

# CONSERVATION HOTLINE

## Soft Spot for the Spotted Owl?

**A**T FIRST GLANCE, LUMBER GIANT WEYERHAEUSER COULD BE ACCUSED OF GIVING AID AND COMFORT to the enemy. According to a recent story in the *Wall Street Journal*, the company is spending \$1 million a year to find and *protect* that scourge of the timber industry, the northern spotted owl. The article adds that Weyerhaeuser has already restricted logging on over 300,000 acres of its land found to be spotted owl habitat. The company has not, however, suddenly developed a case of bird benevolence.

"Weyerhaeuser is required to protect owls on its land," points out Jim Pissot, director of the Washington state office of the National Audubon Society. "To their credit, Weyerhaeuser is one of the more responsible landowners in the state. But they are doing a good job adhering to [state and federal] regulations that are so minimal as to be almost laughable."

While Weyerhaeuser protects owls on its land, it attacks them in print. A large advertisement in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* denouncing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spotted owl recovery plan ended with the warning, "Going overboard for the owl will hurt people."

If the timber industry has truly been afflicted by the northern spotted owl—economic statistics indicate that other factors have cost far more jobs than owl protection—Weyerhaeuser has been immunized by its large corporate real estate holdings. With owl protection responsible for logging restrictions on more than five million acres of federal land in the Pacific Northwest, many timber operations had to forage to find federal forests to log. But as the domestic housing market began to rebound during the past 12 months and the demand for lumber rose, Weyerhaeuser found itself in the catbird's seat with more than five and a half million acres of land. The company's first-quarter profits in 1992 were up a robust 81 percent over the same period in the previous year.

The impact of spotted owl protection on timber-industry jobs is highly suspect. According to Pissot, the loss of some 26,000 logging jobs in Oregon and Washington between 1976 and 1988 had nothing to do with the owl. Export of raw, unfinished logs, overcutting, mill mechanization, and the phasing out of some mills are the real culprits in timber unemployment. Workers are victims of the industry's increased efficiency: The same amount of timber was cut in Washington in 1986 as in 1976, but by 15,000 fewer timber workers. Bruce Beckett, a spokesman for Weyerhaeuser, agrees that industry overhaul cost thousands of jobs prior to 1988, but adds that since then, new regulations for management of public lands have affected upwards of 100,000 industry-related workers in the Northwest.

The entire spotted owl controversy may soon take a back seat to another, similar conflict. Logging is fouling streams in which the sockeye salmon spawns. The *Wall Street Journal* quotes Weyerhaeuser chief John Creighton as saying, "That's a pretty ominous thing to have hanging over our heads."

Steven D. Mirsky

Spotted owl chick



ART WOLFE

## Yemeni Daggers Threaten Rhinos

Previously the last stronghold for black rhinos, Zimbabwe has become the site of their wholesale slaughter. Much of the poaching has been organized by businessmen in Zambia who send locals across the border to shoot the rhinos. In the past, almost all the horns from these animals were sent from Zambia to southern Africa for export to Taiwan. Today, however, the market seems to have shifted somewhat to Yemen, where the horns are prized for dagger handles.

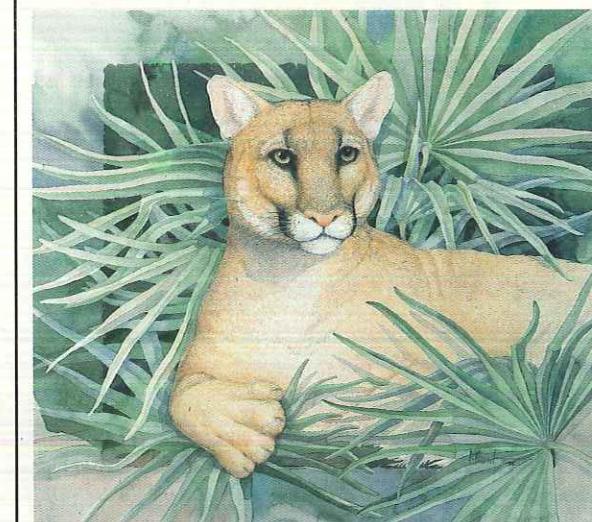
At the end of 1991, officials at Zimbabwe's National Parks and Wild Life Management Department believed the country had about 2,000 black rhinos, over half of the species' entire population. Matusadona National Park, for example, was thought to be home to 150 black rhinos, but only 15 were found in a recent survey. The department now estimates there are as few as 500 to 1,000 black rhinos left in Zimbabwe.

The dollar price of rhino horn paid to an importer in Yemen is about \$450 a pound, half what it is in Taiwan. However, South Africa is clamping down on rhino-horn smuggling, and it appears that some middlemen are choosing not to send all Zimbabwean horn through southern Africa to eastern Asia, but are opting for a less risky route: from Zambia to Tanzania, and then to the Arabian peninsula.

Since the unification of North and South Yemen in May 1990, the country's land boundary has greatly increased in length and is largely unpatrolled, making smuggling relatively simple. In fact, rhino-horn imports into Yemen nearly doubled during 1991. The main dealer in Sanaa, the capital, admits he purchased over 1,650 pounds of horn from August 1990 to March 1992—the booty from about 260 rhinos.

The country's Foreign Minister, Abdul Karim Al-Iryani is preparing a decree that will ban the internal trade in raw rhino horn. Previously, only imports and exports of Yemeni horn were banned; traders could legally buy horn within the country. Yemen's religious leader, the Grand Mufti, has issued an edict stating that it is against the will of God for Muslims to decimate rhinos for their horns.

Esmond Bradley Martin  
and Lucy Vigne



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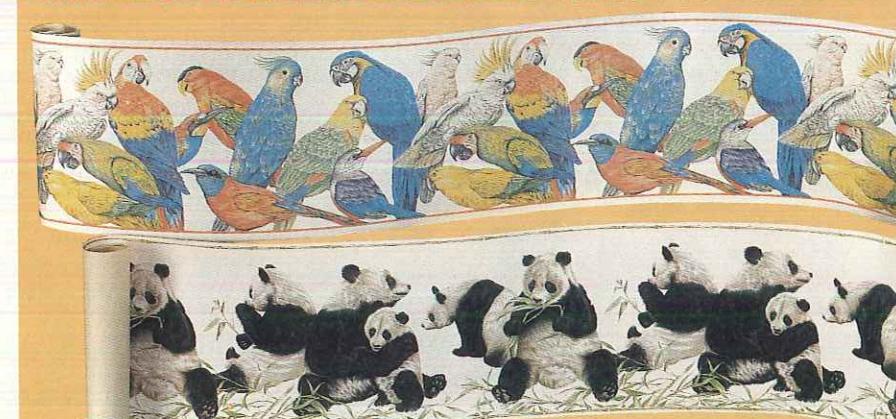
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