

# The Emirate of Sharjah tightens control on the wildlife trade

by Lucy Vigne and Esmond Bradley Martin

**A commendable action  
by the Emir to curb  
illegal and cruel trade  
in wildlife**

HIS HIGHNESS, SHAYKH SULTAN BIN MUHAMMED AL-QASIMI, Ruler of Sharjah, in a meeting with Esmond Martin, UNEP's Special Envoy for the Rhinoceros, at his Palace in November 1992, agreed to prevent any more endangered wild animals from coming into his Emirate.

In an article published in *Swara* (July/August 1992 Vol. 15 No. 4), Esmond Martin had expressed his concern that Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates was importing endangered animals from eastern Africa and from the Indian sub-continent, despite being a member of CITES. Many bird species were being brought from Tanzania to be sold in Sharjah's goat market and pet shops, including greater flamingoes for US \$550 a pair. Also from Tanzania dik diks were on sale in 1991 for US \$550 a pair, and Thomson's gazelles for US \$1,375 a pair. Even a pair of chimpanzees from Uganda had been sold for US \$5,500. Wildlife products such as cheetah and leopard skins were also for sale in the Sharjah souk. In early 1991, a 200-kilogramme consignment of rhino horn was smuggled from Tanzania into Sharjah, where the horns were sold for US \$750 to US \$1,100 a kilogramme according to size, and then smuggled into Yemen. This had been a major blow to Yemen's Foreign Minister and to conservationists as it caused Yemen to be on the central stage once more for importing a

Below: Traditional dhows in Sharjah Harbour, a strategic entrepôt for wildlife trade.



significant quantity of rhino horn.

Wildlife trade continued in 1992. At least 40 Houbara bustards were imported into Sharjah, probably from Pakistan, and were selling for US \$400 each in a North African's home. Other rare birds such as Demoiselle cranes were often seen in the goat market during that year. One Iranian trader confided that he owned a very powerful speedboat which he took regularly to Bandar Abbas in Iran to buy wild saker falcons for US \$1,000 each. He brought these birds back to Sharjah to sell in the goat market to buyers from all over the Gulf who paid US \$1,370 to US \$2,740 for each untrained saker.

Chimpanzees continued to be smuggled into Sharjah in 1992. Some were sold to a foreign circus performing in the United Arab Emirates. In October 1992, two chimpanzees imported illegally via Pakistan were discovered in the Sharjah airport drugged and tied up. One soon died and the other was sent back to the exporter in Pakistan. Also last October, a bear cub, probably from India, was on display in the Sharjah goat market in a tiny cramped cage and was subsequently sold for about US \$1,500. This last incident enraged the local press who publicized the issue, thus putting needed pressure on the Sharjah government to try to stop the illegal wildlife trade.

In late 1992, when Esmond Martin had been appointed UNEP's Special Envoy for the Rhino, a meeting was requested with the Ruler of Sharjah. A week before Esmond Martin's visit, the Sharjah municipality authorities issued a proclamation banning trade in protected animals, and they raided several pet shops confiscating certain endangered birds and reptiles.

Esmond Martin had an encouraging meeting with Shaykh Sultan on 4 November 1992, attended also by the US Consul General, Joseph LeBaron. As well as ordering his authorities to stop any endangered animals from entering Sharjah, the Shaykh said he would have any wildlife that was successfully smuggled in, confiscated and shipped back to its country of origin. His Highness asked to be given a list of protected animals which he would circulate to his officials at Sharjah's seaport and airport. Shaykh Sultan said he would talk to the ruling family of Dubai about further tightening controls there too, as some of Sharjah's illicit trade was coming in via Dubai. He also stated his wish to co-operate with the United Nations in their efforts for rhino conservation and that he would consider making a financial donation at UNEP's rhino donors' conference to be held in mid-1993.

The Ruler of Sharjah expressed his personal interest in wildlife, and rhinos in particular, and is anxious to see that CITES regulations are implemented in his Emirate. The international conservation organizations must now support and assist the Shaykh with the efforts he intends to make.

