

## China's rhino horn stocks

On 29 May 1993 the Chinese State Council published a notice prohibiting with immediate effect the manufacture of medicines containing rhino horn and tiger bone and forbidding within 6 months all domestic trade in such medicines. China is thus the last major consuming country to bring in legislation to prohibit all internal trade in rhino horn. This Notice is the result of strong pressure put on China by the Standing Committee of CITES, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), foreign non-government organizations, and the United States Government, which has now (September 1993) certified China under the Pelly Amendment (this empowers the US to prohibit the import of products from any country that is undermining the effectiveness of international wildlife agreements).

China possesses by far the largest documented stockpile of rhino horn in the world. In 1989 when China carried out its first official stocktake there were at least 9875 kg of horn in import-export corporations and pharmaceutical factories. In September 1992, 8497 kg of rhino horn were officially registered by the government at the main import-export corporations and pharmaceutical factories. The biggest quantities were held by the China National Corporation of Traditional Herbal Medicine in Beijing (3205 kg), the Guangdong Medicine Company (1359 kg), the Yunnan Medicine Company (482 kg), the Beijing Medicine Corporation (392 kg) and the Tianjin Medicines and Health Products Import Export Corporation (380 kg). The import-export corporations claim to have purchased all their stocks legally prior to joining CITES. However, smugglers have brought in rhino horn more recently from Africa, Thailand, Taiwan and Hong Kong and these horns have been mixed in with legal supplies. These and several smaller companies used a total of 650 kg of rhino horn a year in traditional medicines.

Until late 1992, many of these patent medicines were officially exported to Hong Kong, with the rhino horn ingredient often



A factory worker in China making medicinal balls containing rhino horn (*Esmond Bradley Martin*).

blacked out on the label after 1989, when Hong Kong stopped allowing the import of medicines containing rhino horn. In October 1992, as UNEP's Special Envoy for Rhino Conservation, Esmond Bradley Martin visited Beijing. At the time of this visit, as a good will gesture to the UN, the Chinese Government banned all exports of medicines containing rhino horn. The medicines remained widely available in shops throughout China, however. Most resident Chinese cannot afford them, but Chinese visitors from abroad purchase them, including businessmen buying the medicines in bulk, to take back to their home countries.

China may need some international help to comply with the Notice. On a second mission as the UNEP Special Envoy for Rhino Conservation in early June 1993, E.B.M. met senior officials of the Ministry of Forestry and the Ministry of Public Health in Beijing. They complained about the difficulties in implementing the Notice. Officials would have to visit every import-export corporation, factory and traditional pharmacy in order to ascertain the quantity of both raw rhino horn and medicines containing rhino horn and to seal up the stocks for storage in government offices. However, neither adequate resources nor



A selection of antique rhino horn cups and religious statues in one of China's pharmaceutical factories (Esmond Bradley Martin).

manpower had been allocated to carry out this huge exercise in such a large country, parts of which are very remote.

Officials of the Ministry of Public Health said that the government and private individuals will incur losses of 2 billion yuan (\$US200 million at the free market exchange rate) with the implementation of the Notice. These considerable financial losses will be experienced by the factories, which no longer can manufacture medicines containing rhino horn, from money owed to factory employees made redundant, and from stocks that cannot be sold.

Some medicines that contained rhino horn now use water buffalo horn or herbs instead, but an alternative to rhino horn has not yet been found for other medicines. The Chinese are currently trying to produce a rhino horn substitute and officials of the Ministry of Public Health originally estimated that the cost would be about \$US4 million. This was reduced to \$US1,600,000 and presented to the UNEP Donors' Conference held in Nairobi at the end of June 1993 with the request that half be paid by China and the other half be raised from the international community.

International assistance may also be required to save antique rhino horn carvings, which were purchased by some medicine factory managers when they were unable to obtain sufficient quantities of raw horn. From 1960 to 1980, for example, the Beijing Tong Ren Tang factories paid \$US1330–1780 per kg for these carvings from private individuals in China. Perhaps these could be purchased from such factories in order to save them from neglect or possible theft. There are very few of

these cups and religious statues left on public view in China. Some of these treasures should be put into museums for the benefit of both foreign tourists and the Chinese people. Some carvings could also be auctioned by the Chinese government, as has recently happened for other Chinese works of art.

In conclusion, the Chinese Government in May 1993 made a major commitment to end all internal sales of rhino horn, but senior officials admit that there are going to be serious problems in implementing this Notice. What will eventually happen to the stockpile of raw rhino horn and the antique rhino horn works of art, the largest quantities of both in the world, is not known because the Chinese have not yet addressed this important issue.

*Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne  
PO Box 15510 Mbagathi, Nairobi, Kenya*

## Majete's elephants have gone

One of Malawi's discrete populations of elephants *Loxodonta africana* – a herd of 200–300 animals – has vanished from Majete Game Reserve in the Middle Shire Valley in the southern part of the country. For over 3 years no signs have been seen of the elephants and no reports of crop raiding have been received. A recent aerial survey spotted three carcasses but no live elephants.

For some years Majete has been under intense pressure from poachers and an expanding human population. However, the building of a new tarred road combined with the establishment of a large refugee camp in an area of previously uninhabited country north of the reserve, which was used by the elephants in the dry season, was probably instrumental in their disappearance.

The Majete elephants were probably the fourth largest herd in Malawi and represented 8–12 per cent of the national herd. The reserve was gazetted in 1955, largely through the efforts of the National Fauna Preservation Society (now the Wildlife Society of Malawi).

*Wildlife Society of Malawi  
PO Box 1429, Blantyre, Malawi*