

HUNTING THE KILLERS

Poaching has made the Northern white rhino the most endangered large mammal on the planet; only 26 remain in the wild. For 20 years the wildlife investigator Dr Esmond Bradley Martin has been fighting a one-man war to save the rhino and other large mammals from extinction. His undercover campaign has taken him from the game parks of northern Kenya to the tourist bazaars of Khartoum and put his own safety on the line. Report by William Cash

hours' of heated negotiation as the two Americans sat motionless in the back of the car, unable to understand a word. His friend, he says, was a total wreck. 'I think he blamed me for this – like what the hell were we doing in Sudan anyway?'

Thirty years later he might well have asked himself the same question. Nevertheless, on his first afternoon, having left the safety of his hotel, Bradley Martin managed to 'lose' his official 'delegation' in the concrete shambles of old Khartoum and headed for a row of 30 tacky tourist souvenir shops. After checking he wasn't being followed, he started to browse around a shop, pretending to be interested in buying something – a hand-carved ivory chess set, a pair of ivory cufflinks, a letter opener, a walking stick. As he picked up a 'hanko' name seal, which the Japanese use instead of personal signatures, from a huge pile scattered on a table, he could tell it had to be newly worked from illegal hard ivory: the pinkish, translucent grain was smooth as an emperor's chopstick.

This was not the soft-bleached Sudanese rubbish that cracks after the tusks have been cut, so he knew the ivory must have come from African forest elephants in Central or West Africa – or else it was smuggled over in a coffee truck from Cameroon. He noted, too, that prices had gone up. His prime target was not ivory but the much rarer rhino horn. But if they were selling illegal ivory, they were probably selling rhino horn

Had the Sudanese state secret police, the mukhabarat who stand around the Hilton in downtown Khartoum, known the identity and the mission of the white-haired American academic carrying an old tan leather briefcase who walked past them in the lobby, he would probably still be languishing in one of their torture centres. For Dr Esmond Bradley Martin is the world's number one undercover wildlife trade investigator, travelling the world to gather evidence on the multi-billion-dollar endangered species black market. He was in Khartoum to try to prove that Sudan flouts the international ban on the trading of ivory and rhino horn. Not surprisingly, the Sudanese Islamic militia government has never taken well to any Western, or 'neo-colonial', meddling in any of its many illegal trades.

He won't say exactly what cover he used to enter Sudan ('it was very unusual'); only that he was attached to an official delegation which had full armed protection. 'It's a very dangerous place to be and I was very concerned I could be picked up as a spy for asking too many questions.'

The last time he had been in Sudan his vehicle broke down at night in the middle of nowhere on his way back to Khartoum. Forced to sleep in the car, he and his American companion found their vehicle surrounded at 1am by a band of 'very aggressive' Sudanese armed with knives. After talking with the thugs in Arabic, their guide casually informed them, 'They kill you.'

'They were about to slit our throats,' says Bradley Martin. Their guide managed to dissuade them after 'hours and

IN HARM'S WAY
A Northern white rhino at full pelt. These rhinos are the world's most critically endangered large mammals

FLAT EARTH PICTURE



Left, Lucy Vigne, Dr Bradley Martin's English assistant, examines tools used to cut and carve the tusks and horns of elephants and rhinos. Right, Dr Bradley Martin with skins and horns of animals poached from Kenyan national parks

too. After chatting some more he told the Arab shop-owners he had a dealer friend in Yemen who was looking for a new supply of 'horn'. Did they have any?

At the word 'Yemen' there was an instant rise in the interest level. For Yemeni men wear daggers with handles made from rhino horn in much the same way they might wear a Gucci belt, and there is still a strong demand for horn in Yemen. Since 1970, more than 22,000 rhino have been killed to meet this demand. He was told to come back later that night. When he did so, the alleyway door was quickly locked behind him. He was led inside a backroom by two traders. The moment the long, rough horn was removed from a bag hidden under a table, he recognised the shape of the square base. 'It was definitely white rhino, no question,' says Bradley Martin. 'They are much bigger than black.'

