

100 **History**

- 100 The last white rhinoceros in Zimbabwe
Kees Rookmaaker

115 **Opinion**

- 115 The proposed sale of ivory from Botswana, Namibia and South Africa: conditions and verification
Rosalind Reeve, Christopher Tuite, Grace Gabriel, Jason Bell, Peter Pueschel

132 **Field notes**

- 132 Reconnaissance survey of the human–conflict situation around Dadieso area in western Ghana
Moses Kofi Sam, Samuel Ayesu, Bright Boye Kumordzi and Sandra Wilson
- 137 Training as a critical component of elephant research and management in Ghana
Samuel Ayesu, Frank Tetteh-Kumah, Halima Gyesei and Rebecca Baring-Darko
- 140 Immobilizations and evaluation of some clinical parameters from free-ranging elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) in southern Tanzania
Donald G. Mpanduji, Thomas B. Hildebrandt, Robert Fyumagwa, Harald Wiik, Ludwig Siege, Rolf D. Baldus, Salvatory B.P. Bittegeko, Robert Hermes, Rudolf Hahn, Heribert Hofer and Frank Goeritz

146 **Notes from the African Rhino Specialist Group**

- 146 Poaching upsurge in Garamba National Park, Democratic Republic of Congo
Kes Hillman Smith, Fraser Smith, Paulin Tshikaya, Amube Ndey and John Watkin
- 151 Black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis minor*) now back in North Luangwa National Park, Zambia
Elsabe van der Westhuizen
- 151 The Black Rhino Range Expansion Project begins
Pam Sherriffs
- 153 Enhancing rhino horn stockpile management: database now available for range states
Simon Milledge
- 154 AfRSG's training course in rhino monitoring revised and training courses for instructors held
Richard H. Emslie
- 157 Rhino and Elephant Security Group update
Richard H. Emslie
- 159 Scene of the Crime training
Rod Potter
- 159 AfRSG Tanzanian representative killed
Martin Mulama

160 **Book reviews**

- 160 The ivory markets of East Asia, by Esmond Martin and Daniel Stiles, review by *Kees Rookmaaker*
- 162 Policing international trade in endangered species: the CITES treaty and compliance, by *Rosalind Reeve*, review by *Kes Hillman Smith*

164 **Guide to contributors**

BOOK REVIEWS

The ivory markets of East Asia

Esmond Martin and Daniel Stiles, with drawings by Andrew Kamiti

Save the Elephants, PO Box 54667, Nairobi, Kenya, and
7 New Square, Lincoln's Inn, London WC2A 3RA, England

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review by Kees Rookmaaker

Rhino Resource Center, c/o IUCN Species Survival Programme, 219c Huntingdon Road
Cambridge CB3 0DL, United Kingdom

This book gives details about a survey of the ivory trade in five East Asian territories: China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. It is handsomely produced and although in a soft cover, the printing is pleasant, the text without typing errors, the drawings artistic and the colour photographs on separate pages clear and useful. This monograph is a sequel to the reports of two previous surveys, *The Ivory Markets of Africa* (2000, reviewed in *Pachyderm* 29, p. 61) and *The South and South East Asian Ivory Markets* (2002, reviewed in *Pachyderm* 32, p. 78). As its precursors, this is a technical report, filled with facts and figures, data and trends, aimed at national government officers, non-governmental organizations involved in wildlife conservation and CITES officials. Let us hope that those people, together with informed conservationists, take time to read and digest the information gathered during the survey, either in this format (Martin and Stiles 2000, 2002) or in the easier popular summaries (Stiles and Martin 2000 to 2003).

While the two previous reports dealt with trade in range states where elephants are still found in the wild, this time Esmond Martin and Daniel Stiles ventured into a region where the elephant has on the whole not been seen in living memory. Only China may have a small population left in the southern part of Yunnan Province, bordering the wilderness areas of Myanmar

and Laos, although elephants are said to have ranged earlier as far north as the Yellow River Basin. The authors do not explain why they decided to survey these East Asian countries, and they probably did not need to, because we are all aware that certainly China and Japan have ranked among the major manufacturers of worked ivory items throughout recent history. In fact, many of the reports produced by TRAFFIC and other organizations about the ivory trade have looked at the markets in these countries.

The results of the survey are set out carefully in five chapters, each about one of the territories, occupying just under three-quarters of the book. Each chapter starts with a page of details about the legal position of the ivory trade, followed by a history of the ivory markets, the sources and prices of raw ivory from the early 1980s to the present, followed by data obtained during the survey regarding ivory workshops, retail outlets, the use of substitutes where applicable, and finally the vendor's view on the future of the market. The section on the legal situation I found particularly well written and enlightening, and it explains the standards by which each government and wildlife authority should be measured. As a general rule, the East Asian governments comply with CITES regulations and prohibit import and export of ivory. Internal sales and manufacturing are still le-



Ivory-carving association members in Japan sometimes group together to carve ivory at the end of the day to share information and sometimes help apprentices.

gal, but regulated by a variable set of controls. Vendors' views are interesting by their subjectivity, showing that most people who depend on their livelihood on ivory are pessimistic about the future, with stockpiles diminishing, and wildlife laws tightening.

