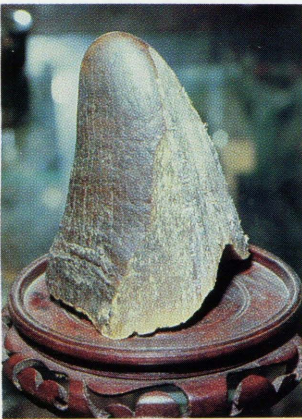


D · E · A · D · L · Y LOVE POTIONS

Wild animals are being sacrificed in alarming numbers to satisfy the Asian demand for aphrodisiacs

BY ESMOND BRADLEY MARTIN



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Although some Asians use rhino horn in aphrodisiacs, more buy the shavings to make fever-reducing drugs and other medicines. Rhino blood and urine are also prized for health and sexual tonics.

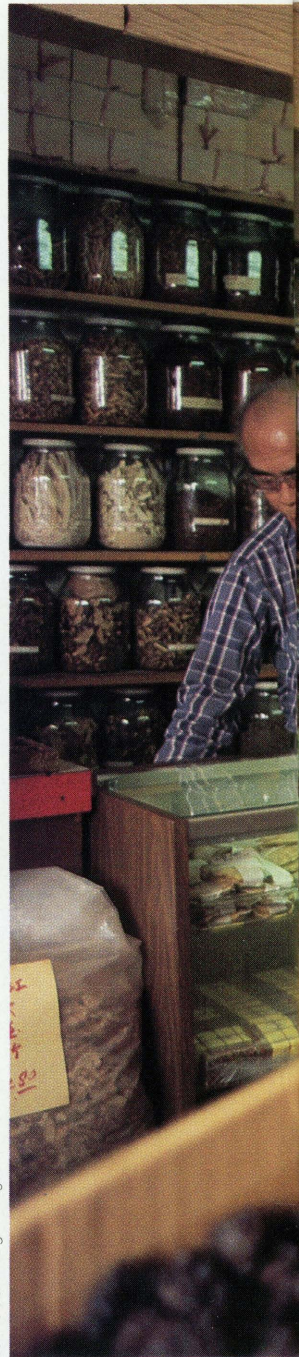
ONE DAY IN 1980, as I was riding through Delhi, India, I saw a bus with a large sign on its side that read in English, "Do you have sexual problems? Do you wish to have more strength and vigor?" It then named a prominent doctor who would prescribe powerful concoctions to improve male sexual performance.

Advertisements for sexual stimulants are common in Asia. Whether these so-called aphrodisiacs are effective I cannot say. Few if any have been put to rigorous scientific tests, and I for one have little inclination to drink brandy flavored with a tiger's penis—reputedly one of the more effective love potions. On the other hand, believing in the power of aphrodisiacs may in itself be sufficient.

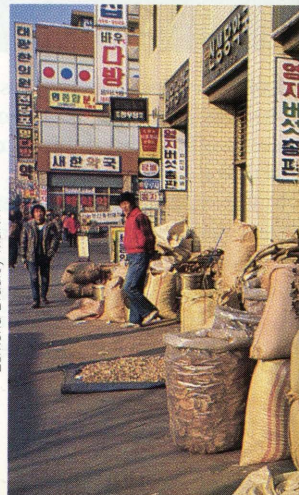
I became interested in aphrodisiacs several years ago, when I began studying the trade in rhinoceros products. At the time, most conservationists thought that aphrodisiac production was the main reason for rhino poaching in Africa. But I soon learned that rhino horn is rarely used for that purpose in Asia. One of my first reports noted that though the Chinese do consume great quantities of rhino horn, they take it mainly as a fever-reducing drug.

One critic said my research was faulty. He claimed that the Chinese I had interviewed in Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia did not want to admit they used aphrodisiacs and consequently fabricated an explanation. His views are typical of Western reasoning. Sexual impotence is embarrassing, something most Westerners prefer not to discuss openly. If a man experiences a decrease in sexual drive, he may become emotionally upset, try to avoid sexual encounters, or seek relief in psychological therapy.

In the Orient, however, it is an accepted "fact" that a man's natural inclination for the sex act may diminish because of age, sickness, and sundry other reasons. Perhaps that is why the Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Indians, and other Easterners try to cure impotence as they do other physical ailments: by taking medication. Asians consume incredible amounts and varieties of animal products and herbs for medicinal purposes, and they consider some especially useful for enhancing their love lives. They are not the least perturbed about asking for aphrodisiacs in their



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Esmond Bradley Martin



Chinese medicine shops (above) are common in Southeast Asia, and they carry an amazing variety of animal products to cure impotence.