Bradley Martin is one of the few experts in the world who can immediately identify all five species of rhino horn. On a recent visit to New York he informed the chairman of the board of the American Museum of Natural History that a famed exhibit of a piece of Indian rhino horn fed to Pope Gregory XIV on his death-bed was not Indian rhino at all; it was African white rhinoceros. The museum catalogue has since been changed.

The price the Khartoum dealer wanted was \$3,500 a kilo and he wouldn't come down below \$3,000. Pulling out his Nikon, Bradley Martin said if he was going to pay \$3,000 he needed to photograph the horn first and send the photographs to his 'trader friend in Yemen'. A few days later, Bradley Martin pulled off exactly the same routine in the back-streets of Omdurman. Lifting up a bag, one local trader produced another fresh-looking white horn – again wanting \$3,000 a kilo minimum.

As Bradley Martin put his Nikon away, disappearing back to his hotel up a dark Omdurman alleyway, he knew he had made a chilling discovery. The source of the Northern white rhino horns could be only one place: Congo.

When he got back to his base in Nairobi, the first thing he did was call his old colleague Dr Kes Hillman-Smith, research coordinator of the Garamba National Park Project in Congo. He told her he had some photographs he wanted her to look at. Little information had come out of the park since she and her husband, Fraser Smith, had evacuated themselves because of the ongoing war in Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Once Dr Hillman-Smith had seen the photographs, she knew the horn was almost certainly from Garamba. At the

A RICH PHILANTHROPIST HAS MOOTED THE IDEA OF SENDING A RESCUE MISSION TO AIRLIFT RHINOS TO SAFETY

last count there were only 26 Northern white (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*) rhinos in the wild, all of them – apart from maybe a few in Southern Sudan – lumbering around with very limited protection in the open grasslands of Garamba close to the southern border of Sudan. So few remain that they all have personal names – ranging from Noel to Mama Moke – but they are the most critically endangered large mammals on the planet.

Bradley Martin's discovery meant there was now a chilling possibility that armed poaching gangs were trying to kill these last remaining rhino for commercial profit. 'If some huge new trade route starts up, they're finished – there is no chance at all,' Dr Hillman-Smith told me. 'Their only chance at the moment is that the poaching has been for meat.'

The poaching is being carried out by gangs of AK-47-armed Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) deserters and hungry Sudanese refugees, some 80,000 of whom are camped close to Garamba Park. Already the elephant population of the park has been reduced from 11,000 in 1995 to about 5,500 in 1998 – along with more than 65 per cent of its hippos and buffaloes.

The armed poaching gangs appear to be moving south from the border, closing in on the rhinos. 'This is a real crisis situation and what is so annoying is that there is no action,' says Bradley Martin. It is known that a millionaire environmental philanthropist has mooted the idea of sending in a rescue mission to airlift a number of rhinos to safety. Dr Hillman-Smith, however, would prefer to see a UN wildlife protection force put in place. Dr Bradley Martin thinks the best answer is to 'lease out' some rhinos to American or South African sanctuaries so they can breed.

AS THE OLD LONDON TAXI bumped along the potholed main road – if that is the right word – that heads north out of Nairobi, I re-read the copy of Bradley Martin's CV he had sent me – all 24 pages of it. Educated at Waspie Brooks School, North Andover. Member of New York's Explorers Club and Academy of Sciences, Royal Geographical Society, Royal African Society and several dozen others. Books (several co-written with his wife, Chryssee) include a history of the Indian ocean dhow trade and a history of Zanzibar. Academic papers range from *A Quantitative Assessment of the Arab Slave Trade of East Africa, 1770-1896* to a survey of *Orang-utan Skulls for Sale in Kalimantan*.

