern Sudan, where middlemen could move the horns to Khartoum for sale. Meanwhile, from Uganda some of the last few rhino horns from Garamba were transported northwards probably through northern Sudan or Somalia, some via Djibouti, to Yemen, based on information collected in Yemen. A contributory factor to the demise of the last of the Northern White Rhinos and killing of elephants was military unrest in the Garamba area with members of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) who were originally from Uganda, but began penetrating the Garamba area from South Sudan around 2005. These rebels harassed and killed local people so much that anti-poaching was again curtailed and military moved into the area to try to control them. The LRA were involved in poaching and no doubt assisted in the smuggling of horn and ivory into Uganda to buyers there.

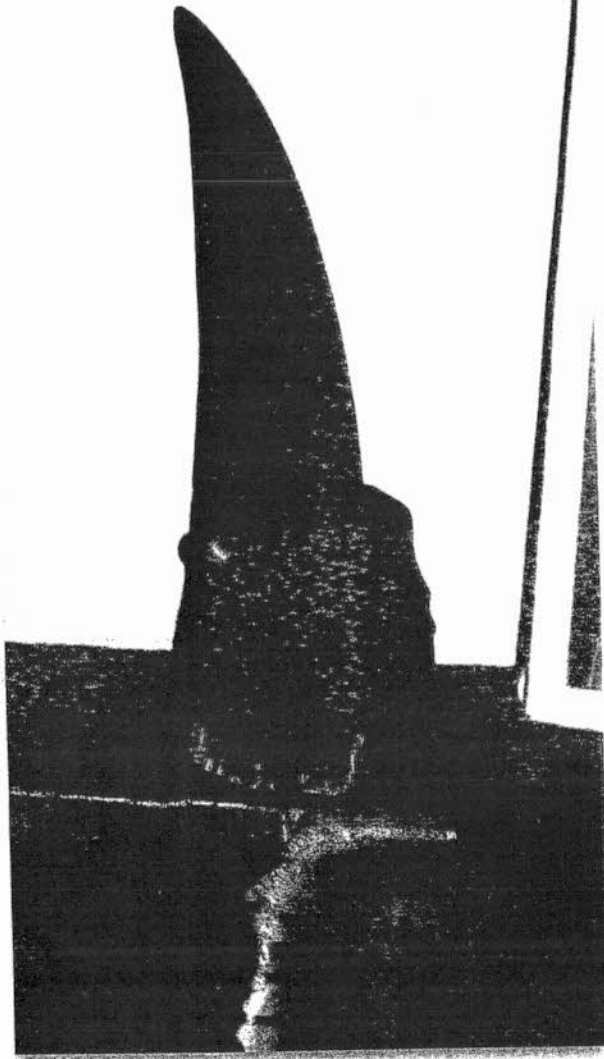
### Investigating the markets

As well as eastwards, the other main smuggling route for Garamba's horns has been north. I first visited Omdurman and Khartoum in Sudan to examine the illegal trade in rhino horn and ivory in 1997. It was extremely difficult to obtain a Sudanese visa if you were British or American. Once I was in Khartoum, I had to register myself with the government within three days. I then had to receive a special permit so I could take photographs. Government security personnel surrounded the public areas in order to prevent political dissent. Understandably, due to the heavy security and bureaucracy there were very few western visitors. I did meet Chinese and South Koreans who were employed mostly by construction companies in Sudan. They were keen to buy ivory and rhino horn, either processed or raw, to take back to their home countries.

Unlike ivory items, rhino horn was not openly displayed in the retail outlets. Although sales of both are illegal in northern Sudan, the government does try to enforce the law regarding rhino horn as the animal is especially endangered in Sudan (there are virtually none left). I had to ask the souvenir shop owners if I could be shown any rhino horns for sale. Eventually I was informed to come to a curio shop in Khartoum. I was quite nervous, as it was at night and the alleyway leading to the shop had no lights, nor were there any people around. I wondered if I were being enticed by the security forces into a trap, or if I were being tricked by the wildlife authorities, or used by a group of criminals waiting to steal money from me. It is sometimes hard to judge how far to go when tracking down illicit rhino horn. Often those involved in this shady business become suspicious of my questions, wondering if I am an informer for the wildlife department or a journalist attempting to find out information to expose their illegal activities. Finally a light was turned on in the curio shop and I was met by a shopkeeper who was acting as a broker for the owner of the horn who was based in Omdurman. He told me he could provide a 3.25 kg horn at a price which was almost three times the price in Yemen at that time. After bargaining he accepted to somewhat reduce the price. He told me to come back the next day to see the horn.