In South Korea, antlers and horns (left) are in such demand that huge amounts are smuggled in to avoid import taxes.



neighborhood pharmacies. The demand is as prevalent among the wealthy and sophisticated as among the poor and uneducated. In Asian medicine shops, age-old prescriptions are sold alongside Western antibiotics and aspirin. The majority of shops boldly display their cures for impotence.

Mail-order drug companies also carry aphrodisiacs. The catalog of the Tak Tai Ginseng Firm in Hong Kong offers Siberian maral deer horn pills and gecko tea to increase potency and seal pills—made from “top-quality testicle and penis of seals, ground into powder and pill in a form convenient for intake”—to “stimulate male virility.” Deer antlers are said to be good for the treatment of “genital feebleness,” their tails for impotence, and their musk for

In amusing juxtaposition, in Hyderabad, India (right), a poster advertising family planning stands behind animal and plant products that will be used in aphrodisiacs.

Not so amusing is the plight of animals killed to supply the market in sexual stimulants. For centuries, male musk deer (below) have been hunted for the odorous substance they secrete during the rut; it is valued as both heart stimulant and aphrodisiac. According to traditional Chinese medicine, the horns of the Japanese serow (below right) are "as potent as a thousand ox horns" when ground and consumed in a tonic.



Gerald Cubitt



"invigoration of vital energy." All these products, attractively packaged, are illustrated with half-page color photographs and described in both Chinese and English.

Ancient books on Chinese medicine make even more fascinating reading. One of the more renowned, *Pen-Ts'ao Kang-Mu*, was completed in 1578 by pharmacist Li Shih-Chen. The author recommended the penis of a wild horse from Mongolia—"acid, saline, and nonpoisonous"—to help "increase a man's quantity of semen." Japanese serow (antelope) horn is "as potent as a thousand ox horns . . . and taken regularly, it is an aphrodisiac to the male." The penis of a wild cat—dried and made into an ash, then mixed with "water flowing from the East"—was prescribed not only for men suffering impotence but also for women having irregular menstruation. Fox saliva and rabbit hair are sometimes "added to aphrodisiac medicines for greater effect." The penis, the kidney, and even the meat of the freshwater otter of China are also used to enhance sexuality.

In Li Shih-Chen's day, medicines of human origin were used in both the Occident and the Orient. In fact, Li recorded more products from humans than from any other mammal for treating impotence, sterility, and other sexual problems. He suggested eating fingernails and toenails and drinking the urine of an unmarried boy to cure sexual weakness. Human milk, preferably fermented, has a "marked rejuvenating effect on dried-up old men," according to this scholar of medicines. He also advocated consumption of human menstrual blood for "sexual weakness in the male after a bout of fever."

Today, you would be as likely to find human products for sale in an Asian medicine shop as in an American drugstore. But many of the animal products Li Shih-Chen recommended as aphrodisiacs are still popular in Asia 400 years later.

IN RECENT YEARS, the illegal killing of rhinos for their horns and other parts has received a great deal of publicity. Less well known are the effects of similar commerce in musk, which comes from three species of shy, solitary deer that inhabit the forested mountains of eastern Asia. For centuries, male musk deer have been hunted for the viscous, distinctive-smelling substance they secrete during the rutting season from a golf-ball-sized gland in the genital region. Considered a vital ingredient in perfumes and medicines, musk has been valued at nearly four times the price of gold. Most perfume manufacturers now use synthetic musk, but the real thing may still be the most expensive animal product in the world.

In Japan, musk is in great demand as a heart stimulant and an aphrodisiac. The country imports 80 percent of the world's supply, mostly from China. Between 1976 and 1982, this amounted to an average of 670 pounds a year, at a cost, in 1981, of \$5,000 per pound. By the time a customer purchases the musk, the retail price can be \$28,000 to \$60,000 a pound. A customer, however, buys only a few grams at a time, which he mixes with gallstones and ginseng, grinding the mixture into a powder.

All three species of musk deer are threatened by hunting and habitat destruction. According to Michael Green, a zoologist who has studied the Himalayan musk deer for

several years, that species is in the most danger. Nevertheless, when Japan ratified CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) in 1980, the government opted to exclude the Himalayan musk deer in order to allow continued musk imports. Furthermore, the Japanese indirectly encourage poaching in India by offering high prices for the musk gland, which is often smuggled out of India and shipped via Nepal to Hong Kong and Japan.

