

REVIEW

Illegal rhino horn trade in Eastern Asia still threatens Kruger's rhinos

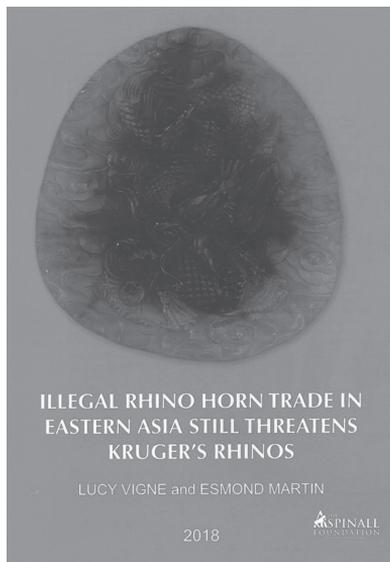
Lucy Vigne and (the late) Esmond Martin, 2018, Aspinall Foundation, Nairobi

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Esmond Bradley Martin has left behind an impressive legacy. Among many other achievements, he has investigated and documented the trade and usage of rhino horn and elephant ivory in all parts of the world. His aim was to provide a base line of facts and figures relating to pachyderm wild animal trade to achieve the best policies for conservation and law enforcement. Not only did he travel to some of the more remote destinations to gather information, crucially he spent much time afterwards to produce meticulously detailed and accurate reports of his findings, often made accessible to a wide audience in top peer-reviewed journals like *Oryx*, *Swara* and especially *Pachyderm*. These will remain, not only as a tribute to his perseverance and exploration, but also as the foundation for future surveys and statistical analysis. It may be added that about 250 of Martin's publications are listed on the Rhino Resource Center, of which he was one of the respected board members.

Lucy Vigne has been Martin's long-time associate and co-author. She had the unenviable task to finish the report under review, which was



the project in progress when Esmond Bradley Martin was murdered in his house in Nairobi. The current report has two interlinked parts, the first on the surge in rhino poaching in South Africa's Kruger National Park (KNP), the second surveying trading conditions of rhino horn in China, Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar.

The indigenous rhino populations of KNP were wiped out by settlers and hunters, the white rhino surviving possibly until the end of the 19th century; the black rhino until 1936. Both species were reintroduced from

the 1960's onwards, and numbers increased to over 10,000 white rhinos and 600 black rhinos by 2010. Poaching escalated with a peak in 2014 of 827 rhinos killed in KNP, and nationwide over 1,000 rhinos have been poached every year since 2013, mostly in KNP. Poachers used to enter the park across its remote eastern border with Mozambique, but this route became less popular with strengthened security. A paramilitary strategy has struggled to curtail poaching, partly due to poor coordination, inadequate use of intelligence, and marginalisation of communities bordering the park. The revenue of sale of live rhinos has decreased, and the cost to protect the wildlife is close to being

unsustainable. The authors discuss a number of reasons for the continued poaching crisis in KNP. Unfortunately, the traders are difficult to apprehend and it is a lucrative illegal market: the value of rhino horn poached from KNP from 2012 to 2016 ranges from USD 82,800,000 to 170,640,000.

The survey in the Asian countries in 2014-2017 showed that China remains the target market. Most rhino horn items seen for sale were tiny machine-made accessories sold per gram, without any artistic merit. Shops in Vietnam, Laos and Burma stock and sell these products to Chinese visitors or middlemen. Although law enforcement has improved, it has to be continuous to be effective. The authors conclude that a multi-pronged approach, which takes into account all causes and symptoms of rhino poaching and consumer demand is the way forward. Fact-based evidence is essential to guide policy decisions. It will remain a battle for years to come to secure the future of the rhinoceros.

The report ends with a useful bibliography. There are several new illustrations of rhinos by Sophie Walbeoffe, as well as good maps. The Aspinall Foundation is to be complimented for sponsoring the surveys.

From my review the impression might be that this is a boring report full of facts and better left on the shelf for reference. While it may not be a crime mystery or romantic novel read at leisure time, it must be said that this work is eminently well written and guides the reader with ease through the complex issues which shows the great expertise of the authors. Esmond Martin is in the wrong field to gain an Oscar or Nobel price, but surely his lifetime devotion to nature conservation will be enough to win him a host of conservation awards, albeit posthumously. This report is just part of an oeuvre that will not only stand the test of time, but will help future conservationists to create policies that will ultimately reduce or stop the horrors of illegal wildlife trade. This report is available without cost and reading it is highly recommended for everybody interested in the protection and conservation of the rhinoceros. It is a sad fact that this is the last report of Esmond Martin's that we will be able to read.

Vigne L, Martin EB. 2018. Illegal rhino horn trade in Eastern Asia still threatens Kruger's rhinos. Port Lympne, Aspinall Foundation, pp. 1-124.

Available online at: <https://www.aspinallfoundation.org/media/3936/rhinos-of-kruger-for-online-for-amos-1.pdf>