



HIGH RHINO HORN PRICES DRIVE POACHING



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Prices for rhino horn vary enormously along the supply chain, with various rates quoted in the media and other sources. Obtaining accurate pricing remains a challenge.

This article reports on our findings on rhino horn pricing obtained in the course of our recent travels in Kenya, Vietnam and China.

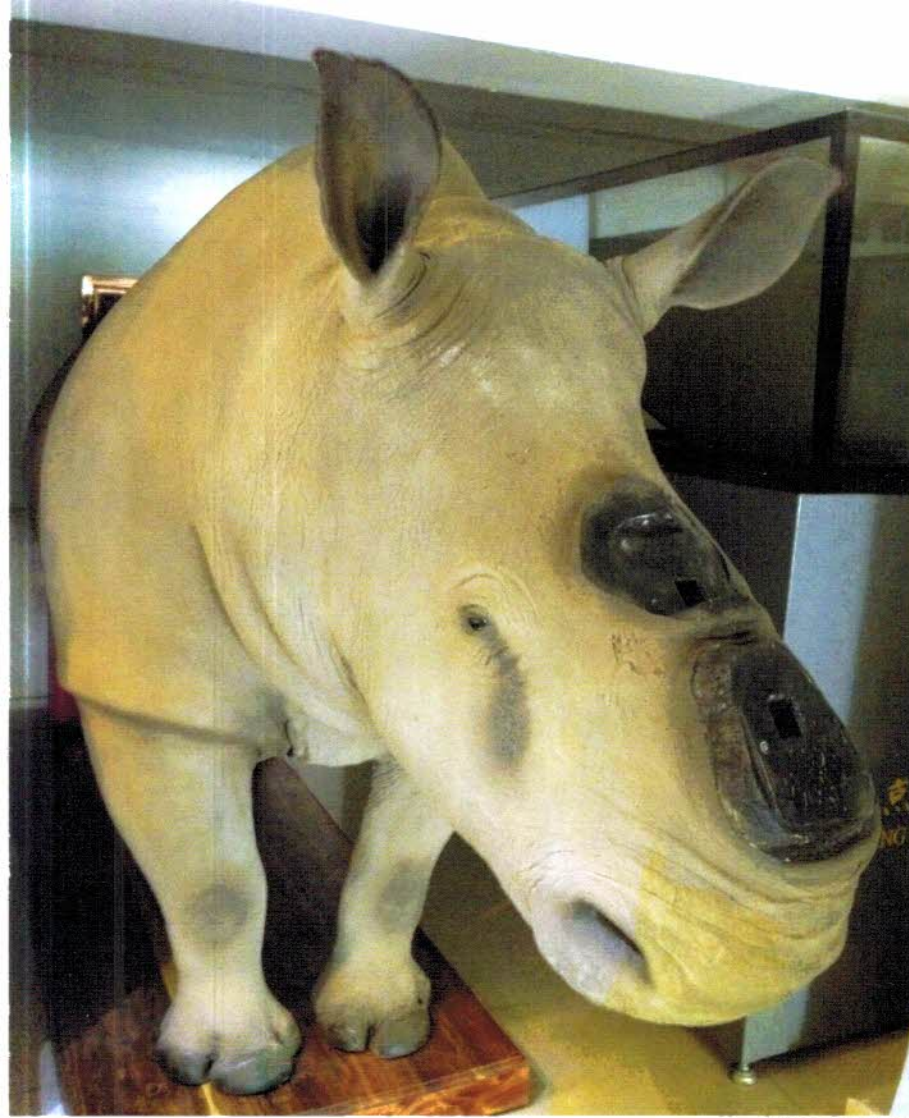
KENYA

Our price sources for rhino horn in Kenya come from poachers, brokers, and informants. The first broker will meet the poachers usually in a rural area. There are at least two poachers in a gang, usually Kenyans, Somalis or Tanzanians. The broker may provide guns and ammunition

or half the agreed amount of money in advance. The poaching gang is paid per horn, not per kilogramme. Horns from both black and white rhino species are priced the same.

To calculate the kilo price, a black rhino's average horn weight is 1.5kg (as the average black rhino has two horns weighing 3kg). A white rhino's average horn weight is 2.5kg (the average white rhino has two horns weighing 5kg). Combining the two species, an average horn weight is 2kg.

Between 2010 and 2013 a first broker paid the poachers about \$2,392 for a 2kg horn. That is \$1,196 per kg. By early 2015, however, a first broker paid \$4,300 for such a horn - that is \$2,150 a kg. This price doubled between 2013 and 2015! The first broker can sell his horn at an even higher price to a second broker who is based



PHOTOS BY LUCY VIGNE

LEFT PAGE: This stuffed white rhino was shipped with CITES permits from Zimbabwe to China on display in 2014 in a shopping mall in Beijing.

