



THE ANNAMITICUS QUARTERLY

Vol. I / Issue 1 / April 2013

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Editor's note

Welcome to the very first issue of the Annamiticus Quarterly!

The first quarter of 2013 was a productive one: On behalf of our flagship species (the rhino and pangolin!), I've campaigned from Berkeley to Bangkok! The 16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP16) was especially memorable because I had the honor of meeting many of the people that I had previously known only through email, Twitter, and Skype! And in between travels, Annamiticus led the celebration of the Second Annual World Pangolin Day! Yes, I know all of the previous sentences ended with exclamation points! (And this particular issue actually covers more than one quarter, because I've included our November 2012 field visit to Hanoi.)

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the history of Annamiticus, it all started as a side project in 2007, when I created the Saving Rhinos educational website (savingrhinos.org). By 2009, Saving Rhinos had become a full-time endeavor and I left my paycheck behind. I combined my passion with my previous experience in marketing and design to grow Saving Rhinos into one of the most comprehensive online resources about the illegal rhino horn trade, with more than 600 articles on the Rhino Horn is Not Medicine blog (rhinoconservation.org). In 2011, I published my first book, Murder, Myths & Medicine. That same year, I launched the Project Pangolin (pangolins.org) website, which contains dozens of curated news stories about pangolin seizures and arrests, along with research and information about pangolins and the pangolin trade. In 2012, I founded Annamiticus (annamiticus.com), an educational nonprofit organization which produces and publishes information about endangered species, illegal wildlife trade, and wildlife crime. I also launched Behind the Schemes (behindtheschemes.org), a podcast about the challenges of protecting our Planet's precious wildlife from commerce, corruption, and counterfeit cures.

Enjoy!
Rhishia



Hello Hanoi



field visit

In November 2012, we traveled to Hanoi, Vietnam, for an incredibly busy week of filming for THE PRICE documentary, capacity building, and wildlife trade monitoring with our partners [Education for Nature-Vietnam](#). My traveling companions were Melinda MacInnis (Annamiticus board member, Writer/Director/Producer of THE PRICE) and Matt Fife (Director/Music Supervisor of THE PRICE and [more](#)).



"Standing in the presence of these imprisoned intelligent beings was devastating."



Many of the bears had sores and lesions from rubbing against the bars of their tiny cells.

Dear beautiful bears ... I am so sorry for what people are doing to you.



bear prisons

We dove right in on our first day in Hanoi and visited "bear bile extraction facilities" with three members of the Education for Nature-Vietnam team: Quyen Vu (ENV founder), Tran Viet Hung, and Doug Hendrie. Melinda, Matt, Doug, and I posed as staff from an American zoo, with Quyen and Hung as our hosts and translators, to ask questions about "bear husbandry" (we were informed that bears don't need exercise!).

The conditions that these bears are forced to endure are horrific. They are confined in coffin-like cages for their entire lives. They can barely turn around or even stretch their legs. No exercise, no enrichment, nothing. Just bear bile extraction (illegal in Vietnam, but legal in China). We filmed at most of the locations, and stopped filming when asked (except for the hidden cameras).

Standing in the presence of these imprisoned intelligent beings was devastating. To say that their spirits were broken is an understatement. I took photos, but not quality ones; my hands were shaking and I could hardly see through tears welling in my eyes.

ENV is leading a powerful and innovative campaign against these bear prisons. Visit [ENV's Facebook page](#) to see how young Vietnamese people are taking action against the consumption of bear bile!



