

# Safari

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COVER PICTURE: September is the month of the annual migration of wildebeeste in the Masai Mara Game Reserve. Regarded as the greatest natural show on earth, the migration gives the lodges heavy occupancies. The Mara Serena Lodge has daily early morning balloon flights over the Mara plains, providing breathtaking views of the migration for visitors.

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# The myth about rhino horn as aphrodisiac

"SAVE the rhino", cry the conservationists.

"We want cash", shout the poachers.

"People first", call the people.

And the fight to protect this massive animal goes on. In Africa there were about 15,000 black rhino in 1980; today there are 4,500. This shocking figure is mainly the result of poaching in the last rhino strongholds, the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania and the Luangwa Valley in Zambia.

Esmond Bradley Martin, based in Nairobi, is one of the people at the forefront of a worldwide effort to save the rhino. He has been working on this since 1978, both in Africa and Asia. "It would be a terrible shame if man's greed were to wipe out such a unique animal", he says, "but poachers cannot resist the money they make".

In the early Seventies African rhino horn was fetching US\$34 a kilo; by 1980 this had risen to \$500 and today it is \$600.

Asian horn brings in a lot more. Today its price is US\$9,000 a kilo. "Naturally this makes rhinos extremely attractive to poachers". And they are easy to kill — many are fairly docile and they have poor eyesight. A poacher who can mimic animal sounds can lure a rhino to its death.

Almost every parts of the rhino is usable, Martin says, with almost every culture in Asia using rhino horn products to some extent. "The horn, which is made of thickly matted hair, and the nails are used for lowering fever and nosebleeds. The skin is used for treating human skin diseases, while the blood is used as a general tonic for menstruation problems. In North Yemen the horn is greatly valued for dagger handles".

Among Europeans, Africans and Americans it is generally believed the horn is used as an aphrodisiac

By JENI ANINDO

by the Chinese, Japanese and Malays.

Says Martin: "This is simply not true. I believe the myth came about in Zanzibar. From the 1980s there were auctions held in Zanzibar, rhino horn was on sale and Gujarati-speaking Indians from Western India would buy it. When asked why, by the Europeans, they said for sexual purposes. True, but these are the only people in the world who use the horn of the rhino as an aphrodisiac ... less than half of one per cent of all uses of rhino products".

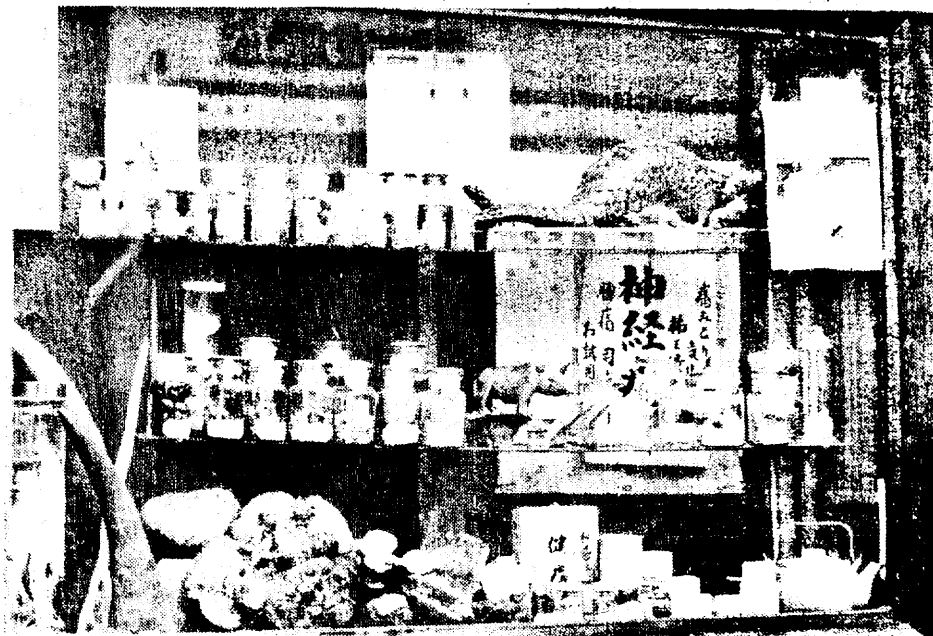
Martin, a 45-year-old American geographer with a bachelor's and master's degree from the University of Arizona, US, and a PhD from the University of Liverpool, England, has been working on the illegal trade from

1964. His research has included a great deal of field work in the Indian Ocean region. He has examined gold smuggling from Dubai to India, and of cloves from Zanzibar to the Tanzanian mainland.

In 1978 Martin went to North Yemen to document illegal trade in the Red Sea. It was during this year that there was the beginning of an international effort to save the rhino and Martin was asked to look into the rhino trade.

Living in Nairobi, he had already noted the illegal trade of rhino horn from Kenya to the Yemen (rhino trade was banned in Kenya in 1976 and the twice-yearly government auctions in Mombasa had stopped).