TOP: In late 2015 we saw the same stuffed rhino in the Beijing mall hidden in an alcove, its precious horns removed for other uses!

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in the towns or cities. They include Chinese, East Africans (some of Arab descent), Somalis and West Africans.

This recent sharp price rise is due to increased competition amongst brokers for rhino horns with more Kenyan-Chinese connections. There are also fewer rhino horns on the market. This is because rhino poaching has declined in Kenya from 59 in 2013, 36 in 2014 to only 11 in 2015.

Rhino poaching has fallen for several reasons. Government departments involved in wildlife conservation have improved cooperation, not only amongst themselves, but also with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private conservationists and, most importantly, with the Association of Private Land Rhino Sanctuaries.

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) has increased the number of rangers on patrol, and they have been supplied with more vehicles and night vision binoculars. Intelligence gathering also has become more effective.

\$2,392
Amount in Kenya a first broker paid poachers for a 2 kg horn between 2010 and 2013

\$4,300
Amount in Kenya a first broker paid poachers for a 2 kg horn by early 2015

A new DNA and forensic laboratory has been installed in Nairobi, allowing seized horns from rhinos with known DNA to be identified. The new Wildlife Act's fines and jail terms for rhino poachers and traders have been hugely increased, and the judiciary has become more proactive, handing down stiffer sentences. Most significantly, some 'kingpin' rhino horn exporters were arrested in 2015.

VIETNAM

At the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) African Rhino Specialist Group meeting in Tanzania in May 2008, a new threat to rhinos was discussed - demand for rhino horn in Vietnam. Some officials and businessmen in Vietnam were becoming increasingly wealthy wanting rhino horn as a status symbol and for medicinal purposes, although imports and domestic trade was illegal.

Meanwhile, Vietnamese handicrafts were steadily increasing in production, especially for export to mainland China. By around 2011, artisans in the northern villages were processing rhino horns to make various items.

In 2013, almost two million people from the mainland went to Vietnam, many for bargain shopping as Vietnamese labour is much cheaper. Although only a fraction buy rhino horn, vendors told us that the Chinese are now the main rhino horn buyers in Vietnam.

Late last year, we surveyed the ivory and rhino horn trade in Vietnam. We visited Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) and Hanoi, but we saw no real rhino horns on display, as vendors know it is illegal and it would soon be confiscated. We also surveyed hundreds of jewellery, antique, jade and souvenir



Bangles made from the good quality inner part of this white rhino horn in Vietnam is bought mostly by mainland Chinese, leaving the rough outer edge on sale to use for traditional medicine.

outlets, but again saw no real rhino horn.

We visited the biggest city in the Central Highlands, Buon Ma Thuot. Although ivory and elephant products were commonly seen for sale, only one souvenir shop had on view a tiny pea-size piece of rhino horn priced at about \$44. The vendor explained one needed to crush the horn into powder to mix with water and drink as a tonic.

We then surveyed villages around Hanoi where artisans specialize in carvings. We learned they usually kept rhino horn items for sale very secretly and out of sight. One village, however, had on display for sale various new rhino horn objects. These included rhino horn bangles, beaded necklaces, beaded bracelets, plain oblong pendants, and traditional handle-less tiny drinking cups, all machine-made. There were raw pieces and shavings of rhino horn, left over from the processing process, wrapped in cellophane to keep them fresh for sale as medicine.

One shop vendor was showing three Chinese retail customers his rhino horn items. He had learned the Chinese language, because people from China were his main customers. Other

vendors in the village had done the same.

Chinese traders relay transaction information by telephone to suppliers in China for the best prices, carrying their rhino horn purchases back across the nearby border.

The same vendor told us that he and his family initially carved wood, but around 2011 they obtained their first rhino horn and were the first in the village to sell rhino horn objects. The family now has three shops in the village. About 10 other families today sell rhino horn as well, he said, but usually did not display it, although we photographed six retail outlets with rhino horn pieces or items on view.

Rhino horn items are made from the inner part of the horn, while the rougher outer pieces are used for medicine. These are sold to middlemen and retail buyers.

We weighed on an electronic scale a large outer piece (236g) from a rhino horn from South Africa, the vendor said, that was selling for \$13/g retail for medicine. The plain rhino horn 'trinkets', that had no skilled carving, were also sold by weight. They were four-times the price at \$53/g retail. A 30g oblong pendant was \$1,590; a 29g cup was



PHOTOS BY LUCY VICIÉ

A Chinese customer in Vietnam examines newly made illegal rhino horn items for retail sale: bangles, a plain oblong pendant, a beaded bracelet and a small cup. The vendor told us the rhino horn came from South Africa.

\$1,573; a 37g bangle was \$1,961, and a 61g beaded bracelet was \$3,233.