I returned to be shown what I recognised to be a white rhino horn. The owner had received the horn a year earlier from Nimule town in Sudan, near the Uganda border, not far from Garamba and close to Nimule National Park that had once held a population of white rhinos. I asked if I could take a photograph for my 'buyer' in Yemen. He agreed. He then lowered the price further. At that moment some people were heard in the alleyway which made the shopkeeper nervous. He put away the horn and with an associate he drove away quickly in his white Volkswagen (Martin and Smith 1999).

Another day I visited a large retail/wholesale curio shop in Omdurman. The owner wore a rhino horn ring. He said if he were bitten by a snake or scorpion he could burn the ring in order to put the ash on the wound as a cure. He then opened his iron safe and showed me a small rhino horn weighing 230 g. As it was a posterior (back) horn I could not identify whether it was from a black or white rhino. While we were discussing the price, a European man entered the shop; he saw the horn and was angry, shouting at us that the horn was illegal and should not be in the shop being offered for sale. The owner could not be bothered with all the fuss. He went off to attend to someone else and the shop assistant allowed me to photograph the horn. When the owner returned and saw this, he was furious and fined his assistant! He, nevertheless, asked me to come back the next day to see a larger horn, which I did. A Sudanese army captain arrived and told the shop owner that he could get one horn of 3.2 kg (probably a white rhino horn based on its weight) and bring it to the shop in the afternoon. I returned once more and the owner showed me a horn weighing 2.54 kg that was from a white rhino. He did not let me photograph it. It was not clear if this horn was from the army captain or another horn that the shop owner was brokering. The horns I saw in Sudan were grossly over-priced (the asking price for all three was USD 3,500 a kg) which no doubt included a very large commission.

Pictures of the two horns that I did manage to photograph were later examined by Kes Hillman Smith who said they were almost certainly from Garamba from rhinos she knew individually. There had been rhino poaching in Garamba in early 1997. While in Sudan, I was offered four other rhino horns, but could not see them due to lack of time; like the others, they could well have been from Garamba. I was told one was from a rhino killed eight months before my visit and another 12 months earlier; rhino poaching had been going on in Garamba through that time.

From Khartoum/Omdurman, traders send most rhino horn by air from Khartoum to Yemen or they take it in trucks to Port Sudan from where it is flown or shipped across the Red Sea to Yemen. Some horn is taken via Addis Ababa and flown to Yemen. Other horn, however, is taken by trucks to Cairo from where it is usually flown to Yemen, or occasionally Oman, for dagger handles, and a little, made in Cairo into worry beads, go to other Gulf States.

In 1998 and 2005 I surveyed the markets in Cairo, Luxor and Aswan for endangered wildlife items, including rhino horn. I only saw one rhino horn in Cairo in 1998. It was a 2 kg old black rhino horn trophy in a large tourist shop in the old Kahn al-Khalili market. The owner had bought the horn a month before and wanted USD 732 a kg for it. The owner said that usually dealers with rhino horns (including horns from Garamba) would go from one shop to another to sell them. The main buyers, the shop owner confirmed, were Yemenis and Omanis. They had one regular buyer from Kuwait who would buy the horn to make into worry beads and then take them to Kuwait to sell. Another shop keeper in Cairo apparently had a 2 kg rhino horn that he was hoping to sell at an astronomic price to a gullible Chinese person! Other vendors in Cairo told me they had sold rhino horns, sometimes powdered, to Egyptians to cure blood poisoning and snake bites.