The organisations involved in the Save the Rhino Campaign — the World Wildlife Fund, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, the New York



Traditional Japanese medicine shop in Kyoto — note the rhino horn in left foreground.

Zoological Society and the African Wildlife Foundation — weren't sure where the rhino products were going. It was believed China was the biggest importer of rhino horn and that it was used as an aphrodisiac.

"Startling everyone, we soon proved this was not the case", says Martin.

Martin set out to find out where the horn came from, who was doing the killing, how the horn was leaving Africa, where it was going, the prices, and how it was being used.

He says he was delighted with the challenge. "I like to start from scratch. No one else in the world was doing this and I found it extremely intellectually interesting".

First he set about collecting information and documenting this. From 1979-82 he travelled widely in Africa and Asia gathering data. "By 1982 the problem was fully defined and understood and emphasis was now put on closing the trade down".

How could this be done? "The only reason rhino are killed is for cash — to stop this it is necessary to persuade people to use acceptable substitutes which have the same effect, like the common Siberian saiga antelope horn and water buffalo horn".

Martin says this has already been successful to some extent. From mid-November last year to April this year, Martin visited 13 Asian countries talking to ministers and top civil servants in a bid to stop rhino trade and ensure banning orders are enforced.

He also talked to doctors and pharmacists who prescribed rhino products as medicines, trying to persuade them to use substitutes.

In South Korea, he says, doctors are beginning to use buffalo horn instead of rhino in their "Chung Sim Hwan" balls, which are taken daily as a tonic by many Koreans.

In Taiwan officials were keen to understand smuggling methods so as to enforce their new law of August 1985 prohibiting rhino horn imports; Martin was able to help.

He says that, under pressure from the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Macao agreed to stop issuing import licences for rhino horn at the end of 1985 and conformed to

CITES principles in February this year.

Moving from country to country Martin feels his five-month trip was most useful. When he needs to reach the top man in a country, Prince Philip, who is President of the World Wildlife Fund, writes to the head of state.

"Because of his clout this is very helpful — if Prince Philip writes people feel they must reply and that opens important doors".

Martin says: "It's never been a one-man-show. Prince Philip as well as other conservation organisations have been involved".

This pleases him greatly. "It's most unusual for groups to work together like this, usually each one wants the kudos. I like people working together, it's very helpful".

But there are still a lot of problems. Singapore is responsible for most of the rhino poaching in Asia, it is the major entrepot for Asian rhino products. The Singapore Government has long delayed a decision to join CITES, although the Prime Minister responded to a plea from Prince Philip by saying he expects Singapore to join CITES at the end of 1986. Martin believes further procrastination is possible.

On a recent visit to Brunei, he worked hard encouraging officials to ban rhino horn

"China is heavily involved, unfortunately. It was a member of CITES, but the organisation does not prohibit medicines containing rhino horn, so China has been manufacturing such medicines in large quantities for all its markets in Asia. I tried to persuade the Chinese to use substitutes", says Martin.

I asked him if he felt he was fighting a losing battle. He didn't answer directly but instead told an interesting story.

"Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world", he said, "and it has 350 rhino whose horn are worth \$9,000 a kilo (Asian horns are believed to be more potent than African)".

However, since 1977 only two of Nepal's rhino have been poached. "This is because 500 army personnel and 200 forest guards are employed to protect the rhino. The animal must not die".

Martin explains this is because the King of Nepal has to kill a rhino in a special Hindu ritual — a blood tarpan — to appease his ancestors. The last such ceremony was in the early Eighties.

The king rode on an elephant with his wife and Hindu priests, he shot a rhino, and a tractor pulled the carcass to a river. Here the king stripped down to a dhoti and with his priests he cut open the rhino and crawled inside. The priests chanted mantras and the king, inside the belly of the dead rhino, chanted prayers to the spirits of his male ancestors.

This ritual is extremely important, says Martin, so saving the rhino is a first priority in Nepal. And it is being done. Commitment is the key.

The Western Press says scientists and expatriates are needed to save the rhino. Says Martin: "This is simply not true; all it needs is commitment from the top".

He says Prime Minister Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe is another head of state concerned about rhino poaching. "He has the military out in the Zambesi Valley and recently nine poachers were killed."

The policy is to shoot on sight unless the armed poachers surrender immediately. When a head of state gets involved the rhino's chances look much brighter.

Wild animals mean money for African countries, Martin says. Last year, for example, Kenya earned around \$262 million from nearly half a million tourists who visited the country. "Ultimately in Africa it all boils down to money. The poachers are in the game for quick hard cash, while governments are only likely to get firmly involved if they see that foreign exchange is going to be lost".

Esmond Bradley Martin enjoys his work. The rhino is a fascinating animal, he says. It's the second largest land mammal in the world. It copulates for 60 minutes at a time and the male has multiple orgasms. "For it to die out because of man's greed would be tragic. My work is devoted to preventing this and I enjoy it. But perhaps the most striking thing I've done was to prove that rhino horn is not used as an aphrodisiac. It's unusual to smash an international myth. If I died today this would be the best thing I've been known for".