India has its own illegal trade in musk. *Indian Materia Medica*, a classic, two-volume work by K. M. Nadkarni, recommends tincture of musk as "a cardiac stimulant, in depressed conditions of the nervous system, and as an aphrodisiac." In 1980, I came across musk for sale in a Moslem

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Musk is perhaps the most expensive animal product in the world—worth up to four times as much as gold.
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area of Bombay. The retail price ranged from \$17,000 to \$28,000 a pound.

In South Korea the demand for both deer antlers and antelope horns is so great that vast quantities are smuggled in to avoid import taxes and duties. The Korean market sparked an unexpected reprieve for the large exotic deer population in New Zealand. Several species, including the European red deer, had been introduced there. New Zealand farmers were culling the animals and selling the venison to West Germany, but by the mid-1970s, the market for deer velvet—believed to have aphrodisiac properties—had soared, so the farmers switched to harvesting the antlers annually. From 1971 to 1979, South Korea's official imports increased from 106 to 337 tons per year. Antelope-horn imports also rose in this period, from 2.75 tons to more than 16 tons annually.

Nearly every medicine clinic in South Korea sells deer antlers, which are combined with as many as 20 other ingredients (usually vegetable matter) and sold in little packets. The buyer boils the blend in a special pot and drinks the mixture as a health tonic and aphrodisiac.

South Koreans also use snakes and dogs in concocting sexual stimulants. I visited a restaurant in Pusan that served nothing but snake soup. Cages full of snakes lined the walls; the proprietor told me he purchased them regularly from a dealer who captured them in the mountains. He preferred the poisonous ones, though they were more costly, because he thought they made better aphrodisiac soup. He showed me how he prepared the soup, carefully taking a snake from one of the cages, dropping the creature into a pot with a little water in it, and simmering the snake on his stove for a few hours. He added no seasonings and never gutted the reptile. When it was thoroughly cooked into a thick, green, stewlike soup, he served a small bowl of it to a customer, who paid \$24 for it, saying that such a powerful love potion was well worth the price.

I found the dogmeat restaurants even more disturbing. It is almost impossible to avoid seeing what goes on inside, as the establishments are usually open to the street, prob-

ably for ventilation. Live dogs stand in rows, tied up so they cannot get away. Crushed garlic and other ingredients are tossed into a gigantic metal cauldron of boiling water; then a dog is slaughtered and dumped in. The smell of the concoction is far from appetizing, but groups of men join to buy the dogmeat stew, which can sell for as much as \$100

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when made from a whole carcass. Dogmeat soup sells for \$17 a bowl. There are also butcher shops in South Korea that specialize in the sale of fresh dogmeat, retailing for about \$4.25 a pound.

Hundreds of thousands of centipedes and geckos are also consumed each year. The centipedes are killed and then dried. A prominent dealer in Seoul told me they increase a man's sexual stamina. Geckos are always sold in pairs, supposedly a male and a female. The dried lizards are ground into a powder and added to food or pressed into pills and swallowed with tea. A pair of dried geckos can fetch up to \$9 in medicine clinics.

Tiger parts—fat, bone, blood, claws, and hair—have traditionally been used in medicines in the Far East. But elderly Chinese men regard the male sex organ as the best virility prescription of all. They place a dried tiger penis, with testicles still attached, into a bottle of French cognac or Chinese wine and let it soak for weeks, or even months. Then they take a few sips of the liquor every night.

In 1979 a friend of mine heard that a Bangkok restaurant was serving tiger-penis soup. This delicacy was not listed on the menu, but the waiter readily suggested it. Soon afterward, a story about the soup was published, prompting several complaints to the Thai government. In due course, government officials raided the restaurant and confiscated three very soggy old penises. The restaurant owner said that he added them for only a few minutes to each batch of soup. Whether they actually were tiger penises was not ascertained.

So many tiger penises are offered for sale in Asia that few of them can be the genuine article. Scientists estimate that 6,000 tigers remain in the wild; this number could not satisfy even 10 percent of the demand. The majority of organs come from domestic cattle or are fashioned from ox tendons and packaged in Hong Kong. Some wholesalers of traditional medicines openly admit the tiger penises are fakes. Nevertheless, customers in Djakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Macao pay between \$7 and \$18 for them. In Singapore it is sometimes possible to buy the real things, which come from tigers in nearby Sumatra and retail for about \$118. A trader told me he had purchased one from an Indonesian sailor in 1982 for \$94.

