

## THE RHINO MAN, Part III

The rhino horn issue is very grave and must be taken seriously by all who love and respect nature. The future of these living relics of 60 million years of evolution whose fate is distressingly at stake is hard to swallow. A lot has been written about the rhino. Many theories have been raised on how to save the species from extinction. As a result of cultures whose societies still dwell on belief so strongly embodied in their tradition attributing the horn with almost supernatural healing powers. In spite of some progress achieved in a few range countries in Africa in building their rhino population through a combination of effective management and sheer hard commitment, such as in Namibia, South Africa and Kenya, a number of range states are beset with a host of socio-economic problems, bad politics, corruption coupled with insufficient international backing to making wrong conservation decisions, resulting in mixing priorities.

The sad fact is that we are continuing to lose rhinos in the wild at an alarming rate; a bad case is Zimbabwe where more than 1,500 rhinos have been slaughtered in less than four years. Botswana runs the risk of being the only country to lose her rhino population twice in this century. Many dedicated men have lost their lives in the line of duty trying to protect our precious wildlife from poachers. Many more will fall

to poachers' bullets in the ongoing battle to save the last that still exist in the wild. It's sad that many families will continue to suffer the loss of their sole bread-winner in those poor societies in Africa. For how long must this carnage continue before the world sobers up to the fact that we are losing a priceless global natural heritage? We will have nobody to blame but ourselves to the future generations if the rhino were to become extinct within our time and if that happens, no doubt many other species will follow suit.

I believe Taiwan has the means of putting an end to using rhino horn as a mode of treatment by traditional medicine men. What needs to be done is for the Government of Taiwan together with traditional medicine men, to embark on a serious long-term public conservation awareness program. The traditional medicine men should put great emphasis on herbal substitutes in place of rhino horn power. Public education is an important weapon if properly directed especially if religious leaders are involved in the campaign. I believe this could effectively change people's attitudes and habits. There are other equally effective short-term measures which if simultaneously implemented, could bring immediate dividends to the rhino and other populations of endangered species of wildlife in the wild.

These short-term measures are:

1) Consolidation of all registered rhino horns in one place so as to

avoid cheating by unscrupulous medicine men.  
2) Immediate establishment of a special police unit similar to the South African Endangered Species Protection Unit or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to counter smuggling of wildlife products.  
3) Stiffening the jail term from the current one year to over 5 years and imposition of extremely heavy fines.



MICHAEL WERIKHE

P.S. Michael will be returning to the states in late October. He will be at a reunion of winners of the Goldman Environmental Award in San Francisco on October 26-27 and then on to Gresham, Oregon (outside Portland) from October 28 - November 14. If you live near either cities, drop me a line and I'll give you better addresses.

## IF IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR GEORGE WASHINGTON...

(from The Tucson Weekly, May 4 - May 10, 1994, p.53)

Recently, University of Massachusetts Professor Robert Malloy announced a plan to save the endangered African black rhinoceros from hunters who kill them for their horns. At a cost of about \$2,000 per animal, officials would tranquilize the rhino, remove the horn and attach an artificial one, using a technique similar to that used to affix dental crowns. The horn would be painted orange to discourage poachers. Namibia has rejected the proposal, preferring its own program and to remove but not replace the horns, but Malloy maintains that an artificial horn is necessary for rhinos' social standing within the group.