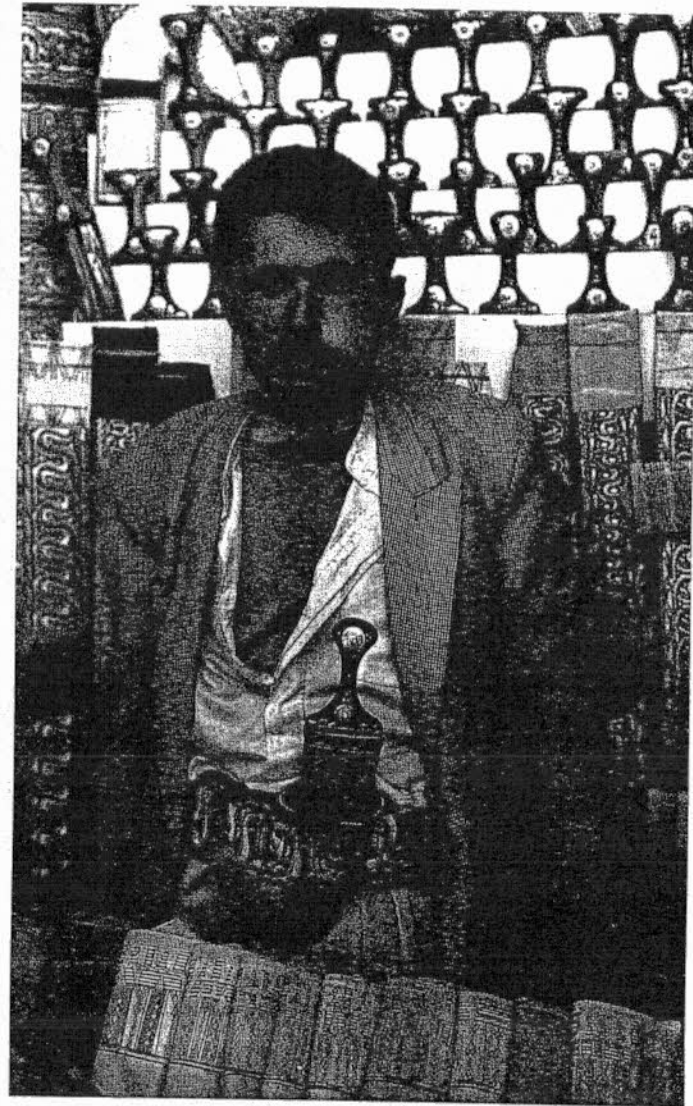
## Uses of rhino horn

Data that I have collected over the years from rhino horn dealers in Africa and Asia reveal that the majority of eastern and central African rhino horn has been taken to Yemen. Here they are crafted into dagger handles for the traditional jambiya. These are still worn daily by many Yemeni men, especially around Sanaa and northwards. From Yemen, the left over chips and powder are taken to eastern Asia for medicines.

## Yemen

I first visited North Yemen in 1978 and saw large quantities of African rhino horn being imported legally into Sanaa. My wife, Chrysee, and I were caught up in an attempted coup with tanks filling the streets of Sanaa! Rhino horn imports were massive in the 1970s and it was not until 1982 that imports were banned. This country has always been difficult to control, however, with armed and lawless tribesmen living in a mountainous terrain, and with long sea and desert borders that are hard to patrol. The central government based in Sanaa has struggled to enforce their 1982 rhino horn import ban and their 1992 ban on internal trade in raw rhino horn.

North and South Yemen united to form one country, the Republic of Yemen, in 1990, but intermittent clashes in the east, north and south have continued. This has made it extremely easy to smuggle all goods, even human traffic, into or through the country, and rhino horn remains a low priority to the government. The country has other worries, such as kidnappings of foreigners by Yemenis who have grudges against the government's allocation of resources, internal religious battles, and killings of foreigners by al Qaeda sympathisers.