A tall, donnish-looking man of 58 with clear, marble-blue

eyes, he does not like having his photograph taken; indeed, until very recently – his white hair is now so well known in places such as Yemen it hardly matters – he refused to allow any photographs for fear he would be recognised on his undercover missions. His manner is brisk and inquisitive; a good listener; a fast talker; the sort of American who makes sure you put your postal code in his visitors' book and who drinks iced tea at lunch. A copy of Wilfred Thesiger's biography lies within easy reach. He has lived in Africa for the past 30 years.

He told me he 'didn't like' talking about his family and it took me some time to discover that he was the great-grandson of America's 19th-century steel baron Henry Phipps. In 1897, during a depression, the Bradley Martins threw a costume ball at the Waldorf in New York that put them into the *Guinness Book of Records* for hosting the most expensive party of the 19th century: the lavish evening was, in fact, widely denounced by the American press as the most ostentatious party in US history. Mrs Bradley Martin wore a massive ruby necklace once worn by Marie-Antoinette.

Her descendant keeps a low profile; in Africa he prefers to call himself only Dr Martin. If you receive a letter from Dr Bradley Martin, no address is given, only a Nairobi PO Box number. His elegant neo-Palladian house, about 15 miles from Nairobi, is built so it cannot be seen either from the road or from its tall wrought-iron gates. As you drive up to them, they look as if they could belong to a Victorian 'Old Rectory' in, say, Kent. When the dark-green front door of Villa Langata closes behind you, the first thing you see is a sea of luxury green English carpet. Everywhere. Hanging not quite straight on a wall in the hallway is a framed print of a Chinese statue of a rhinoceros in decorative military armour. The main stairs in front of you are closed off by a heavy bank-vault-like door – like a New York pre-war apartment lift – locked with a giant padlock.

THE OPERATIONAL NERVE CENTRE of the undercover investigation team is run from Villa Langata's first-floor study. There is no computer, fax machine or e-mail – only his fine private collection of rare East African books and yards of handwritten journals, dossiers, research papers and secret files detailing names of underworld dealers, informers, prices, covers used and trade routes recorded on repeated undercover missions abroad.

In his upstairs sitting-room is a smiling group photograph – taken when ivory trading was legal – of some of Japan's biggest ivory traders after Bradley Martin had dinner with them. 'They all drove white Mercedes,' he said. 'The only people who have the information I want are traders. I make a special effort to meet them and to socialise with them to get information. I have been attacked for spending time with people when they are crooks, but where else do I get the information?' His bedroom shelves are filled with books on the darker side of criminal psychology and all forms of underworld trafficking – from the Chicago Mafia to Chinese Triads – as well as well-thumbed reference books on chess. 'I am intellectually very interested in illegal trade,' he says. 'Also, what interests me is that academics keep out of it.'

The most intriguing exhibit on his study wall, however, is a framed medal on a thick, orange ribbon. For his hazardous work as a field spy, obtaining information in such countries as Yemen and the police state of Sudan, taking on the governments of South Korea and Taiwan, he has been awarded the Order of the Golden Ark by Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, former president of the then World Wildlife Fund. The medal is the conservation world equivalent of the Victoria Cross. At around 10.30am the peace of Villa

'I MEET TRADERS AND I HAVE BEEN ATTACKED FOR SPENDING TIME WITH CROOKS BUT WHERE ELSE DO I GET THE INFORMATION?'

Langata is interrupted by the sound of a Subaru pulling up in the gravelled drive. Lucy Vigne, his British assistant and co-investigator, walks in. With her dark wave of long, brown hair, deep hazel eyes and cut-glass English accent, she looks like the young Katharine Ross.

She spent the first three-and-a-half years of her life in Cape Town until her father – the liberal British political journalist Randolph Vigne – was deported in the Sixties for his anti-apartheid writings. She always wanted to be a naturalist and read zoology at Oxford, specialising in rare and exotic birds.