There are even fewer rhinoceroses than tigers in Asia—about 2,400—but more rhino parts are used in traditional medicine than parts from any other wild animal. People

from northern India, Nepal, Burma, and northern Thailand consume rhino blood, urine, and penises in aphrodisiacs. Rhinos are capable of copulating for as long as 90 minutes, with the male having orgasms at two-minute intervals. Perhaps this "feat" is the basis for belief in the aphrodisiac powers of the rhino's penis.

I have seen rhino blood and urine for sale but not penises. A Chinese pharmacist in Chiang Mai, Thailand, however, told me he had sold them during the 1950s, for about \$125 apiece. He explained that they are usually soaked in a strong liquor, as are tiger penises. He claimed they were extremely difficult to obtain; the last time he had sold one was in the early 1970s, for \$740.

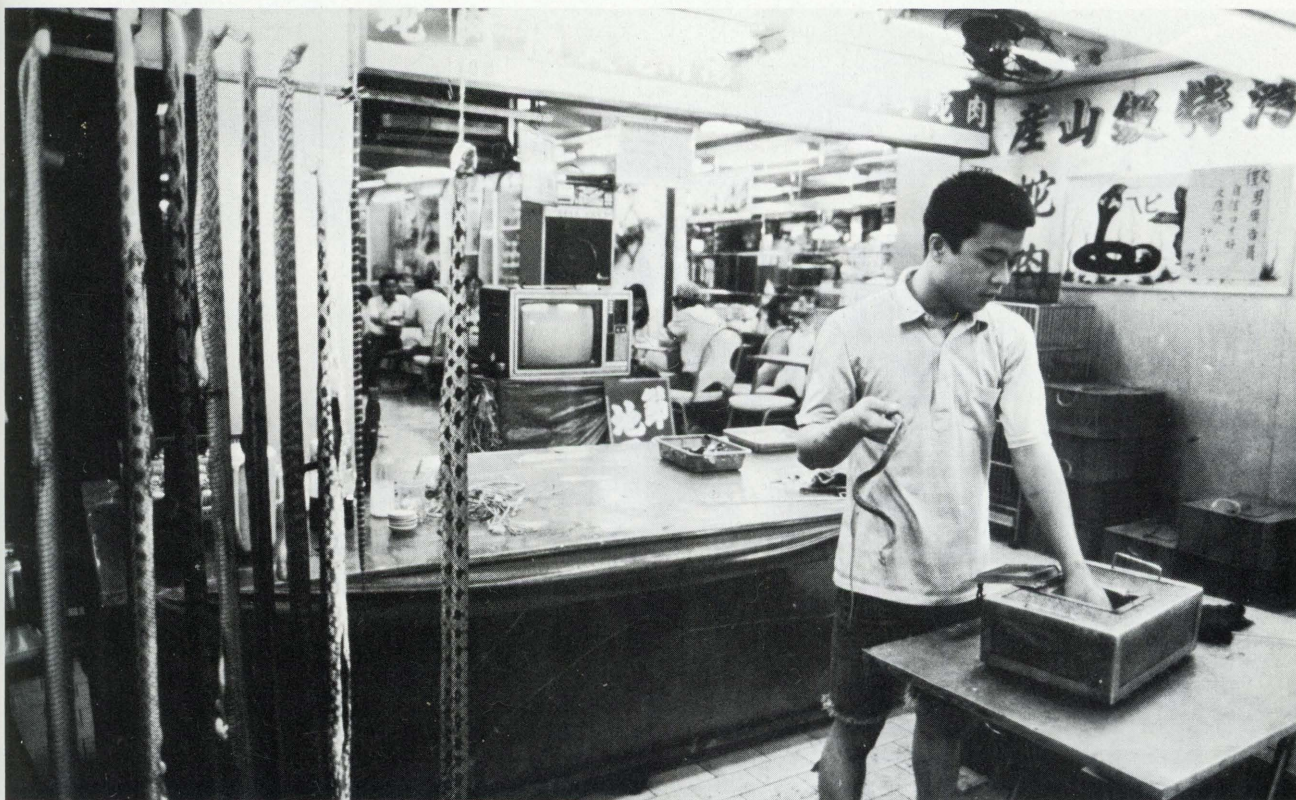
The Burmese use rhino blood as both a health tonic and an aphrodisiac. In 1981, I visited the Kyaucktagyi Temple in Mandalay. Sitting on the temple floor was a medicine man selling rhino blood alongside pangolin scales, tiger teeth, ivory, and various other animal products. When I showed an interest in the blood, he offered a small bottle for the equivalent of \$3.10 and said that the blood had been smuggled into Burma from India and that he had fortified it with ingredients listed in an old recipe. He suggested that I mix a spoonful in warm milk, brandy, or whiskey and take the concoction every other night to make me strong. On another occasion, a Tharu doctor in southern Nepal told me that he prescribed rhino blood mixed with water for patients who were "sexually weak and had thin semen."

