

BOOK REVIEWS

ON A KNIFE'S EDGE: THE RHINOCEROS HORN TRADE IN YEMEN

**Esmond Bradley Martin, Lucy Vigne
and Crawford Allen**

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Since the early 1970s, Yemen has been one of the largest consumers of rhino horn in the world, importing over 40% of the annual trade during that time. Beautiful and durable, the horn is prized there for the manufacture of dagger handles, *jambiyas*, worn by only the richest and most influential of men. Yet, responsible for the deaths of some 22,350 rhinos over the last 26 years, most Yemenis until recently barely even knew of the rhinos themselves, if anything, confusing them with the giraffe. Although still a significant threat to the few remaining rhinos, the trade of rhino horn into Yemen has dropped massively. The imports of the main *jambiya* producing family, for example, have dropped from 1,585 kg in 1982 to 15 kg in 1996.

Although driven by a complex mixture of value, status, *per capita* income, lack of trade controls and availability, much of this reduction in trade in rhino horn has been due to the persistent efforts of Esmond Bradley Martin. Over the years Martin has investigated, documented, and motivated efforts to control and reduce this threat to rhinos. Well known for their studies of rhino horn and ivory trade over the years, Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne join here with Crawford Allen of TRAFFIC to pro-

duce a thorough and painstakingly researched documentation of the rhino horn trade and the use of rhino horn in Yemen.

With a background on the history and culture of the use of rhino horn, the legislation relating to its control and the statistics of the trade, this monograph focuses in most detail on the studies and control actions carried out since 1990. Organized into methods, results and discussion, these details cover an interesting mixture of statistical, factual and anecdotal evidence. This is an extremely valuable record of a strange but highly significant cause of death for very many of Africa's rhinos in this century. The authors end with a series of recommendations. Has the Rhinoceros Task Force been established yet, to follow through all the actions needed, one asks?

Photo credit: Lucy Vigne



Photo 1. A *jambiya* shop in Sana'a's old souk.