Bradley Martin recruited Lucy Vigne as his assistant in 1986 when she was working in Nairobi as the 26-year-old editor of *Pachyderm*, a leading academic journal of the elephant and rhino conservation world. Until he hired Vigne, his usual co-investigator abroad (he often goes alone) was his wife, who still accompanies him on certain trips.

His missions abroad can be compared with UN weapons inspections; at one part of the day he and Lucy will be meeting high-ranking foreign government ministers to put pressure on them to enforce official trade bans, or to discuss what to use as a substitute for rhino horn. Afterwards, they will return to their respective hotels for a shower and then venture out again later under cover (Esmond has 'worn wigs and stuff'; Lucy often disguises herself as an Arab woman) to investigate the local underground traders, wildlife markets or traditional pharmacies, playing roles such as the 'naive' tourist, 'big-time' trader or curious scholar. 'What we do is different every time,' says Esmond. 'What is very exciting about the work,' says Lucy, 'is that one moment you are talking to the Prime Minister of Yemen and the next moment, in the same notebook, you are in a souk secretly counting how many rhino horn handles are being made.'

It is during their trips to Yemen that they have had their worst scares. In May 1994 they were caught up in the outbreak of the civil war. On their second night in Sanaa, the capital, they had a secret late-night meeting with Dr al-Iryani (now the prime minister) during which he produced a beautiful jambia knife with a jasper handle, a new material which was being tested as a possible alternative to rhino horn. The minister said he would arrange a meeting with the jambia maker – a crucial breakthrough.

In the middle of the night, however, Lucy was awoken by the sound of anti-aircraft trolleys being pulled along the road outside her hotel door. Then she heard a 'terrible firing, like bazookas' outside. Having no phone – she was at a local Yemenese hotel – she squeezed herself under her bed as she heard the deafening noise of missiles roaring and exploding overhead. 'I thought the hotel was about to be blown up, or a bullet was going to come through the window,' she says. 'Esmond was staying around the corner – as usual – at the four-star Tajsheba.' Eventually they had to be evacuated from Sanaa by the American air force.

In the le Carré/Fleming spy thriller genre, of course, it would be impossible for an ex-deb English blonde to work successfully – from separate hotel rooms – for 14 years with an American boss. Not so Bradley Martin and Vigne. Although they have occasionally 'had' to share the same hotel room, their relationship is strictly un-Bondlike once the day's work is over. For the past 11 years, Lucy has been married to a Kenyan polo-playing computer executive and she has two small children.

It was in Yemen back in 1978, when Bradley Martin was with his wife researching the smuggled cargoes of dhows for one of their books, that they stumbled across the answer to the mystery of why there had been such a sudden increase in the slaughter of rhinos in East Africa. Taking a close look at the handles on the rows of brilliantly decorative jambia

The voice of an angel

His fans include David Lynch, Lou Reed and Bruce Springsteen, but it's taken Jimmy Scott 60 years to be recognised as a unique singer. By Ian Johnston. Portrait by Polly Borland

ONE OF the undoubted highlights of Nick Cave's Meltdown festival at the South Bank in London this summer was an emotionally overwhelming performance by the 74-year-old jazz vocalist, Jimmy Scott. Standing alone in the spotlight, shoulders hunched, his long arms outstretched imploringly, eyes tightly shut, Scott seemed to enter a transcendental state from the moment he began to sing. His soaring, fractured, high-pitched voice trembled with longing and sadness, investing enduring bittersweet ballads such as *Everybody's Somebody's Fool, What I Wouldn't Give* and *All the Way* with a cathartic power that completely seduced the audience.

There are many gifted, 'forgotten' cult singers who unjustly reside on the margins of popular music history, but Jimmy Scott is

perhaps the greatest of them all. 'It's been 50, almost 60 years,' muses Scott on his life in showbusiness. 'It sure is rewarding to know that a career can go on that long,' he laughs.

