

BOOK REVIEWS

Tiger bone and rhino horn: the destruction of wildlife for traditional Chinese medicine

Richard Ellis

Island Press/Shearwater Books, Washington, Covelo, London, 2005, 294 pages, ISBN 1 55963 532 0

review by Lucy Vigne

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I was immediately drawn to this book as so little is understood, let alone written, about traditional Chinese medicine and the devastating effect it now has on endangered wildlife. This is a book that needed to be written. It offers a wealth of information expressed with a light touch but in a factual and fair way. It is aimed at the American audience, but we can all learn from it, whether we are from eastern Asia or the West. Richard Ellis, a leading expert on extinction, has synthesized material from historical records, anecdotes and scientific reports, giving due credit, to produce a very readable book on the painful subject of man's past tendency to kill animals for land clearance and for fun. Nowadays—as animal numbers dwindle precariously—they are being poached for what has become a threatening demand: for medicines for the growing numbers of wealthy Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Taiwanese round the world.

An attractive hardback, with pleasing typeface and paper, the book has been artistically laid out and carefully edited, encouraging one to turn its pages and read on. The text is divided into seven chapters; rhinos, tigers and bears dominate.

Two chapters on tigers give their history in relation to man's destructive use of them, with sections on the tigers of Siberia (Amur), Indonesia, China and India, and their use in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). A chapter on bears gives a horrific account of their persecution both in the wild and on farms where the highly prized bile is agonizingly extracted. The longest chapter, on rhinos (pages 71–143), has

sections on the unicorn myth, the five rhino species in Africa and Asia and the threats to them, rhino product medicines and trade. Rhinos and the other species are revisited in later chapters, so the reader cannot forget the disturbing issues to be faced if we are to keep them alive. Other well-known species threatened by TCM and documented here include elephant, musk deer, leopard, narwhal, pangolin, saiga antelope, sea horse, seal and sea lion.

Of compelling interest is the contrast displayed here between traditional Chinese and Western medicines, their origins, development and worldwide spread. Traditional Chinese medicine is preventive and tries to harmonize the body and bring balance; Western medicine seeks to cure. The chapter on this subject explains also the differences and similarities of these two schools of medicine and helps us to understand the needs of patients and doctors. The fact is stated that the Chinese do not use rhino horn as an aphrodisiac but to reduce fever, still one of the most common misunderstandings in the West, although I would have preferred a greater emphasis on this mistaken view earlier on in the book. It amazes me that so many well-educated people still get this simple fact wrong, showing the need for books such as this to explain the reality of TCM.

The book gives concrete examples of research conducted on some of these medicines. It offers the evidence that rhino horn, in the small doses given, has not been scientifically proven to work against fever, but that bear bile does contain healing sub-

stances that scientists are now synthesizing. Yet many TCM adherents believe that whether or not their medicines work cannot be assessed from a solely Western perspective. Richard Ellis points out that public statements and education explaining that such medicines are endangering species is the most powerful way to save these animals.

A 21-page bibliography shows the thorough research Ellis has conducted and the wealth of material he has distilled from reliable sources. A bonus is the 47 illustrations, 18 of them the author's own animal drawings. Maps are lacking, however, and it might have been helpful to have places named in the text

and animal ranges shown on maps, along with a few more tables of animal numbers for clarity and easier referral.

This is an excellent overview for the layman, and for the scientist who perhaps has not been able to read all the academic journals and popular magazine articles covering these subjects. It is easy, compelling and informative reading in its painful portrayal of man's blind greed for wildlife products. It proclaims the urgent need to address the issue through public awareness, to stop the suffering and illegal killing of wild animals, many of them now endangered, in order for them to provide traditional Chinese medicines.

No oasis: the Egyptian ivory trade in 2005

Esmond Martin and Tom Milliken

TRAFFIC International, Cambridge, 2005; 23 pages, ISBN 1 8585 0 208 X
available from www.traffic.org/publications/index.html

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This monograph updates the ivory market status in Egypt, previously last reported in Martin (2000), Martin and Stiles (2000) and Stiles and Martin (2001). The last two CITES Conferences of the Parties called for assessment of both compliance of target countries with CITES Resolution 10.10 (Rev. CoP 12) and the internal ivory markets of African elephant range states (Decision 12.39 and Decision 13.26). Martin and Stiles (2000) demonstrated that Egypt was an important player in the illegal movement, working and selling of ivory in Africa (third overall). Since it is not an elephant range state, this survey was made to ensure that Egypt was not overlooked in implementing Decision 13.26.

This report contains much information not seen in previous publications on Egyptian ivory, such as a detailed treatment of wildlife trade legislation and policy and Egypt's participation in the Elephant Trade Information System, which I found most useful for understanding the context of Egyptian ivory trading over time. The monograph also contains a detailed account of where retail ivory is being sold, including the types and quantities of items.

The authors spent about three weeks in March–April 2005, carrying out work in Cairo, Luxor, Aswan, Hurghada and Sharm el-Sheikh, the main tourist

centres in Egypt. Using the ivory market monitoring and assessment methodology developed by Martin and Stiles (2000, 2002, 2003, 2005), the authors' overall findings showed that Egypt was still a country that affected elephant conservation negatively, but that since 1998 ivory market size and activity have decreased. Unfortunately, the report does not contain a table that compares trade indicators from 1998 and 2005 to enable a quick quantitative assessment of the changes. As it took me considerable time searching the report to find the data, I present one here so that the reader can readily appreciate what has happened (table 1). Complete comparative data were available only for Cairo, as it is apparently the only place in Egypt where ivory is worked today. Former ivory craftsmen in Luxor have seemingly stopped work except for ivory repair.

Although the number of active ivory craftsmen and the number of retail items seen for sale have dropped considerably since 1998, usually good news, the other indicators show that there is little basis for thinking the trend downwards is irreversible. The indicators, together with learning from the monograph about Egyptian government actions over the past few years, suggest a situation of strong latent demand, limited only by raw ivory