

# China's New Law

*China passes new legislation to ban the domestic trade in rhino horn*

*Story and photos by Lucy Vigne and Esmond Bradley Martin*

CHINA MUST BE CONGRATulated on its recent efforts to restrict and finally to end the country's rhino horn trade. In December 1989, the government registered for the first time its rhino horn stocks in the pharmaceutical factories and main import-export corporations which totalled a minimum of 9,875 kilogrammes, the largest documented stockpile in the world. In 1992, officials undertook a second stock-taking which showed that 8,497 kilogrammes were left, with 42 percent stored in Beijing. The government said it would take about 13 years to use up these stocks. These, they said, were mostly imported as off-cuts and powder from Yemen's dagger-handle industry, before the country joined CITES in 1981; they were therefore legal. Unfortunately, these rhino horn stocks also consist of illegal horn; it is known that smugglers have brought a

quantity of rhino horn into China since 1981.

In October 1992, when Esmond Martin visited Beijing as Special Envoy for Rhino Conservation for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), government officials agreed to ban all exports of medicines containing rhino horn. This was a major step forward as many patent medicines containing rhino horn were regularly exported to Hong Kong (with the rhino horn ingredient blacked out on the label after 1989 when its import into Hong Kong became illegal). The traditional medicine shops all over China, however, continued to sell the medicines, and still do, mainly to wealthy Chinese visitors and businessmen from abroad who would often take them back to their country in bulk, thus perpetuating the international trade.

Therefore, it was encouraging news to conservationists that on 29 May 1993 the Chinese State Council promulgated a Notice prohibiting with immediate effect the manufacture of medicines containing rhino horn and also tiger bone, and forbidding within six months all internal sales in such medicines. China is thus the last of the main consuming countries of rhino horn to prohibit its domestic trade. This was largely

the result of strong pressure put on China during the previous few months by the Standing Committee of CITES, UNEP, several foreign non-governmental organizations and the US government. China is still concerned that the United States is considering applying economic sanctions against the

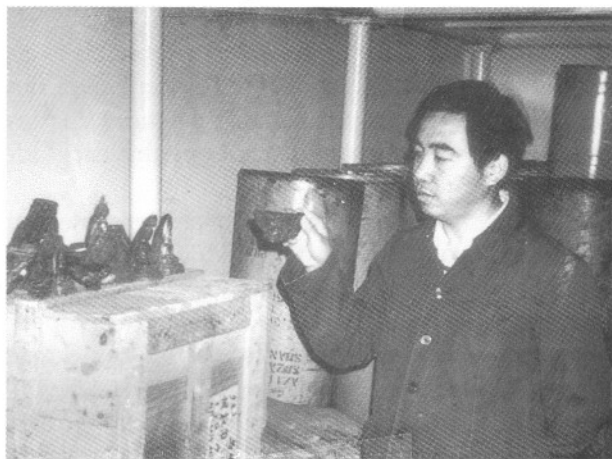
country under the Pelly Amendment for their continued trade in rhino horn (along possibly with Taiwan).

It is thus important to China that the new legislation be implemented effectively. However, during a second mission to Beijing in June 1993 as the UN's Special Envoy for Rhino Conservation, Esmond Martin was told by



officials of their concern that they had neither enough resources nor manpower to carry out all the necessary follow-up to the Notice. It is essential that they be enabled to investigate the quantity of both raw rhino horn and medicines containing rhino horn in every import-export corporation, factory and traditional pharmacy in the whole country, and then seal up the stocks for storage in government offices, all by the end of November 1993. (What will eventually happen to these stocks is undecided.)

Officials estimate that 2 billion yuan or \$200 million will be lost when the Notice is implemented, due to stocks which cannot be sold, factories which cannot make any more medicines with rhino horn, and redundant employees. Thus enforcing the May 1993 Notice will not only be difficult and expensive in such a large country, but also will cause severe financial losses.



