

The Rhino in fairy tales



by Chris Walker

THE rhino in Africa has declined from a population of over 70 000 in the 70's to fewer than 14 000 to-day.

Why, one may ask, has this happened and who is responsible. You may very well wonder for the position is most alarming and causing concerned people and Governments to take a long, hard, urgent look at the situation.

It's quite simple really, they are seriously endangered according to Dr Esmond Bradley-Martin, Vice Chairman of the IUCN African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group (AERSG) and expert on the trade in Rhino products, 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 funds and ineffective management have enabled many poaching activities to go largely unabated. All species, there are five in all, two from Africa, the square-lipped rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*), the hooked-lipped rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) and the three Asian species, are threatened by the trade in rhino products. The black rhino in Africa faces the gravest danger and there seems little hope of stopping the decline in the near future. July 1985 saw the World Wildlife Fund start an international project to close down the trade in rhino products. Under the Directorship of Dr Bradley-Martin it aims firstly, to encourage the governments of countries which still legally import rhino horn to stop. These countries are Singapore, South Korea, Macao and Brunei. As of August, 1986,

Taiwan has agreed to halt all rhino horn imports. According to Bradley-Martin, countries which have banned imports of rhino products but do not adequately enforce their laws, will be asked to tighten up their controls.

The country with the worst problem for the rhino is North Yemen being the greatest importer of rhino horn in the world. Efforts will be made to encourage the use of cow and water buffalo horn for carving dagger handles, a highly prized item sought after by the oil rich Yemenies. Dealers, traditional doctors and pharmacists throughout South East Asia will be encouraged to deal in the horn of the Saiga antelope, commercially harvested and not in danger of extinction in the USSR.

The Saiga antelope horn is an acceptable substitute for the cure of high

Left: The Kaokoveld — home of the rare desert adopted rhino.

Below: It takes no more than 10 minutes to remove a rhino horn.

Pictures by Clive Walker



what cost.

To pull the tiger back from extinction cost millions. A lesson we should avoid. Given the space and protection rhinos survive very well and every one who has any concern about their future survival should do everything possible to ensure they are not only read about in fairy tales.

Estimated world population

	1920	1985
Black rhino	65 000	7 000
White rhino	3 500	4 000
Indian	900	1 700
Sumatran	1 500	660
Javan	35	55
	70 935	13 415

(Sources: Esmond Bradley-Martin, David Western, Andrew Laurie, Nico van Strien and Rudolf Schenkell).

The position in South Africa and SWA is as follows:

Natal/Zululand	479
SWA	400
Pilansberg	21
Kruger National Park	110
Addo	4
Total	1 014

fever in place of rhino horn.

Dr. Bradley-Martin's efforts in convincing the people involved in the trade to curtail the use of rhino horn will be watched with great interest. Meanwhile the killing continues in Africa and Southern Africa has also felt the work of poachers.

Zimbabwe has had to send in a Special Force to combat poaching in the Zambezi Valley where more than 50 rhino have been shot. Zambia's Luangwa Valley have between 300 and 500 black rhino remaining from an estimated 8 000 in 1973. Etosha in Namibia/SWA has also felt the effects of poaching and very careful steps are taken in Zululand against any possible poaching.

The 100 plus black rhino in the Kruger National Park are under excellent protection, however, the authori-

ties are always on their guard.

My guess is the rhino numbers will continue to fall for the simple fact that most areas that contain rhino populations simply don't, with the exception of certain parks, have the manpower to deal with the problem on the ground. Shortages of trained staff, and equipment is clearly the biggest problem. It's one thing to blame the trade at one end and then to have inadequate back-up where the rhinos actually live.

A concerted effort in all spheres is essential and certainly the vital aspect of awareness being created by Bradley-Martin is important and should be pursued vigorously. Whether the black rhino will yet only be read about in fairy tales is still to be seen. Hopefully sense will prevail as it so often has in the past at the 11th hour, but at

This information is based on the EWT Rhino Workshop date of February 1984. All rhino populations have increased although no accurate figures can be given for the Umfolozi-Hluhluwe Complex as this has been the subject of an intense survey conducted by black rhino expert, Peter Hitchins, who has only just completed his field work. Financially supported by the Endangered Wildlife Trust and carried out by the Natal Parks Board, this area has the greatest number of black rhino in South Africa and Peter Hitchins' report should provide vital information on this population which represents the cradle of South Africa's black rhino. *Donations can be sent to: Lapalala Wilderness School, PO Box 645, Bedfordview 2008.*