Since the late Forties, when he first appeared with Lionel Hampton's band as 'Little' Jimmy Scott, the singer's intense, unfettered vibrato has influenced countless performers, including Nancy Wilson, Marvin Gaye, Johnny Ray, Frankie Valli and Stevie Wonder. Though all of these enjoyed far greater commercial success than Scott, the originator of this heartrending vocal style remains remarkably philosophical. 'I never got angry that someone might be using what I put out,' Scott reflects, his androgynous waxen features breaking into a typically broad smile. 'At times I would say to myself, I wish I had a gig like so-and-so, I hope my opportunity comes. I think we all do that. But things go around - you just have to have an inner depth of understanding.'

One of 10 children, Jimmy Victor Scott was born on July 17, 1925, in Cleveland, Ohio. Both he and a brother were afflicted with Kallmann's Syndrome. This hereditary hormonal deficiency stunted his growth, and meant that he would never grow facial or

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bodily hair and his voice would never break, thus creating his near-feminine presence and singing voice which has echoes of Dinah Washington and Billie Holiday. 'My mother, of course, took us along to doctors and tried to have something done to help,' he recalls. 'But when it came to it, we would have been guinea-pigs and she didn't want that. The things that they were testing, she wasn't sure we would benefit. They couldn't promise her that so, get back to work, bye.'

Music had always fascinated Jimmy and his career seemed predestined. 'Growing up in Cleveland, a lot of the activities that were going on socially were based on musical expression,' Scott reflects. 'It was a rare thing, entertainment. Any time it came there, it was an exciting thing for the people, so you paid a lot of attention to what the music was about, who was singing, or who was playing in the big bands. Fortunately, music was also part of the educational element there. They, too, introduced a variety: the classical music, the choral music and things.'

Scott's mother, Justine, a church pianist who encouraged his deep love of music, was killed in a car accident when Jimmy was 13, dying in his arms. Scott began to sing for money in an effort to keep the family together, but to his lasting regret his siblings were sent to different foster homes. This calamity, along with a ruinous contract with Savoy records (for whom he recorded three hits in the mid-Fifties), harassment from promoters who believed he was a woman in drag, the constant threat of racism and the dissolution of his four marriages, forged the tears that Scott cried as he sang his trademark ballads of loneliness and despair.

Pimps, prostitutes and others on the margins of society worshipped him, throwing silver dollars at his feet in numerous downtown dives. 'I wasn't singing these particular songs to promote it, but I've found that there is sadness all over the world,' says Scott, his voice dropping to a faint whisper. 'The lyric or the thought in the song... I got to the place that projected to people and they'd come and tell me, "I recognise that feeling", or "I've lived that". Something about those songs made them remember suffering or sorrow; it came, too, from the life I had lived, the losses I had suffered. In the end, just to have that moment of loss again seems to free a soul up. I used to say, "I've got to quit

singing, 'cos I'm making folks too sad.' But they'd tell me, "Don't you ever quit."'