Despite these high prices, we learned that two years before, prices had been double for rhino horn, wholesale and retail. We learned from a traditional Vietnamese medicine doctor that in 2015, African rhino horn was priced wholesale at \$35,100/kg. Karl Ammann (photographer and writer) found in October 2015 that rhino horn was selling wholesale for \$30,500/kg in Vietnam and Laos, compared to \$65,000/kg in 2012/13.

CHINA

China was the biggest importer and consumer of African rhino horn, along with Yemen, in the late 20th century. There was a lull in the markets from around 1993 - when China banned the domestic trade in rhino horn - until about 2008, when China's economy soared. In the early 2000s, 'nouveau riche' Chinese could afford rhino horn, flouting international and national bans.

In April/May 2014, we visited Beijing and Shanghai to survey the ivory and rhino horn trade. We revisited these cities and surveyed six other cities in October/November 2015, finding

ivory factories and retail outlets potentially selling ivory and rhino horn.

Shopkeepers are becoming increasingly suspicious of customers interested in rhino horn. Most transactions occur behind closed doors and online. In 2014 we had seen fake rhino horns for sale, but very little real rhino horn. In a shopping mall specialising in antiques, was an old rhino horn handle (12 x 4 cm) for a dagger. The vendor shone a torch through it showing the distinctive hair strands. He said its price was \$10,620. There were occasional supposedly rhino horn carved antique libation cups and bowls, mostly seen in Shanghai in a specialised art collectors' show room, but often these are fakes.

Chinese traditional medicine shops do not display rhino horn for sale because it is illegal. So again in 2015 we looked in retail outlets selling antiques, jade, jewellery, stones, souvenirs and wood carvings for rhino horn.

Only in one jade shop in Tianjin did we see for sale four small pieces of new rhino horn under the glass countertop. The vendor did not know their origin, only their use for traditional Chinese medicine. The small sizes show that customers need only tiny amounts of rhino horn for their health.

They were wrapped in cellophane to keep fresh. Each was labelled with the weight. These were \$21,835 for a 55g piece, \$21,123 for a 53.4g piece, and \$3,481 for pieces of 8.1g and 8g. The vendor offered a 40 per cent discount. This is a still huge price at \$248/g. This is the highest retail price we know offered for a piece of rhino horn. Karl Ammann learned from informers in China that in 2014 and 2015 rhino horn retailed at \$120/g which is more usual.

In Guangzhou, according to Karl Ammann's fieldwork, raw rhino horn wholesale was the equivalent of \$31,452/kg in June 2015, and \$30,000/kg in August 2015, and the same again in October 2015, but this was down from \$65,000/kg in 2012. The wholesale price had thus fallen by half, as in Vietnam.

PUBLISHED PRICES

The international media usually publish incorrect rhino horn prices which often do not give the distinction between the different levels in the trading chain - such as the amount each poacher is paid and what a third broker receives in Asia from the second broker in Africa.

The reports often do not clarify whether the prices given in Asia are wholesale kilo prices or retail gramme prices, nor whether they refer to raw or worked products. Unfortunately, inflated



PHOTO BY LUCY VICINE

Fake rhino horns, such as this one, are made in Vietnam from cow or water buffalo horn and sold as ornaments.

prices quoted in the media can result in even greater incentives to kill rhinos and trade in their horns. The media must therefore avoid exaggerating the figures.

CONCLUSION

In Kenya, the price of rhino horn received by poachers doubled between 2013 and 2015 (\$1,196/kg to \$2,392/kg). This is due to a growing scarcity of horn on the Kenyan market, and also probably rising demand with increased African-Chinese interaction.

However, although still high, wholesale prices for rhino horns in China and Vietnam almost halved during this period from about \$65,000/kg to \$35,000/kg. The retail prices in Vietnam for new worked rhino horn on display for sale, which are mostly machine-processed into jewellery, have also roughly halved from 2013-2015 from \$95/g to \$53/g. This is perhaps because more rhino horn came onto the Asian market, with heavy poaching in South Africa of over 1,000

rhinos a year from 2013 to 2015, along with horns from poached animals in other range states, privately owned horns, and stolen government stocks.

In China, retail prices are higher. The price for small pieces of rhino horn sold for traditional medicine in China on display in an expensive outlet can be as much as \$248/g, but \$120/g was more common for secretive retail sales in 2015. With retail prices much higher for rhino horn, some retail customers travel to certain village shops near Hanoi to buy rhino horn (both raw for medicine and processed for ornaments), and in growing numbers. Chinese traders do the same.

In 2015, the wholesale price in Vietnam and China for rhino horn was about 16 times higher (\$35,000/kg) than is received by a poaching gang in Kenya (\$2,150/kg). Even if the mark up halves again, there is much money to be made at all levels of the supply chain. The strong incentive to poach rhinos and to trade in rhino horn is thus not expected to abate soon. ●