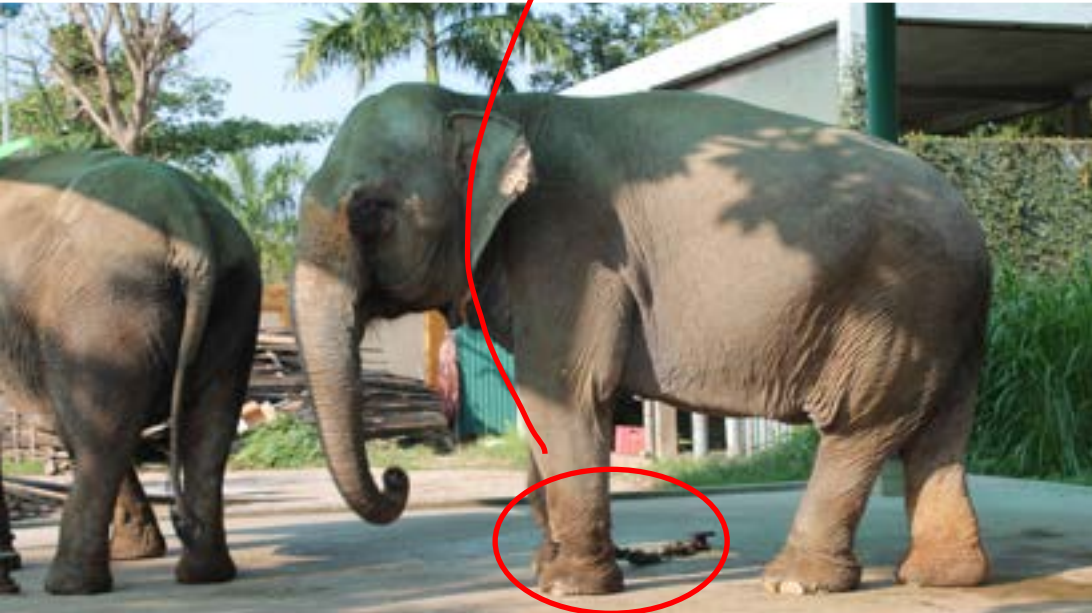


bao son paradise theme park

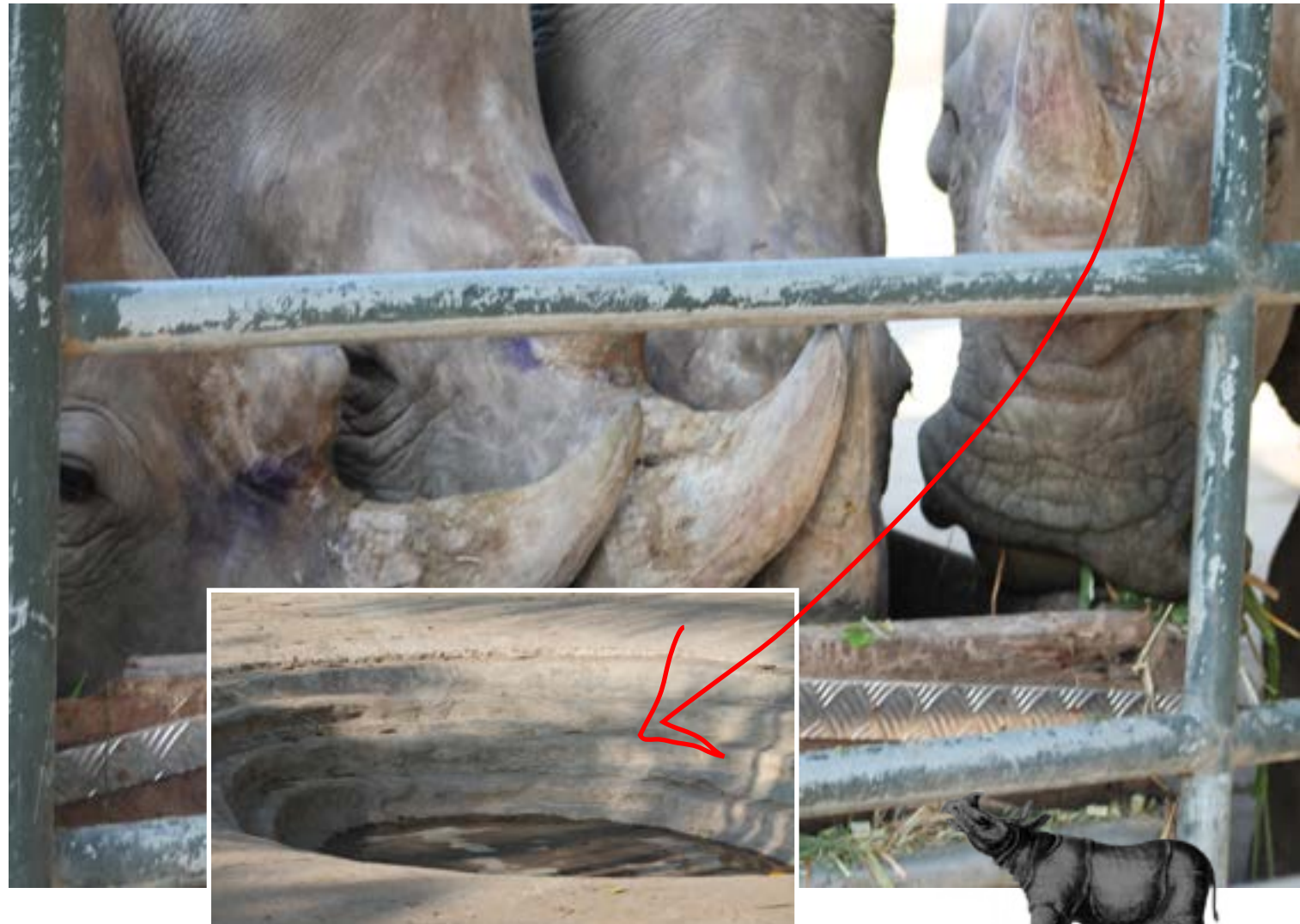
After the bear prisons, we headed for the notorious Bao Son Paradise Theme Park. This facility is of particular interest since it has imported rhinos and tigers (yes, tigers!) from South Africa.