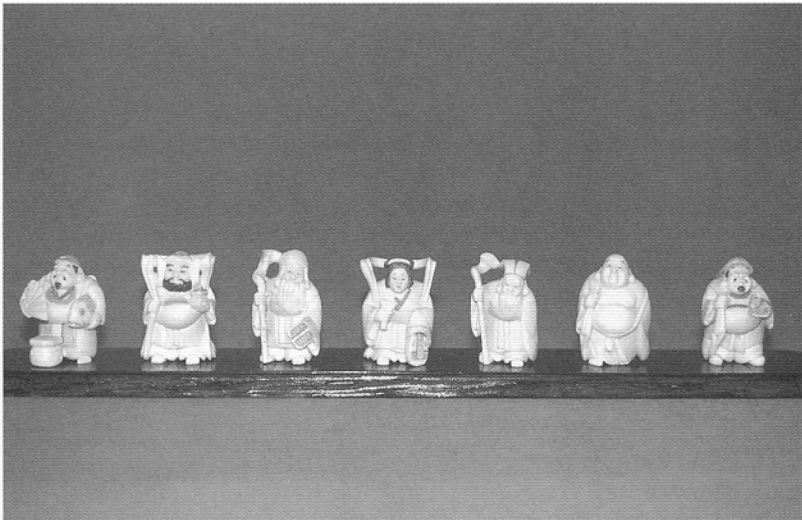
The bulk of the data gathered by Martin and Stiles necessarily document the workshops where ivory is worked and the retail outlets where the various items are sold. As in the two previous reports, the amount of detail in the figures and the tables is quite staggering. For instance, in Tokyo the investigator found ivory items for retail sale in 51 antique stalls, 17 department stores, 9 gift shops, 1 grocery shop, 7 ivory specialty shops, 9 name-seal shops, 1 netsuke shop and 1 stationery shop—96 outlets, selling 5358 items altogether. The same attention to detail is found in all the other data sets found in the book, which is a tribute to the method of surveying and the perseverance of the investigators. They know where to search for ivory, which questions can be asked, and what kind of data can be expected. They have tried everywhere to record what they saw, instead of what they wanted to see or were told to look at, and while I would imagine that they must have missed a retail outlet or two, and may not have counted every ivory item for sale in each country, their data are quite sufficient for

their primary aim—to provide essential baseline indicators of the trade in ivory products.

When the investigator went to Japan, he would have been curious to find first-hand information on the impact of the one-off sale of 50 tonnes (49,735 kg to be exact) of ivory, which was allowed after the 10th Conference of the Parties to CITES in 1997 decided to downlist to Appendix II the elephant populations in Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Against expectations, ivory dealers in other countries paid very little attention to this and nobody expected this to lead to a relaxation of the trade ban on ivory in general. The Japanese traders

also have kept their promise to keep this ivory for the local market only and not for export to other places. Although it worked once, would it be possible to have more regular auctions of surplus ivory from countries where elephant populations are increasing, without damaging the dwindling populations, especially in Asian countries? This is a serious question to which there are no easy answers. To be truly transparent, I would believe that countries intending to sell ivory must have an accounting system in place that ensures that not a single gram of ivory in their stocks originates from outside their country or from an illegally killed specimen. Elephant owners must be willing to allow scrutiny of their holdings and their management procedures to ensure that a poacher or an unscrupulous owner can never benefit from any one-off or direct government auction. As CITES has allowed another sale of 60 tonnes after May 2004, the market will have another chance to be tested under international supervision.

During this survey in five East Asian territories, Martin and Stiles, travelling independently, counted about 54,000 ivory items in 413 retail outlets in 11 cities. They found 66% of these in Hong Kong, 17% in China, 14% in Japan. There is no longer any evidence of an active ivory trade in either Taiwan or



These carvings of the laughing Buddha in Japanese mythology are called 'the seven gods of luck' or *hodei*.

South Korea. These figures are most surprising for the rather small numbers, probably much lower than would have been expected. Figures of ivory stocks, imports and exports for all countries were gathered seriously until 1990 when the CITES ban on ivory trade came into force in most countries but have become much more patchy after that time. When local traders in Africa and South East Asia were asked about the destination of ivory, most of them imagined that the greatest part of their stocks were headed for markets in Japan and China. While the manufacture and sale of ivory products is definitely ongoing in both these countries, as well as sales in Hong Kong and Singapore, one rather worrying fact is emerging. Wherever Martin and Stiles went in the course of their three surveys, be they in Africa, Thailand or China, everywhere they were told that ivory was bought primarily by diplomats, expatriate staff and tourists. It is true that the *nouveau-riche* of China and the citizens of Japan like to purchase items made out of ivory, but as stressed in a recent issue of *BBC Wildlife*, 'the unpalatable truth is that much of the ivory heads for places such as Portobello Road' (Stiles and Martin 2003). Elephants are poached by local Africans and Asians, their ivory turned into little works of art in East Asia, but I cannot shake the impression that the most important market is to be found among Americans and Europeans.

I don't know if Martin and Stiles will look at those continents next, or if they will want to revisit the countries where they found the greatest concentrations of

ivory items for sale. It would seem to me that their survey needs to be repeated at regular intervals to discover and understand changing trends and markets. It will not be enough to go around a town with a questionnaire on which boxes can be ticked. These surveys need the personal input of an expert, who can understand and explain the larger picture. Let us hope that Save the Elephants will continue to sponsor this type of work. Certainly, the three reports produced by Martin and Stiles during the last three years are a tribute to all those involved

in this study. The reports should be read by government officials and conservationists, and they would be a great asset to the shelves of libraries in zoos, museums and universities, as well as interested conservationists, for future reference. Let us hope, most of all, that the surveys executed so effectively and carefully by Martin and Stiles, over a period of many years and often not without personal danger, will help in shaping policies that aim to increase the population of elephants and to stop the horrors of poaching and illegal trade.

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