

## All countries must comply with CITES ban on international trade in rhino products

by Esmond Bradley Martin  
and Lucy Vigne

From 1970 to 1985, the black rhino population in Kenya declined by 98 per cent. Since then, it has been expanding at about 5 per cent a year and now numbers around 400 animals. One of the main reasons for this abrupt change is that government and private sectors have worked together to develop rhino sanctuaries. These fenced-in areas, often with electric wires, are guarded night and day making it extremely difficult for poachers to kill the rhinos. However, in many parts of Africa and Asia where rhinos still exist, poaching continues to be the major threat.

Although most Asian countries have effectively banned the trade in rhino products, there are four main markets left: China, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand whose governments have been apathetic about implementing and enforcing laws against imports and exports of rhino products, and continue to allow domestic trade. Traditional medicine shops openly sell rhino products and derivatives to their customers to cure high fever and other ailments in these countries.



### The East African Wild Life Society

The East African Wild Life Society was formed in 1961 by amalgamating the Wild Life Societies of Kenya and Tanzania (both founded in 1956).

The policy of the Society is to safeguard wildlife and its habitat, in all its forms, as a national and international resource.

Members are requested to address any queries to the Executive Director.

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In 1990, however, the results of a scientific study carried out at the Chinese University of Hong Kong were published, revealing that saiga antelope horn reduces fever in rats as effectively as rhino horn, and that water buffalo horn and cow horn, when administered in large enough doses, also lower fever. WWF Hong Kong is arranging to have this paper translated into Chinese and Korean and circulated to the traditional doctors in the four offending countries. There is now no scientific nor ethical reason that doctors and pharmacists can give for prescribing rhino horn instead of substitutes to their patients.

A major media and press campaign is now underway, criticizing the governments of China, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand for not complying with CITES (The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) which bans international trade in rhino products and urges member states to prohibit all internal trade. The world's conservation community has grown impatient with the bureaucratic inertia of these countries where traders continue to pay high prices for rhino horn so encouraging poaching. In Taiwan, people will pay over US \$40,000 a kilo retail for Asian horn (ten times the price they pay for African horn as they believe Asian horn has more concentrated healing properties as it is smaller). Thailand has a greater variety of rhino products, including hide, nails and penises, for sale in Bangkok than anywhere else in the world. China continues to manufacture packaged medicines containing rhino horn, which are mainly bought by overseas Chinese visiting China. In South Korea, about 85 per cent of the Oriental medicine clinics, recently surveyed, sell rhino products and derivatives in the capital, Seoul.

If we want the remaining rhinos to have a better chance of survival into the future, the demand for rhino products must be reduced in these four countries. Now that there is scientific back-up to support the use of substitutes for rhino horn, we have good reason to hope that the international media campaign pressurizing the last four main Asian markets to stop the trade in rhino products will work.

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