

Esmond Bradley Martin, 1941–2018



Esmond Bradley Martin at Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, photo by Lucy Vigne

Esmond Bradley Martin (17 April 1941 to 4 February 2018) was an American geographer who, through extensive fieldwork in Asia, was an authority on the traditional uses of rhino products. He carried out pioneering work from the 1970s investigating the illegal rhino horn and ivory markets to help close them down and save rhinos and elephants. He had been the United Nations Special Envoy for Rhinos in the early 1990s and, in the 2000s, he worked in dangerous markets surveying endangered wildlife commodities for sale. His work helped China ban their domestic rhino horn trade in 1993 and their ivory trade in 2017.

Esmond was essentially an optimist, believing that with committed leadership, proper law enforcement and effective management, wild populations of rhinos, elephants and other species could flourish in their natural habitat in Africa and Asia.

Born in New York City, Esmond had the most enquiring and persistent mind, always questioning well informed people. His interests ranged from opera, 18th century French furniture and paintings, to travelling and learning about different cultures and demand for endangered animals. From Brooks School in Massachusetts, he went to the University of Arizona receiving a BSc in Agricultural Economics in 1964 followed by an MA for his thesis “The rural land use of Kenya.” In 1971 he completed his PhD in Geography at the University of Liverpool on “The development of Malindi from the Portuguese period to the present.”

While in England he collected Africana, enjoying visits to Maggs and other antiquarian bookshops, absorbed by the writings of early explorers in Africa, particularly admiring Burton. He had first been to Africa when he was 18 with his brother on a hunting safari to the Congo, which gave him his initial taste of adventure in Africa. In 1972 he and his wife Chryssee made Kenya their home, living near Nairobi National Park in Langata where he was to be tragically murdered 46 years later.

The dhow trade was his first passion, exploring many of the Indian Ocean ports. He wrote *Cargoes of the East: The ports, trade and culture of the Arabian Seas and West Indian Ocean* in 1978 (reprinted in 2008) and *Zanzibar: Tradition and revolution* in 1978 (reprinted in 1992 and 2007). From this, he learned about huge quantities of rhino horn smuggled from Africa into North Yemen to make into handles for traditional daggers (*jambiyas*). The Saudi Arabian oil boom brought wealth to many in North Yemen in the 1970s. This was at a time of civil wars, corruption and mismanagement in much of Africa where rhinos were slaughtered and wiped out from much of their range to meet this demand. He worked tirelessly to close down this market.

From 1971 to 1991 Esmond investigated the international trade in rhino products in Africa and Asia. His position as Special Envoy for rhinos for the United Nations Environment Programme in 1992 and 1993 helped to curb the poaching crisis and illegal trade in rhino horn at that time. From the late 1990s he investigated the world's ivory markets, supported mainly by Save the Elephants, and continued to monitor the rhino horn trade for the Aspinall Foundation. His final field-work was in Myanmar in December 2017.

Esmond's main publications included *Run rhino run* (Chatto & Windus 1982) written with his wife. Later he co-authored a series of monographs on the ivory trade with Daniel Stiles or myself. Esmond kept copious notebooks and wrote prolifically, always with a fountain pen, producing over 30 books and monographs and more than 350 articles. For many years Esmond was on the Boards of the Kenya Museum Society and the East African Wild Life Society, and selflessly helped with their respective publications, *Kenya Past and Present* and *Swara*. He was also a dedicated editorial board member for *Pachyderm*, the journal of the IUCN SSC African Elephant, African Rhino and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups (and was a member of all three Groups). He believed in "widely disseminating information." He was often interviewed by the media and advised several wildlife documentary film makers. Such films included "The Rhino War" documentary by Westinghouse TV USA in 1982, *National Geographic's* "The Rhino War" in 1988, and the BBC TV's "Ivory Wars" in 1989, 2000 and 2012.

Esmond was a member of the Association of American Geographers, American Geographical Society, Explorers Club New York, Royal African Society, UK African Studies Association and UK's Fauna and Flora International. He received the Order of the Golden Ark from Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands in 1986, and he was a Chartered Geographer awarded in 2003 by the RGS-IBG. He was a life Fellow of the RGS-IBG and an ardent supporter.

Lucy Vigne
Rhino horn and ivory trade researcher
(working with Esmond for 35 years)