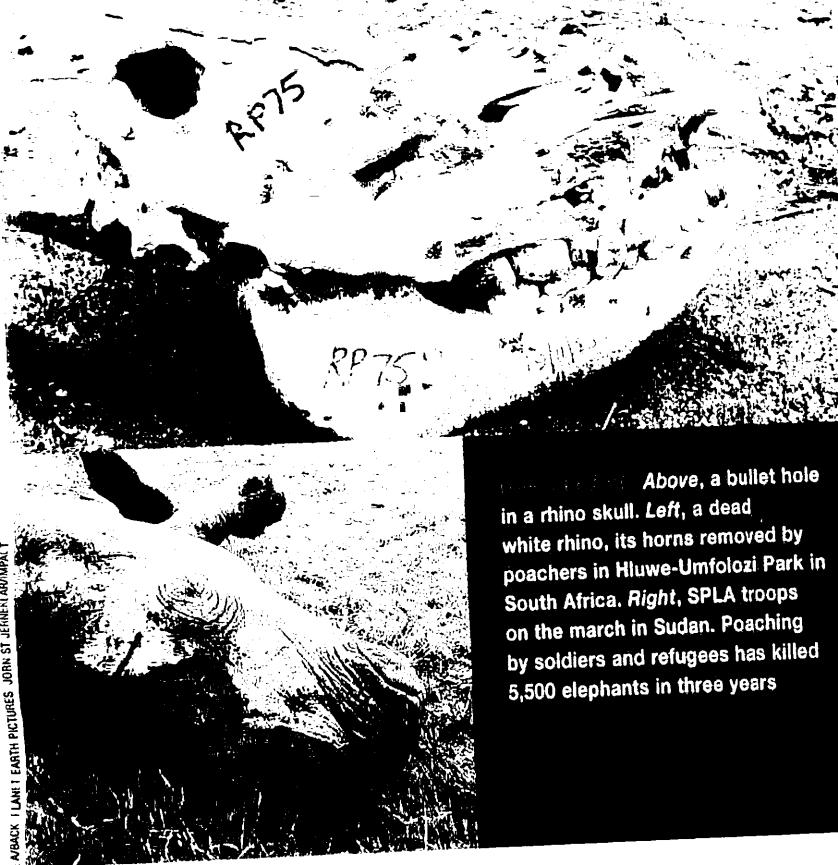
In 1962, with long-time admirer Ray Charles, Scott recorded a masterful album, *Falling in Love is Wonderful*, which should have introduced him to a much wider audience. Savoy, claiming that Scott was still under contract, threatened to sue. The album was withdrawn, his subsequent comebacks were short-lived and Scott faded into obscurity, performing on the hotel lounge circuit.

In March 1991 Scott's career was finally resuscitated. He sang at the funeral of his friend, the songwriter Doc Pomus. Fellow mourner Seymour Stein, head of Sire Records, was so taken with Scott's rendition of Gershwin's *Someone to Watch Over Me* at the service that he arranged a deal for the singer with Warner Bros. The following year Scott released one of the finest jazz vocal albums ever recorded, *All the Way*, a masterpiece in part arranged by the film composer Johnny Mandel. 'That was a personal gift for me, the forming of that record,' admits Scott. 'When Johnny did the arrangement of *Angel Eyes* he didn't hear Frank Sinatra, he heard Jimmy Scott.'

Today, devotees of his poignant phrasing include David Lynch (he sang on the soundtrack of the director's 1992 film *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me*), Lou Reed (Scott was a featured artist on Reed's *Magic and Loss* album), Madonna, Bruce Springsteen, Quincy Jones, Alec Baldwin, Kim Basinger, and Scott's old friend, Joe Pesci.

In May, he also began to court a younger audience with the release of his fourth Warner Bros album, *Holding Back the Years* - a CD of covers including Bryan Ferry's *Slave to Love*, Elvis Costello's *Almost Blue*, and a wonderful version of Prince's *Nothing Compares 2 U*. In the sleeve notes, as if to warn emotionally vulnerable listeners, Lou Reed observes, 'He has the voice of an angel and can break your heart.'

The Jimmy Scott Trio will be playing at the Jazz Cafe, Camden Town, as part of the Camden Mix festival from October 18 to 20 (tickets: 0171-344 0044)



Above, a bullet hole in a rhino skull. Left, a dead white rhino, its horns removed by poachers in Hluwe-Umfolozi Park in South Africa. Right, SPLA troops on the march in Sudan. Poaching by soldiers and refugees has killed 5,500 elephants in three years



daggers on display in the medieval souk market, they recognised the distinctive grain. They were the first Western scholars to expose how the new oil-related wealth in Yemen was being spent to import more than 50 per cent of the world's rhino horn to be carved into dagger handles.

