

A NEW EFFORT TO COUNTER RHINO POACHING

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No other large mammals have declined so rapidly as rhinos over the past fifteen years. From a population of over 70 000 in 1970, there are now fewer than 14 000. They are seriously endangered because of man's demand for their horn which is made into dagger handles in North Yemen and used, as well as other parts of this animal, for traditional medicines in South East Asia. Lack of adequate funds and ineffective management have enabled many poaching activities to go largely unabated.

In July 1985, the World Wildlife Fund, assisted by the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife, started an international project to close down the trade in rhino products. The project is under the directorship of Dr Esmond Bradley Martin, Vice-Chairman of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources' (IUCN) African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group (AERSG) and expert on the trade in rhino products. The project's aims are, firstly, to encourage the governments of Singapore, South Korea, Macao and Brunei to halt the legal import of rhino products. In August 1985, Taiwan agreed to stop all rhino horn imports. Secondly, countries which have banned imports of rhino products but do not adequately enforce their laws, will be asked to tighten up their controls. Of those countries, North Yemen presents the worst problem as it is the country with the greatest amount of rhino horn imports in the world. Thirdly, importers, wholesalers, traditional doctors and pharmacists throughout South East Asia will be urged to deal in saiga antelope horn instead of rhino horn. The saiga antelope is commercially harvested in the Soviet Union and is not endangered. Moreover, its horn is an acceptable substitute for that of rhino horn in traditional Chinese medicine as a

cure for high fever. And in North Yemen, efforts will be made to encourage the use of cow and water buffalo horn for carving into dagger handles.

Concern for the rhino has become an international issue. Several heads of State in Africa, including President Moi of Kenya, President Kaunda of Zambia and Prime Minister Mugabe of Zimbabwe, have voiced their dismay over continued poaching and look askance at Uganda, Chad, Zaire, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan where virtually all the extensive rhino populations have disappeared in the past ten years.

Zimbabwe, which has the most effective wildlife management department in tropical Africa and where black and white rhinos have actually been increasing in number, has had some severe poaching problems this year. However, stringent measures were immediately taken when poachers from Zambia crossed the Zambezi River and shot more than 50 rhinos between Kariba and Kanyemba. The government sent in troops of the Zimbabwean Special Forces to combat the incidents. The wildlife department also translocated 63 rhinos from the area to the Hwange National Park.

The Central African Republic (CAR) has experienced the severest poaching in recent years. CAR's rhinos have declined by 95% during the past five years. There are less than 200 rhinos left in the country. According to Jean-Marc Froment, a biologist living in northern CAR, a poacher can sell a rhino horn for US \$95 to a businessman who will arrange its transport to Khartoum by wood-carrying lorries, from where it will be flown to Sana'a, the capital of North Yemen. In Zambia's Luangwa Valley, there were between 4 000 and 8 000 rhinos in 1973. Today there are only three to five hundred left. The demand for rhino horn is great in Zambia because the econ-

omy is so poor that people are desperate for money and willingly poach for middlemen who in turn send the horn abroad for foreign exchange.

Tanzania's Selous Game Reserve in 1981 was believed to have about 3 000 rhinos, but in 1983 poaching increased substantially, according to reports from safari operators. New roads are being built in the area, and communications to this formerly secluded reserve are being improved. Having lost 90% of its rhinos in the northern part of the country, it looks as if Tanzanian rhinos are now coming under severe threat in the Selous. Anti-poaching units are needed there urgently.

In Asia, there are three rhino species, and two of them are seriously endangered. There are less than 60 Javan rhinos in one small reserve. Although this population is nearly double what it was in the 1960s, it could easily be wiped out by disease or by well-organised poaching. The Sumatran (or hairy rhino) populations are now so scattered in small island populations that their chances of meeting one another to breed are slim. A captive-breeding programme has been initiated, and rhino trapping is presently being organised in Indonesia by John Aspinall, who is hoping to bring some rhino pairs to the safety of Howlett's Zoo in England.

Estimated World Populations

| | 1970 | 1985 |
|----------------|--------|-------|
| Black Rhino | 65 000 | 7 000 |
| White Rhino | 3 500 | 4 000 |
| Indian Rhino | 900 | 1 700 |
| Sumatran Rhino | 1 500 | 660 |
| Javan Rhino | 35 | 55 |

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