

# Survival or extinction? How to save elephants and rhinos

Bridget Martin

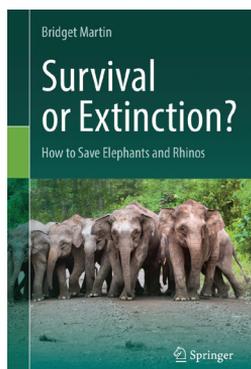
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Bridget Martin's 44-chapter e-book in 14 parts provides a broad overview of the illegal wildlife trade (IWT) in ivory and rhino horn. Martin charts the increasingly complex IWT from source to consumer, tracing the "labyrinthine" nexus made possible by bribery, corruption, greed and conflict. How the massive web is coordinated, from the armed rebel groups and trafficking rings who infiltrate and incentivise poachers to the criminal gangs, middlemen and sellers driven by avarice, as well as the justifications of the consumers. She discusses laws protecting elephants and rhinos and the strategies used by organisations such as TRAFFIC, IUCN, Wildlife Direct and Save the Rhino International. The concerted action of wildlife enforcement networks such as ASEAN-WEN, Interpol, Cobra—international partnerships with global intelligence links to intercept the illegal trade chain—is also covered. While there are no new insights offered, it could be useful to have all of this information in a single volume.

Much of the book is a compilation of secondary material, drawing on reputable sources, including the surveys of Tom Milliken, Daniel Stiles, Cynthia Moss, the late Dr Esmond Martin, and under-cover sleuthing by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA). As such it contains nothing new, and much of it will be familiar to readers of *Pachyderm*. It would have been useful to have a table with data such as the researchers, the dates surveys were carried out, and the prices of IWT items for easy comparison.

Martin has dedicated her book to Sudan, the last male Northern White Rhino "who unlike so many other rhinos, was fortunate enough to pass away peacefully", and this sets the tone. Though, when does poaching of once sentient animals, their faces hacked to pieces to extract tusk and horn, and left



lifeless, while their body parts are shipped thousands of kilometres from Africa (and Asia) through intermediary ports such as Singapore not fail to sicken one's soul? Transit through corrupt customs is one thing, but shipping lines, airlines and even "the banking system" are all implicated in IWT. In 2017, the EIA exposed the *Shuidong Connection*, where switched bills of lading, freight forwarding operators, and accomplices (including military) were in place at every stage of

the poaching-smuggling chain. We learn that traffickers disguise illegal cargo by the most devious means, such as coating the bloody ends of tusks and horns with toothpaste or shampoo, "mask[ing] the stench of decay".

Despite the widespread publicity, consumers manage to purchase illegal ivory and horn in all sorts of ways, you may not have heard of. In the Philippines the cult of idolatry has turned some priests into illegal ivory vendors, Monsignor Garcia, a Filipino priest/merchant divulged to a researcher how to smuggle a Santo Niño [ivory icon] out of the country by "wrapping his statue in old stinky underwear with ketchup poured all over it to look shitty with blood". Rhino horn is smuggled in lobster heads and fish maw into Vietnam.

In Part III, *Commodities*, Martin scrutinises relevant international laws, which often contradict sovereign laws; the varied legislation with different statutes and acts is not only confusing, it emphasises just how complex it is to terminate the IWT in ivory and rhino horn. She believes potential solutions include harmonised legislation across range states as well as transit and consumer countries. CITES introduced a control system based on permits, registration, stockpiles, and monitoring and sets out an administrative system to enforce them. Yet, the Secretariat cannot prosecute poachers nor the organised criminal gangs. Martin is also critical that CITES does not have a transparent voting system, using secret balloting.

Martin goes on to amplify the point of the “well-known loopholes in the law”, and legal ambiguities such as newly killed elephant ivory being passed off as mammoth. Added to this are three exemptions muddying the water of ivory markets, allowing to legally sell ivory imported before 1989, as well as ivory deriving from one-off sales and pre-1947 artefacts.

Just one example of a loophole is Thailand, where laundering is highlighted. Ivory obtained from wild Thai elephants is considered illegal but ivory from domestic elephants is lawful. The tusks of domestic elephants are trimmed supplying the legal trade. Who can tell the difference, asks Martin? A TRAFFIC survey of 2013–14 revealed that the surging market exceeded demand, hence “*legal ivory coming from domestic elephants*” was insufficient, resulting in “*attempts to move large quantities of African elephant ivory to Thailand from Africa*”.

The section on Commodities focuses on the escalating consumption of rhino horn. Affluence is fuelling demand across south-east Asia: “*An ancient attribute of Vietnamese social and political intercourse is the giving of precious presents to curry favour and gain influence*”. This is known locally as The Ferrari Factor, where decadent young Vietnamese “*flaunt new money and success*” by shaving rhino horn into their beverages and meals.

Martin turns her attention to Poaching and Smuggling in Part IV, and the Markets in Parts VI and VII. The story would not be complete without a summary of China’s principal role, showing for instance how the Chinese obtained container loads of ivory from Nigeria where unregulated ivory markets are still operating. While Martin mentions the trade ban imposed on Nigeria by CITES for flouting the rules, she questions how we can tackle the “rampant” corruption, weak law enforcement, legal systems where evidence is discredited and where there is an absence of political will.

China is well-known as a rhino horn consumer nation. While rhino cannot be legally traded in China in the absence of wild rhinos in the country and the restrictions of international trade, researchers in 2014 found the second most common illicit item for sale was rhino horn. When in 2015, 65 horns (and 340 tusks) were seized in a raid at a Chinese businessman’s property in Mozambique, he offered

a bribe of USD 36,000 to drop the case.

