

Book Review

RUN RHINO RUN by Esmond and Chryssee Bradley Martin
Chatto and Windus, London 1982 Price 9.95

The slaughter of elephant populations for their ivory in a number of African countries in the last decade has been given great prominence by the international news media. Concurrently an even more serious but less understood destruction has been taking place — that of Africa's rhinos. In *Run Rhino Run*, Esmond and Chryssee Bradley Martin put down, for what I believe is the first time the full story behind the massive poaching of rhinos in Africa and Asia over the past decade.

The book opens with a chapter on rhinos in history and mythology, which sets the scene for much of which is to follow and explains the peculiar fascination which man has had for the rhino, and for rhino products, down the centuries. Next, the authors take a brief look at the ecology and behaviour of rhinos in the wild — a popular account, this, for the general reader, since the authors are the first to admit they do not have an extensive field knowledge of rhinos. There follows a chapter which documents the slaughter of rhinos in both Asia and Africa, from historical times up to the massive poaching of recent years.

The major thrust of the authors own research and conservation activities are dealt with in two chapters which deal with rhino products especially horn. Following their investigations in the Far East, the authors clear up the confusion which has long existed over the uses to which rhino horn are put in the

Orient. The authors excel in their in-depth explanations of the intriguing historical, mythological and economic conditions which have given rise to the demand for rhino horns for medicinal purposes by the Chinese in particular. The myth, perpetrated in the western world, that the horn is used as an aphrodisiac is clearly and firmly dispelled. In this account, and the chapter on the rhino trade which follows, the Bradley Martins' manage to get across to the reader some of the flavour and mystique of the oriental medicine shops, which makes the book a pleasure to read despite its very serious contents. Their detailed explanation of the economics and *raison d'être* of the trade itself provides a firm basis for future action by international conservation organisations, who until recently have been hamstrung by the absence of any real understanding of the motivation behind the trade.

In the last chapter, the authors look at the prospects for rhino conservation in the wild.. I would take issue with their statement at one point that aid provided to Uganda's parks in 1980 was a waste of time (in an article in this newsletter Iain Douglas-Hamilton explains just how important this aid was in reversing the disastrous situation there). There can be no general rule in such instances, and each situation must be looked at as it arises on its own merits. This criticism aside, the chapter is an able summary bearing in mind that in a popular account such as this it is impossible to really go into all the intricacies in any depth.

All in all, this book is a lucid and timely account which should do much to inform and arouse the interest of the general public at a time when the world's rhinos need all the support they can get.

Robert Malpas

The views expressed in this Newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of IUCN, SSC nor AERSG.

Most of the articles in this Newsletter have been contributed by Nairobi-based members. This was necessary for the first issue, but we very much hope that in the next and subsequent issues other members and consultants to A ERSG elsewhere will send in articles and news to give the Newsletter a more Pan-African viewpoint. The Newsletter will be produced twice a year. We await your contributions!

Robert Malpas
Editor