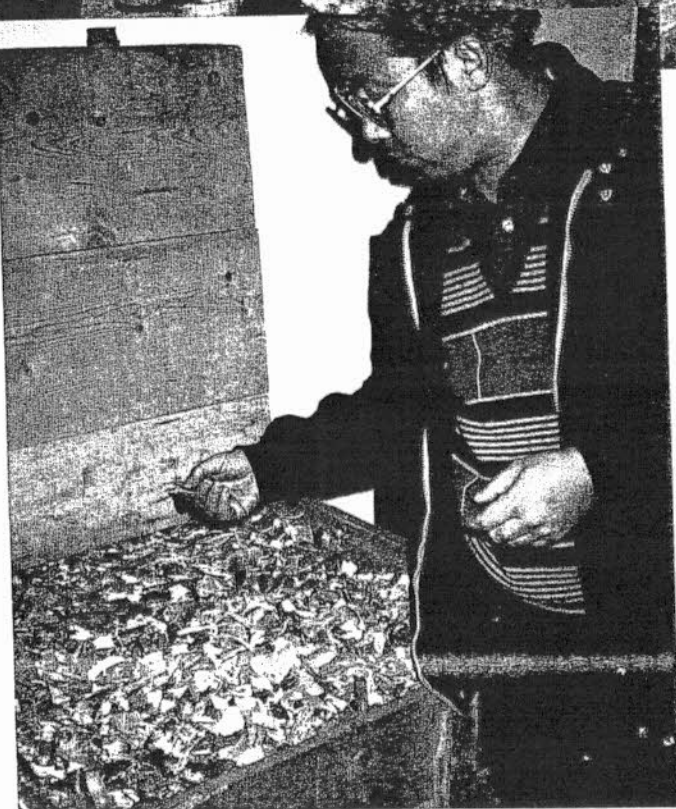


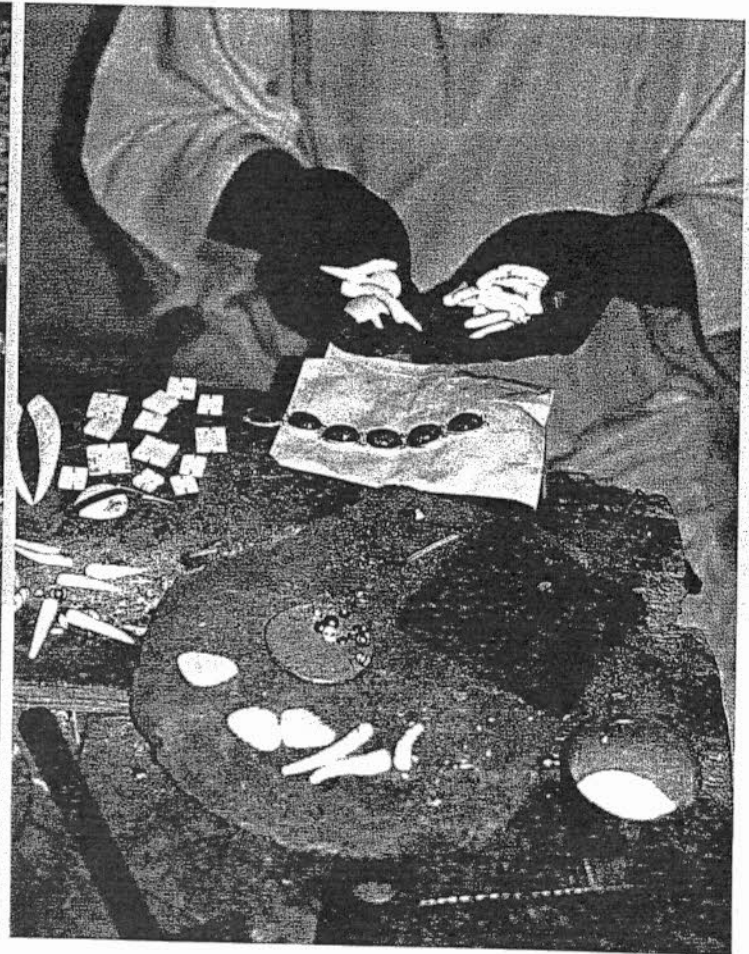
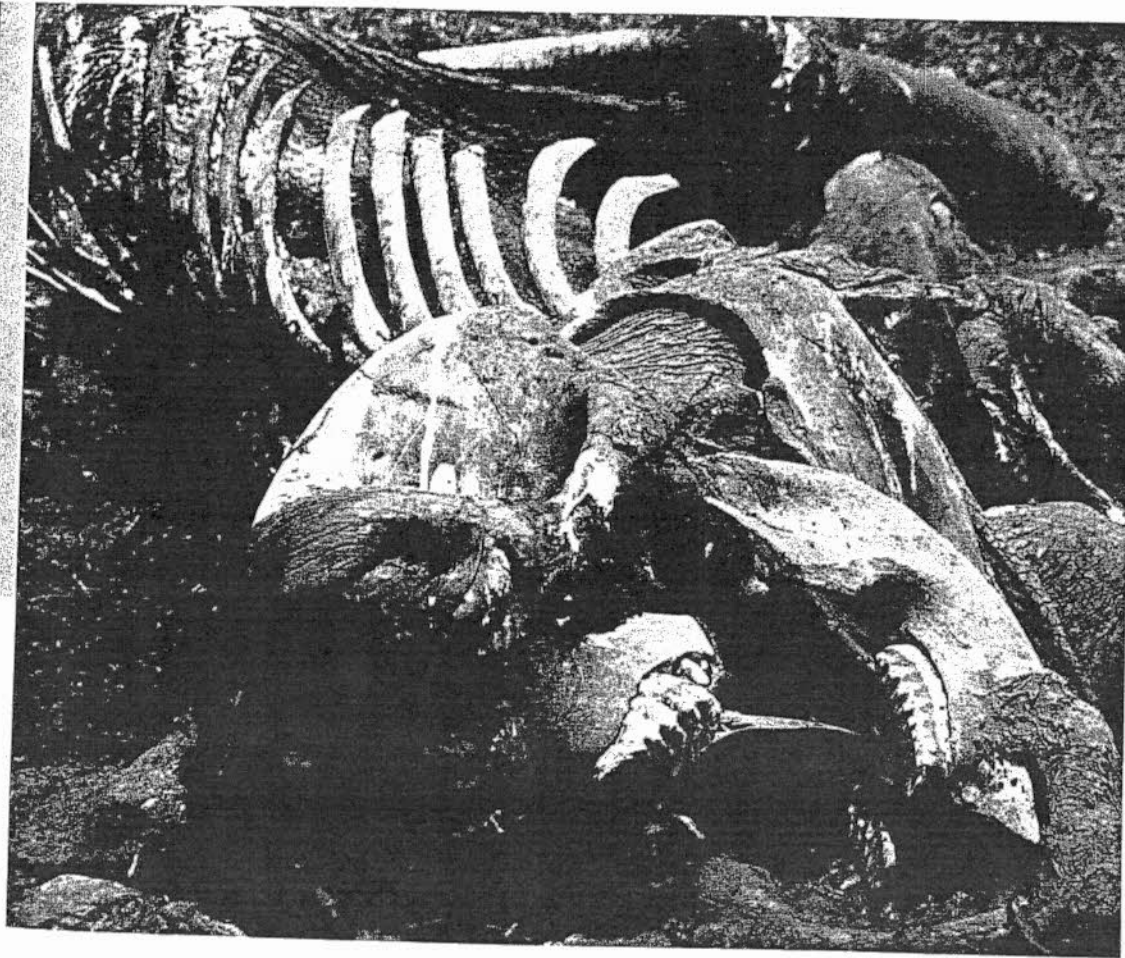
Traders in Yemen were easy to interview in the 1980s, before suspicions that their business was being closed down by conservation organisations. As they sat cross-legged in their small workshops in Sanaa's old souk, they would tell us that in the 1970s and 1980s most of their rhino horns came from Kenya, Tanzania and Sudan. There were thousands of black rhinos in eastern Africa, and hundreds of northern white rhinos in the Central African Republic, Chad, Sudan, Uganda, and Zaire (today the Democratic Republic of Congo, DRC), but in these two decades, numbers of black rhinos fell dramatically and the Northern White Rhino was almost obliterated. Rampant civil wars in these parts of Africa had brought in plentiful supplies of firearms and there were frequent breakdowns in law and order making it easy to kill rhinos. This coincided with growing wealth in North Yemen due to the start of the oil boom in Saudi Arabia where many Yemenis found work, returning money to their families back home. Demand for rhino horns spiralled. An average of 3,000 kg of horn in the 1970s and over 1,000 kg up until the mid-1980s from central and eastern Africa were reaching Yemen. Rhinos were being poached to meet this escalating market, and import prices into Yemen rose by almost 65% between 1980 and 1991.

