

INDIA'S RHINO-HORN TRADE

AFTER investigating the trade in both African and local rhino horn in India last year, Dr. Esmond Bradley Martin has compiled a report for the World Wildlife Fund and the I.U.C.N. in which he recommends that the Forest Department in Assam, north-east India, should immediately cease its annual auctions of rhino horn.

This is because the horn from Assam can move freely throughout all the other Indian states and hinders the efforts of the authorities trying to crack down on smuggling rhino horn from other parts of India, and from Africa. He notes that with the price rising sharply to \$7,800 a kilo now, this is encouraging more people to poach the Indian rhino, in spite of the risks that have to be taken because of the increased vigilance.

Dr. Bradley Martin has also urged stricter controls against the export of Indian rhino horn and advocates that all movement of such horn coming into the possession of Indian conservation authorities should be destroyed, except that for museums or scientific use.

Dr. Bradley Martin's report on the trade and uses of rhino products in India shows that there is still a widespread belief among Indians that the rhino horn, and other parts of the animals, have magical properties. While most people still believe in its aphrodisiac qualities, he found that the price has escalated to such an extent that even small quantities of rhino horn are now beyond the reach of most Indians.

The killing of rhinos in India was banned as far back as 1910, but even then it was too late to save the population, except those in Assam and West Bengal which are now preserved by law. Kaziranga Sanctuary, with 950 rhino, now contains the world's largest population of the Indian rhino.

Many deterrents

Many deterrents have been introduced by the Government to prevent poaching, and jail sentences have been stepped up from three to six months for killing a rhino. Despite this, the price has risen so high that many are prepared to take the risk, especially as the syndicates which operate the poaching rings take care of the welfare of the families of those jailed, and such is the retribution meted out to informants that the authorities find it almost impossible to get information from those poachers they catch. In most cases they do not even know the identity of the people at the top. When one poacher kills a rhino, he then gives its location to an accomplice, who sends a third person to remove the horn.

Dr. Bradley Martin writes in his report. "It is because of the increase in price that poaching, despite the greater risks now, appears to be on the increase again in 1980. After all, an honest man working as a farm labourer or as a waiter in an Assam hotel would need to work for three years to earn as much money as a poacher makes from a single rhino horn".

Unlike in Africa, where the horn is the main and usually the only part of the animal taken by poachers, Indian rhinos are also sought after for their skins—even rhino urine and dung has a market value for curative purposes.

While the price within India itself is high, rhino horn fetches much more in South-east Asia and the Far East. Since 1969, when the

price was around \$4,200 a kilo, it has now soared to \$10,000 a kilo.

Because of such astronomical prices, and the rising demand, Indian conservation officials fear that poaching activities will increase in the 80s to a degree never experienced before.

While Indians in the north and north-east of the sub-continent have traditionally relied upon Indian rhinos for horns, those on the West coast around Bombay and in Rajasthan, have for centuries imported African rhino horn for domestic use and since it was long a custom of soldiers from Rajasthan to carry shields made from rhino skin, Dr. Bradley Martin believes that African rhinos were the source for those highly-ornamented shields.

E. African rhino

Although no records are kept in India of imported rhino products and the records from the East African end showed a negligible quantity, he does not take this into account, but quotes sources in India as saying that between 1949 and 1971 and especially during the years after the East African countries gained their independence, many Indian residents who decided to return to their homeland carried with them rhino horn and ivory for sale in Gujarat State.

Dr. Bradley Martin found on questioning dealers in traditional medicines that all rhino horn has become so expensive in India that they prefer to look for substitutes, of which there are many.

The most expensive so-called aphrodisiac on sale in Bombay shops, according to Dr. Bradley Martin, is deer musk, retailing for an incredible \$625 for 10 grammes.

His report continues: "Some of the less expensive love potions found in this city are monkey glands, goat bile, the penis of a rabbit, a special gland from a crocodile and the bile of a whale."

"In Baroda, Gujarat, two of the more popular aphrodisiacs are worms and land slugs. The dried worms, crushed into powder and mixed with other ingredients, are made into little pills that sell for the equivalent of 75 US cents for 100 grammes. The purchaser mashes them up and mixes them with oil for external application to his penis.... In West Bengal one of the most common aphrodisiacs is made from red ants."

There are two reasons why rhino horn is not used so much nowadays as an aphrodisiac in India. One is the expense, putting it economically out of reach of most people and secondly those dealing in rhino products find it more profitable to export them abroad for hard currency.

Dr. Bradley Martin estimates that less than 50 kilos of rhino horn are consumed annually in India today and comments: "This is a minute quantity in comparison to world market demands for rhino as dagger handles and as a fever-reducing medicine."

Bombay and the State of Gujarat are the main places in India where rhino horn is still used, because of the traditional trading connections with East Africa, but only very small quantities are used. It is frequently mixed with herbs to make it more palatable and one *hakim* first burns the horn, mixes the ashes with saffron and cardamon, then adds honey as a sweetener.

Apart from its use as a supposed aphrodisiac, rhino horn is taken by Indians to relieve lumbago, polio and arthritis. There is



PHOTO: E. B. Martin

The Indian rhino, now confined almost to the extreme north-west of the country, is smaller than its East African relative.

also a long tradition of its use as a cure for haemorrhoids. The patient sits in a chair with a large hole in it and smoke rises up from a burning rhino horn, placed underneath.

"Remaining in this precarious position for a quarter of an hour for each treatment would not be easily accomplished without an expert tending the fire," wryly comments Dr. Bradley Martin.

Many are the uses of rhino products in India but the most bizarre are the "recipes" for which rhino urine or dung are the chief ingredients.

Dr. Bradley Martin found that some Gujaratis believe that rhino dung can cure bumps on the skin, and when combined with eucalyptus oil, can be rubbed on the neck to relieve stiffness.

In most Indian zoos, it seems, there is a thriving black market in rhino urine. Calcutta Zoo officials proudly told Dr. Bradley Martin they made \$750 from it during 1979 and every morning Indians, and some Nepalese, buy rhino urine for 44 cents a litre. In Assam, it costs more, and there is even a state sales tax of six percent!

In Delhi Zoo, however, the director looked aghast when Dr. Bradley Martin asked about the local price for the commodity, denying vehemently that any such thing was sold. When he went to see the keeper later, out of sight of the director, he was offered a litre of urine for three dollars—inclusive of delivery charges to his hotel!

Rhino urine

The urine's use varies, it appears, from an aphrodisiac to a cure for coughs and to quote from his report once more: "I admit that I was amazed when I found out that some men who have difficulties in becoming sexually excited, soak porous leaves in rhino urine and tie them tightly with string around their sexual parts until the desired effect takes place. Others mix two parts of groundnut oil to one part urine and dab the mixture on the male organ. A further use for rhino urine is to cure coughs and sore throats; some people mix it with honey and water and drink it at night before going to bed, and in the morning before breakfast...."