Following this vital breakthrough, he was appointed the first ever full-time *wildlife trade investigator* by the World Wildlife Fund and ~~the first ever UN~~ Special Envoy on rhinoceros conservation. He also established that rhino horn was being used in the Far East not for aphrodisiac purposes – as is glibly popularly believed – but for fever-reducing medicinal purposes. Once inside a state-owned pharmaceutical factory in Beijing – 'I just walk in,' he says – Bradley Martin saw sacks of Ming dynasty antique cups and bowls worth up to \$30,000 each waiting to be smashed up just for their horn ('like ripping up a Renoir painting to get the frame').

In South Korea, a major illegal importer, rhino horn (from Koreans working in Yemen) is an essential ingredient of *chung sin hwan* balls – literal meaning 'medicine of the heart' – which cost about \$10 and are taken daily by Koreans as a natural 'energy booster'. Each ball, sealed in wax, covered in gold leaf like a Godiva chocolate, comes in a pretty little ornate box. The balls are gulped down whole.

Bradley Martin's work in South Korea ruined business for many traditional pharmacy owners. The last time he was there, in 1992, several of his informers just 'walked away' unpaid as they became 'so petrified' trying to establish the identity of the main wholesale trader of rhino horn in Seoul. Finally, a Korean journalist Bradley Martin had trained as an informer told him a contract had been put out on his life. 'Dr Martin,' he was told, 'if I were you I wouldn't come back.' He says Korea is the only country he has 'purposefully avoided' for many years.

In 1989 he exposed the world's largest rhino horn smuggling cartel ever, between Johannesburg's Jan Smuts airport and Taiwan. According to one influential commentator, Bradley Martin's hazardous, often abjectly funded, undercover work was 'largely responsible' for getting the rhino horn trade internationally banned in the Eighties. He also played a critically important role – monitoring traders and routes to the Far East – in getting the ivory trade banned in 1989. But a decade later, Bradley Martin faces his biggest challenge yet. Following his recent

trip to Sudan, he believes there is alarming evidence that the

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Khartoum connection may be opening up once again, re-establishing Sudan as the ivory capital of Africa, smuggling newly shot ivory from Africa via Egypt to the Far East. There are already sinister signs that demand is rising in the East. Before flying out to Nairobi to see Bradley Martin, I visited the offices of the Environmental Investigation Agency in London, three floors above a photocopy shop on Clerkenwell Road. I was shown

photographic evidence of a seizure of 600kg of raw ivory at Paris airport last October, when French Customs became suspicious of a North Korean diplomat ('they don't get adequately paid,' Bradley Martin tells me) wheeling around a trolley piled with 20 suitcases. They were found to be crammed with fresh elephant tusks. He had been flying from Cameroon to China.

The extent to which a return to legalised ivory trading will create a window of opportunity for the 'laundering' of ivory – unscrupulous dealers (and they don't get more unscrupulous than in Khartoum) selling off newly poached ivory claiming it is from 'old' stockpiles – is an acutely sensitive subject in conservation circles. Today's dealers are so well organised that any form of regulated trade provides endless loopholes for corruption.

On a recent undercover spy mission to Cairo, Aswan and Luxor, Bradley Martin found the tourist markets and hotels 'awash' with more than 21,000 pieces of ivory trinkets, scarabs, seals, chopsticks, animal figures, elephant bridges (tusks with elephants carved along them), jewellery – the largest haul of ivory on sale anywhere in Africa. As in Khartoum, much of it is 'hard' ivory.

In Cairo alone, he counted 88 shops with illegally carved ivory – coming from the forest elephants of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan and Central African Republic. Many of the ivory items were on display in the Middle East's largest outdoor market, the Khan al-Khalili. Much of the ivory is smuggled up via the Nile in Sudan into Egypt by the old 'Forty Days' route, with herders smuggling the raw tusks with the camels they are bringing to Cairo's meat markets.

On his final few days in Khartoum, he learnt from merchants and underworld trade contacts that ivory – as in the Eighties – is again being exported in bulk to Asia, mostly China and South Korea. Already the price of ivory has nearly doubled. Any hope that his job might be done would be wishful thinking.