In the 1990s it became steadily more difficult to monitor the rhino horn trade in Yemen as the traders and craftsmen became more secretive, and travel around Yemen became more restricted for security reasons. Our most dangerous visit was in 1994 with the outbreak of civil war that saw my colleague Lucy Vigne and I evacuated by American rescue aeroplanes to Riyadh! Most investigative work in the souk would require Lucy to dress heavily veiled so as not to be recognised, sometimes in Omani dress, in order to walk down the dusty narrow alleys to the far end of the souk where the jambiya craftsmen and traders operate. One has to rely on the better nature of the Yemenis that they are not going to stab one in the back! On long journeys out of Sanaa, however, the government insisted that we have an army escort. In 1991, five heavily armed army guards escorted us to investigate rhino horn in Sadaa in the dangerous north. More recently in 2008 Belgian tourists were killed in southern Yemen in a village through which we were passing a few days later, and again we could only go there after obtaining numerous police block permits and with a police escort all the way. Yemen has perhaps been the most dangerous region that I have worked in over the years!

It was not until the year 1998 that Yemeni traders say they were receiving rhino horns mostly originating from the DRC and Kenya. This fits in with the period of poaching in 1997 in Garamba and when I was offered rhino horns from Garamba in Khartoum and Omdurman. Traders in Yemen stated that most of their rhino horn came from eastern Africa, except for 2005 and 2006 when the majority was from the DRC and Kenya. Again, this follows the time of serious poaching in Garamba in 2003 and 2004. By November, 2004 only four rhinos were found in the Park during a survey.

Throughout the 2000s, traders in Yemen have been receiving 20-70 kg of rhino horn annually from animals killed in eastern and central Africa. The import price rose by 40% between 2003 and 2007 from USD 1 200-1 700 a kg as the horn was becoming scarcer (Vigne et al. 2007).





Yemen banned the re-export of rhino horn in 1987 to try to help curtail the international trade in rhino horn that was causing the demise of rhino populations in Africa. Until then thousands of kilos of rhino horn chips and shavings that were left over from the carving of jambiya handles had been exported from Yemen to eastern Asia, especially to China. There is a lot of wastage from crafting whole horn into jambiya handles, perhaps 60%. In the 1980s, Yemeni traders told us they were receiving for the chips and shavings around 70% of the price of raw horn. This lucrative export business had given them significant profits in those years.

### China and Taiwan

In 1990, I visited China and Taiwan to look for the rhino horn markets. African rhino horn was available for retail sale in medicine shops and stalls at around USD 4,000 a kg. I found several medicine factory storerooms in Beijing, Tianjin and Guangzhou which contained large wooden crates full of rhino horn pieces from Yemen. I saw several hundred kilos that were to be an ingredient into various traditional Chinese medicines. These factories were continuing to use rhino horn pieces legally, but following much pressure and publicity, with photos I had taken appearing in the international media (Martin 1991), the internal use and sales of rhino horn





were finally banned in China in 1993. Some trade to China continued illegally. Left-over rhino horn chips smuggled from Yemen to China gradually dwindled, however, as the Yemeni market for rhino horn shrunk, partly as a result of recent economic hardship in the country. Instead, with growing wealth in China and rising numbers of Chinese working in Africa since the early 2000s, demand for rhino horn in China rose. The Chinese have increasingly been obtaining rhino horn directly from Africa in the 2000s and Vietnam have replaced the Yemen market as the biggest threat for Africa's rhinos in recent years.



## Wars, wealth and Northern White Rhinos

In conclusion, the trade routes for rhino horns and ivory from Garamba National Park to the end markets in Asia have, over the previous four decades, wound their way through some of the most volatile and unstable states where there have been continual civil wars and poor law and order. The DRC, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia and Yemen have witnessed turbulent times allowing rhino horn and ivory trade routes to flourish, passing through corrupt and criminal hands. It is very unfortunate that the last *in situ* stronghold of the Northern White Rhino was located in this troubled area.

The demand for rhino horn in Yemen and China has fuelled the people of this desperate Central African region to destroy their valuable heritage forever: the Northern White Rhino.