The latest developments are included in Part VIII *Internet and technology*, and Part IX: *Enforcement*. The author probes into the advantages and disadvantages of IT, and, breakthroughs in forensics and DNA profiling to combat IWT. This is vital as the author says, once it is possible to work out which populations of elephants and rhinos are being targeted, the appropriate protected area authorities can direct intensive law enforcement to prevent this happening.

Part X: *Important developments* details deterrence activities, such as Save the Rhino International’s Chi Campaign in Vietnam to discourage consumerism of rhino horn. Years of high-level diplomacy between London, Beijing and the UN resulted in the London Declaration of 2014, an acclamation to raise the profile of the IWT, secure political support and promote sustainable livelihoods.

This leads into the ivory bans put in place over the last few decades, and their impacts. According to Martin the landmark decision to implement an outright ivory ban which came into effect in China and Hong Kong on 31 December 2017, has been more successful in mainland China than Hong Kong; and the “*response [by Hong Kong lawmakers] is disappointing*”. She is right, in Hong Kong, the world’s largest ivory market, the trade does not fully cease until 2021, and this delayed timeframe continues to endanger African elephants, who are still being killed. Martin endorses Dan Stiles’ question: “*What is Plan B for elephants should a sales ban on ivory be ineffective, or even make matters worse?*” as there is a very real likelihood of the IWT being driven further “underground” or to neighbouring nations.

Part XII: *Sustainable Use*. There is a long cultural relationship between people, elephant ivory and rhino horn going back millennia. The problem is that, as most conservationists if not the public agree, the trade became utterly unsustainable (An estimated 110,000 elephants have been slaughtered in just one decade). Martin returns again and again to her chosen solution which is that “no demand has to be the ultimate aim”. While Martin is clearly against legalising the market and avoids discussing a sustainable and legalised trade, this chapter does not seriously enough come to grips with this important debate.

Among the *Seeds of hope* offered in Part XIII, Martin believes “religious leadership has enormous potential for good” as religious leaders such as the Popes “wield a lot of influence”. (But do they have sufficient influence to make a serious change to immoral

persons, who still attend church for the sake of appearances, I wonder?). In 2013, Muslim fatwas were issued against illegal killing of wildlife as it is “against the will of God”. But what has come of these fatwas in Indonesia where poaching has contributed to the decline of the Sumatran rhino in the last few decades?

Other positive developments discussed in the concluding chapters, are building on existing international frameworks implementing effective legal parameters and deterrents, to global galvanisation of law enforcement networks and promoting socio-economic development with key roles for local communities. “*Local communities are integral to the solution*”, says Martin, mentioning just two success stories where communities are benefitting from devolved revenue, Sabie Game Park in Mozambique and the Northland Rangeland Trust conservancies in Kenya.

Refreshingly, Martin includes information on the toll being exacted on rangers, “In Africa 82% of rangers and in Asia 63% of rangers had faced a life-threatening situation in the line of duty”. Rangers are killed and suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is “deeply distressing” when rangers find poachers they have arrested back “on their turf” only weeks later. In South Africa SANParks run project Embrace, and hopefully this programme can be replicated in express support of rangers elsewhere.

Martin emboldens the public to take action, and her suggestions include joining online petitions, which “can deliver a powerful message”. 50,000 signatures were received for an elephant campaign in Myanmar. More importantly eBay, Google and Microsoft have pledged to develop and implement policies to help end wildlife trafficking.

In the final part XIV: *Towards a Resolution*, Martin’s discussion of shrinking elephant range and rhino habitats due to habitat loss and escalating human-elephant conflict, is superficial. However, Martin does not ignore underlying social issues, recognising that poverty is a key driver of poaching. She advocates a balanced approach to achieve livelihood security with a percentage of annual tourist revenue invested in the communities, to be discussed by governments benefitting from their foreign exchange.

There are surprising omissions. While Martin writes about the destruction of ivory and rhino

horn stockpiles, starting with the first burning which took place in Kenya in July 1989, she fails to mention the largest burning ever, again in Kenya in April 2016 when 105 tonnes of ivory (representing 8,000 elephants) were torched as well as 1.35 tonnes of rhino horn (343 rhinos). Neither does she make any attempt to analyse how the burning really suppresses the trade. While other countries have followed suit, including China (by crushing in 2014), not everyone agrees with destroying their ivory stockpiles and >700 tonnes remains in stockrooms in African range states. Martin mentions Botswana and Namibia who are opposed, but she argues that using their ivory stockpile in a proposed one-off sale may “fuel another poaching spree”, while those against the strategy contend that they would rather use the revenue to support conservation activities.

Martin is a university lecturer and her book sometimes reads like an undergraduate resource. In places her arguments are naïve, and the presentation often sensationalist. Her short two, three or four-word sentences soon start to grate. Chapter 38 is hurriedly put together with awkward mistakes in Ian Player’s obituary, confusing this conservation giant with Ian Parker, the well-published author. Such inaccuracies reduce the text’s veracity.

While the arrangement of chapters is seemingly well-ordered in the Table of Contents, once you get going the text is disorganised and lacks cohesiveness. Many sections could have been excised due to repetition. It is a pity that a good editor wasn’t engaged to condense the book by half and to create a more structured narrative. There is sufficient information in this 582-page book to be used as an e-resource for undergraduate students, but it is far from an authoritative analysis of the main issues of IWT.

My main criticism is that her bias against trade could be more convincingly argued if she had engaged properly with the pro-trade debate rather than skirting around the issue. Martin recognises the complexity, but it is going to take more than galvanising the public to resolve poaching and the demand for ivory and rhino horn, and no profound solutions in ending the IWT are really presented.

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