*Above; A Chinese official examines a rhino horn antique cup in the store-room of a medicine factory in Beijing.*

*Right; Antique carvings made from rhino horn such as these are worth thousands of dollars each..*

Consideration should be given by the international community to assist China to comply with the Notice. Furthermore, at the recent Rhino Donors' Conference held at UNEP in Nairobi, China asked the international community to contribute funds for another expense related to the ban: research to find a substitute for rhino horn in those medicines that do not yet have a suitable alternative ingredient. International help might also be needed to save many exquisite, antique objects,

mainly cups that were carved from rhino horn in the Ming and Chin dynasties. They were originally bought by the factories from private individuals in the 1950s to 1970s in order to be pulverized and incorporated into medicines. One factory manager in Tianjin said the factory had used up 80 kilogrammes of these antiques by 1992 and only had 20 kilogrammes left. These treasures are now lying about in sacks. Rather than abandon them, some of these beautiful carvings, worth thou-

sands of dollars each, should be given to China's museums, and others could be auctioned internationally, as the Chinese government has done recently with other works of art.

The momentum within China's government to ban effectively the rhino horn trade must not slacken. The international community should express its approval of China's sacrifice in ending a tradition thousands of years old, in the interests of the threatened rhino species. ●

## SOCIETY *highlights*

### Ugandan Exhibition

On the 10 to 12th December an Art Exhibition was organized by the Italian Embassy, Uganda in co-operation with the East African Wild Life Society's Ugandan branch. The theme was 'The Garden of Eden' and the artist, Mr Ntensibe, concentrated on wildlife. Approximately 300 people attended the event including Government officials and diplomats and a fifth of the profits are for the Society for which they would like to extend their thanks to all concerned.

### Donations and Representatives

George and Lory Frame have generously donated 350 copies of *Swift and Enduring*, their book of the cheetahs and wild dogs of the Serengeti for which the Society is very grateful.

Another welcome donation was presented by Mr C. Shah from Kashmircraft, (P.O. Box 43606, Nairobi) - a guide to Kenya's land, people and wildlife in the form of 60 slides and a tape.

We also wish to give our sincere appreciation to our Society representative in Japan, Mr Mustuo Tsukazaki who gave a donation of US \$4,465 when he paid a visit to our Head Office in December last year, and students from Thunderbird Graduate School of International Management (USA) accompanied by the Dean of Students, Mr Stephen Beaver and Associate Professor of International Studies, Mr John Conklin for their donation of Ksh 5,000 in January this year.

On the 3rd January we appointed Mr Paolo P. Sepe as our new representative

in Germany. While here he made a handsome donation to the Society and showed a keen interest in our Society and wildlife conservation in general. The Society would also like to welcome four more representatives; Abed Azab from Israel, Mr and Mrs Gill from Grass Roots Travel Ltd, England and Mrs Lidia Sanchez Regules from Spain.

### Domestic Fowl a possible danger to wild birds in East Africa?

In 1986 a Symposium held in Canada discussed the potential danger of infectious disease to wild (free-living) birds, especially rare species. In 1989 the Proceedings were published by ICBP as its Technical Publication No 10. *Disease and Threatened Birds*. Since then there has been an upsurge of interest in, and concern about, pathogens (viruses, bacteria, parasites etc) and the threat they may pose to wild animals.

An increasing trend in East Africa has been for those employed by national parks and game reserves to keep domestic chickens within staff quarters. The chickens in question are usually local (village) stock, brought in by road and kept as free-ranging birds for meat and egg production.

It is possible that chickens kept in a national park or game reserve could present a health hazard to wild avifauna, many infectious diseases of the domestic fowl are transmissible to other birds. While some of these diseases are probably mainly a threat to galliform species, eg; guinea fowl, others, such as Newcastle

disease, have a very wide host range and might have devastating effects on wild populations.

The purpose of this letter is two-fold:

1) To draw attention to the situation and to put forward the hypothesis that domestic chickens are a health threat to wild birds in protected areas, and

2) To seek help and comments from those who may have unpublished information or access to reports that are relevant to this subject but are not generally available.

If indeed it can be demonstrated that chickens are a danger to wild birds in East Africa then perhaps the authorities should consider reviewing the policy of allowing staff to keep poultry within protected areas.

Professor John E. Cooper FRCVS.

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or, if easier:

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### Apology from Joe Cheffings

I must apologise to *Swara* readers for the incorrect spelling of Mr Cherry Kearton's surname in my review of the book *They married adventure* (*Swara* Nov/Dec 1993). The mistake was a proof reading error and entirely my own fault.'

**Apologies from Swara** are also due to Esmond Bradley Martin for referring to Zairois instead of Zambian poachers in *Swara* Jan/Feb 1994 contents page.