



Top: Practitioners prepare products to be used in Traditional Chinese Medicine

Middle: ENV displays posters in Vietnamese TCM shops to raise awareness that rhino horn is illegal and using it is threatening the rhino's survival

Bottom: ENV's wildlife crime team work with the authorities to combat the illegal wildlife trade



The Vietnamese use rhino horn to display wealth and affirm status amongst peers



WHY DO PEOPLE CONSUME RHINO HORN?

The demand for rhino horn in Viet Nam has been identified as a major driver of the rhino poaching crisis. Therefore, on my journey to Hanoi in Viet Nam to attend a meeting on rhino horn demand reduction and to visit Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV), I was filled with apprehension as to what I might find.

Susie Offord | Deputy Director

Viet Nam has one of the fastest-growing economies in the world and, with a population of 91.5 million, is now the world's thirteenth-most populated country. The country has seen rapid urbanisation, an increase in new wealth and with it higher disposable income.

My first appointment was with Ms Dung, Operations Director at ENV, who is in charge of the awareness programme on the illegal wildlife trade. ENV has been working on reducing the demand for rhino horn since 2012, when SRI donated £12,500 to help fund one of ENV's rhino horn awareness campaigns. Its work includes raising awareness about wildlife in the general public, managing a wildlife crime hotline, carrying out investigations and working with the Vietnamese authorities. ENV is one of only a small number of

vitamin tablets. People don't generally come in and ask for a specific product; instead they describe their symptoms to the practitioner who will then diagnose what the customer needs. TCM doctors are well respected and customers choose which TCM shop to go to through recommendations, or they may already know and trust the shop; trust is important to their trade. Some of the practitioners admitted that they have been asked by customers for rhino horn but all denied ever selling it.

On my last day I attended a demand reduction meeting organised by the TRAFFIC Greater Mekong Programme (the wildlife trade monitoring network). TRAFFIC has undertaken comprehensive consumer research into perceptions around the use of rhino horn in Viet Nam. The consumer research involved surveying 600 middle-upper income adults in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The meeting aimed to elucidate

the results of the survey and then plan a targeted behaviour-change campaign to reduce the demand for rhino horn. Dr Jo Shaw,

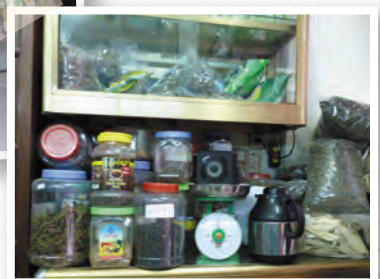


local Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) working on illegal wildlife trade and it faces a difficult task, but it has a strong following of young people in Viet Nam who are starting to care more about wildlife than previous generations.

The next day I visited Hai Thuong Lan Ong Street, which is one of the main streets in Hanoi for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) shops. Rhino horn was not openly being sold in any of these shops (there were, however, signs of bear bile which is also illegal). The TCM practitioners explained that customers mostly want treatment for their general good health, a bit like taking

from WWF-South Africa which funded the research, noted that 'The survey results provided invaluable insights into the current situation in Viet Nam with regard to who is buying and using rhino horn and most importantly provided additional information on why'.

While many people in Viet Nam still believe in the health benefits of rhino horn and believe it has detoxifying properties,



the survey showed this is not the main motivator for consumption.

One of the main reasons people use rhino horn is to display wealth and affirm status amongst one's peers. Dr Naomi Doak, Co-ordinator of the TRAFFIC Greater Mekong Programme who led the research, explained that 'Rhino horn is very expensive and rare, which adds to its appeal'. The research identified one of the main rhino horn-user groups as wealthy men, over 40 who live in urban centres. They value their image and status, and do not show empathy for animals. Giving a gift of rhino horn is seen as a sign of respect and power and can often be done to 'seal' important business deals.

Mothers may also buy rhino horn for emergencies if their child is ill; often in conjunction with using western medicines. Dr Doak added that it was concerning that the research showed 'Many more people would like to buy horn than can afford to at present'.

These findings are being used to help design TRAFFIC's future behaviour-change campaign for demand reduction in Viet Nam. I believe this is one of the best ways that we can have a significant impact on the horrific rhino poaching figures we see today.

I left Hanoi with a mixture of feelings. It is a fantastic city, full of interesting and friendly people; it is clearly doing well. However demand for illegal wildlife products is evidently increasing.

Fortunately the young people of Viet Nam appear to want to protect wildlife, but many species don't have enough time to wait for several generations before a culture fully changes. Over the next few years, Government commitment to tackle the illegal wildlife trade and the work of other organisations in consumer countries such as Viet Nam is going to play a major role in the survival of many species, especially rhinos.

Grants

In October 2012, we gave a grant of £12,500 to ENV for a demand reduction campaign, and in summer 2013, we gave another \$1,250 for an ENV press conference. As the project draws to a close, we will consider how best to continue our support for demand reduction in Vietnam and other rhino horn-consumer countries.



One man One rhino

The ultimate test of endurance

In June 2013, our fantastic rhino supporter Vinny O'Neill undertook a challenge that many thought was impossible: he would be the first person ever to run an ultra-marathon solo in rhino costume.

Katherine Ellis | Office and Communications Manager

Vinny had entered South Africa's legendary Comrades ultra-marathon; an 87km course from Durban to Pietmaritzburg. He was also running on an 'up' year where the race is predominantly uphill.



Vinny was a good bet for his challenge; he is currently the fastest marathon rhino costume runner, having completed the 2012 Virgin London marathon in 4:17:27. Without the costume, Vinny has a marathon personal best of 2:53:54.

On the day, Vinny said he quickly gained amazing support. "At the beginning of the race I was joined by four African runners and they ran with me all the way. The group grew to eight as we went along and they stopped when I stopped and they ran when I ran."

Vinny had just 12 hours to complete the course, when the organisers close the finish line. Throughout the morning, winds picked up and temperatures reached 30°C, making the costume resemble a personal sauna. Vinny said, 'It was so hot and I just kept on taking water. The start was hardest as it is all uphill but further into the race it flattens out and I was able to pick up the pace'. And of course the crowds gave enormous support, with chants of 'Rhino man'.

Demonstrating his super-human endurance, Vinny finished well under the cut-off time in 10:38:02. He came 4,045th out of a field of approximately 14,000.

www.comrades.com

Thanks & congratulations

Our thanks and congratulations go to Vinny who raised over £3,000 through his Comrades challenge in support of Save the Rhino



>> **Stop Press** >> Congratulations to Vinny, for being a well-deserved awardee of the **CATHSSETA Spirit of Comrades Awards 2013**, for running the race in rhino costume and raising funds for rhino conservation >> **Stop Press** >>