Thais, Burmese, and Nepalese drink the urine as a cure for asthma and lung congestion. In parts of northern India some men use it as an aphrodisiac, soaking leaves in it and then tying them around their penises to give them a better erection. A well-known *hakim* (Moslem doctor) in Ahmabad told me that he combines rhino urine with rhino blood and peanut oil for application to the organs of men who are not easily aroused.

In Nepal, rhino urine is sometimes collected from animals in wildlife reserves. Mahouts carry bottles with them when they take tourists game-viewing from the backs of elephants. When the mahout sees a rhino urinating, he waits until the animal moves away, then leads the elephant to the puddle, jumps down, and fills the bottle. Most of the rhino urine is collected from captive animals. The Calcutta Zoo has been selling it for more than 25 years. When I was there in 1980, a whiskey bottle filled with the urine cost about 40¢, and there was a big demand for it. Early in the morning, crowds of people, each with their bottles, were lined up near the main entrance to the zoo.

THE PERSISTENT DEMAND for animal products as aphrodisiacs, and even more as traditional medicines, has helped eliminate tremendous numbers of some of Asia's most spectacular animals, including the rhinoceros and tiger, and threatens the future of others, particularly the Himalayan musk deer. Tigers may already be extinct in Java, Bali, and the Caspian region. And, according to Tan Bangjie of the Beijing Zoo, their population in China has fallen below 300, declining at least 80 percent in the past 40 years. One of the main causes, Bangjie states, is the widespread demand for tiger bones for medicinal use.

All three species of Asian rhinos are endangered. The



A shop and restaurant in Snake Alley, Taipei, Taiwan. Before visiting local brothels, men drink a potion of snake blood and bile to increase sexual potency. The meat is considered a delicacy.

greater Indian rhino has been severely poached in northern India, its main stronghold. As for the Himalayan musk deer, Michael Green estimates that about 10,000 are illegally killed each year for their musk pods.

Western zoologists, ecologists, and reserve planners rarely mention and almost never write about aphrodisiacs. But it is time to face the reality that many species are succumbing to the sexual appetites of Asian men, who are not about to give up their centuries-old practices. It may not be scientifically fashionable to talk about love potions, but if we are to pursue rational strategies for protecting these endangered species, it is important to know why they are being killed and where their products are traded and how they are used.

We cannot disparage the effectiveness of animal-based aphrodisiacs. Because many Asians believe in them, these concoctions can produce positive results. Moreover, Western medicine is continually discovering drugs derived from plants and animal products which have been used by other cultures to cure ailments for hundreds of years.

What can we do to protect wildlife from this abuse? We can turn a blind eye toward traders in Asia who sell imitation tiger penises and other fake products. Perhaps ranching is the answer in some situations; harvesting antlers from captive introduced deer herds in New Zealand may help protect native populations of rare deer species elsewhere. On the other hand, ranching can create a greater demand for an

animal product than the industry can fill. And enforcement of laws protecting related wild species is nearly impossible.

Since 1958 the Chinese have been raising musk deer and extracting the prized substance without killing the animals. The harvested musk is used by a government-operated pharmaceutical corporation in the preparation of more than a hundred medicines; it is not available in pure form to the public. Supply, however, often does not meet the country's demand, and so additional musk is imported. Official figures show that China imported about 20 pounds of musk from Hong Kong in 1979. During that same year, a separate *illegal* trade in musk of *Chinese* origin began when authorities relaxed restrictions along the border with Hong Kong. The musk from China is smuggled into Hong Kong and then exported to Japan. Because it is the whole pods that are being smuggled, the musk must be coming from wild rather than captive-raised animals.

Solutions to the problem of how to prevent rare animals from being killed for aphrodisiacs must be practical and should benefit the local people. More and better ranching schemes may be one means, particularly for species not already threatened with extinction. Protection of animals in their native habitat, stricter enforcement of import and export laws, and education programs emphasizing the plight of endangered species and their value to people will also help ensure wildlife survival. □

Esmond Bradley Martin is a Conservation Fellow of Wildlife Conservation International and consultant to several other wildlife conservation organizations. In Run Rhino Run (Chatto & Windus, 1982), he recounts the devastating commerce in rhino products.