

REALLY RHINOS!

7:2, Summer, 1993

This issue is dedicated to Beth Ann Daly of Iowa City, a new rhino subscriber who has generously contributed many tidbits & rhinos for this issue.

UN ENVOY FOR RHINOS!

Excerpted from BBC Wildlife,
11 February, 1993:42-44.

In 1961, Sir Peter Scott predicted that the black rhino would be extinct in three decades and today, 32 years later, despite the WWF, SSP, Operation Rhino, Save the Rhino and all the other rhino-friendly organizations, the downward slope continues. Despite all the gloom and doom, there is hope. Now there is actually a UN Envoy for Rhinos and guess who it is? Yes! Esmond Bradley Martin! "People are finally realizing that it is possible to save the rhinos. I keep hammering away at the pessimists with success stories - successes which are in some of the world's poorest countries." Bradley Martin suggests that where there is a will there is a way provided

the will is at the highest political level. In Nepal, the king himself has ordered the protection of rhinos and the governments of both Kenya and India have provided sufficient political will and commitment to control the poaching.

After the shocking realization that Zimbabwe's black rhino population was only a quarter of what had been officially claimed in November, 1992, Dr. Mostafa K. Tolba, the executive director of the UN Environment Program (which among other things, administers CITES) reacted with unbureaucratic speed & in a matter of weeks he had created the post of UN Special Envoy for Rhinos, the first time this has ever been done for a species; provided funds to the Zimbabwe Wildlife Department for anti-poaching intelligence-gathering activities and co-funded a documentary film on the trade and his envoy's interviews with dealers.

Research in the U.S. indicated that there is no need to add toxins to rhino horn medicines as they already contain dangerous poisons put there by the manufacturers. Researchers at the Forensic Laboratory of the US Fish and Wildlife Service have discovered that rhino keratin has a lower molecular weight,

higher sulphur content and a lower pH value than keratin from other species. This is useful because to prosecute someone for importing rhino-horn medicines, it is first necessary to prove there really is rhino horn in the pills. In fact, unpublished reports reveal that in two brands of Asian medicinal tea balls, no traces of rhino-specific keratins were found. It would therefore appear that someone is being conned - not only are patients not getting the medicine they are paying for, they may actually be poisoning themselves or their children. Legal trade in these "medicines" has now been stopped in Taiwan and further exports from China are banned. But in China, the world's most populous nation, there are estimated to be nearly 8.5 tons of rhino-horn stock.

There is another way to bring pressure to bear on the rhino-trading countries: a clause in US law called the Pelley Amendment. It says that if any country can be shown to be undermining an international agreement to protect an endangered species, in this case CITES, the US government can ban imports of all wildlife products (including fisheries) from that country. The next CITES meeting will be in the US in 1994 and your letters

supporting this amendment are critical. How the US government stands on this issue will undoubtedly influence many other CITES member-countries as they cast their votes.

Some final words about CITES. The point of CITES is to protect species whose survival is being, or might be threatened by international trade. The failure of CITES to end the illegal rhino-horn trade is now being used as an excuse to restructure the whole convention, making its goals as much to do with continuation of trade as the protection of the species. CITES has not failed the rhino. It is the poor implementation of CITES - the failure of the people who matter to carry out the democratically voted decisions and resolutions of the people who mind. CITES can be likened to a dam across a river of rhino trade, with conservationists and customs officers in the role of the beavers. The dam is well built and most of the flow has been stopped but every time one leak is plugged, another one - another smuggling route - appears. Leakage is now down to a trickle, but the rhino populations are so low that there is a drought of rhinos to feed the trade - because for years there were more leaks than there were new rhinos. But the leaks are being plugged faster now

that rhinos have become the issue of the moment. If we succeed, we will then need a long period during which the rhino trade is totally dammed, and the level of rhinos allowed to rise. And the last thing the rhino puddle needs now is a sluice-gate of legal trade. Otherwise the rhinos will run dry, and Sir Peter Scott's dire prediction will come true - and only a few years behind schedule.

MORE ON FORENSICS

A fascinating article on new scientific methods to catch poachers can be found in the Spring, 1993 issue of *ZooLife*.

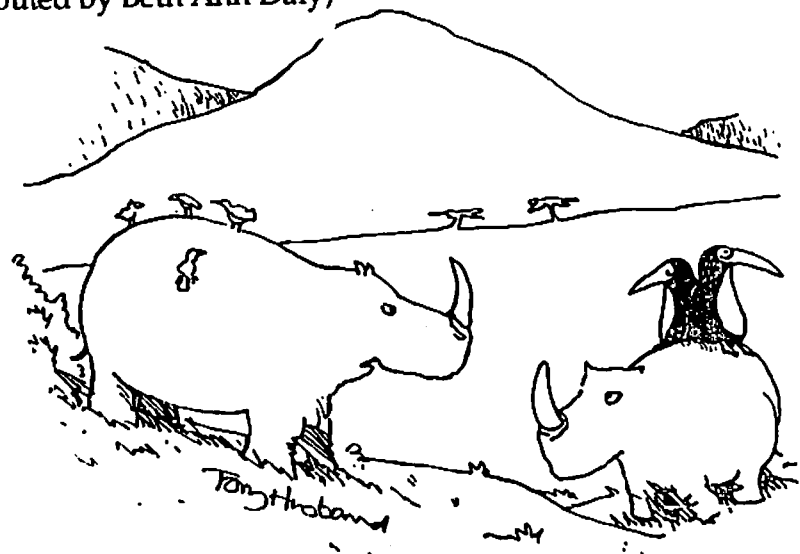
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Forensics Laboratory in Ashland, Oregon is highlighted. (see also the preceding article).

RHINO HUMOR

Q: Why did the rhino cross the road?

A: The chicken was on vacation!

(contributed by Beth Ann Daly)



"And where the hell have you been?"

A traveller going through customs in Africa was asked by the customs officer if he had anything to declare.

"No, nothing to declare," said the man.

"Are you sure about that?" asked the customs agent.

"Quite sure," replied the man.

Narrowing his eyes, the customs officer said, "What about that rhinoceros standing behind you with bread in his ears?"

"Sir," said the man indignantly: "What I put in my sandwiches is my own business." (contributed by Arthur Chandler)