A "paradise"? For whom?

The first disturbing sight at this "paradise theme park" was a pair of Asian elephants in chains, with sores on their shackled legs.



Around the corner from the chained elephants were four white rhinos in an enclosure. A keeper fed greens to them several times during our stay. I asked about the cuts and abrasions on the rhinos. We were told the rhinos had been fighting over their pool, which was empty. The rhinos had nowhere to wallow.





Two tigers paced endlessly in their enclosure.

In 2010, a game reserve in South Africa sold two tigers (perhaps these two) to Bao Son Paradise Theme Park, according to South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs.



The cheetahs looked especially miserable.

big cats

small enclosures

Who sold you into this life?



The male lion had rubbed sores on his face.



the VIP experience

One day, we accompanied “Q”, a member of ENV’s Wildlife Crime Unit, on a wildlife trade monitoring visit. We headed to a restaurant believed to be serving illegal wildlife meat to customers. The three of us (Melinda, Matt, and I) posed as the owners of cafe in Los Angeles, looking for new ideas for our “VIP customers”. The restaurant owner (we’ll call him Mr. X) eagerly welcomed us and gave us a tour.

Clearly visible from the front of the restaurant was an entire bear immersed in a tank of “bear wine”, which Mr. X proclaimed as “good for your health”.

On the other side of the wall was a room full of dirty cages and filthy aquariums. Feathers and bits of fur were here and there. The cages and aquariums were empty, except for one cage, which held several Chinese water dragons. “Very fresh”, Mr X said proudly.

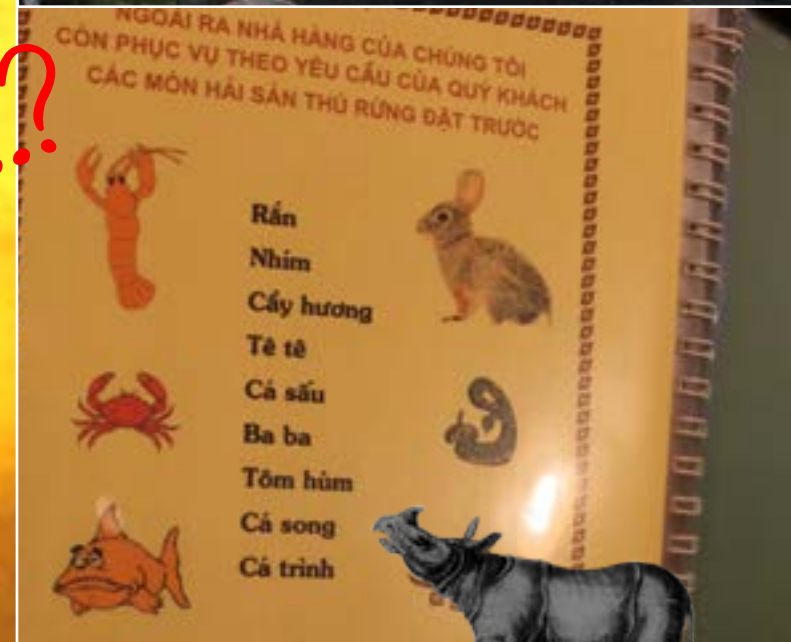
We followed our host upstairs. He beamed as he showed off the VIP room, featuring a special VIP menu which included pangolin and civet.

Directly across from the VIP room was Mr. X’s private quarters. Except for the taxidermied leopard cat, it looked like the typical grandparent’s apartment: Knickknacks and photos of grandchildren.

As we readied to leave, Mr. X asked if we’d like to taste the bear wine. He said it was US \$500 for a glass, but that he could water it down if we wanted something less expensive. We politely declined his offer by saying we would come back for dinner.

We did not return.

ENV is working to change attitudes and stop restaurants from promoting the consumption of wildlife.



Very fresh ...?

traditional medicine shops

Do you have the bowls for grinding rhino horn?



Is rhino horn readily available at traditional medicine shops in Hanoi? Well, not the real thing. Much of what is passed off as “rhino horn” to the average Vietnamese person is buffalo or cow horn. It’s fake. You need to be wealthy or well-connected (preferably both) to obtain actual rhino horn.

The first shop that we visited (accompanied by “T” from ENV) greeted us with a pungent clove-like smell. It was hard to miss the taxidermied pangolin hanging on the wall. “T” chatted up the shop owners in Vietnamese. They were reluctant to talk about rhino horn, but eventually revealed that they did not sell rhino horn and mentioned that “journalists” had come by earlier asking for rhino horn.

At the second shop, T spoke with the owners at length. They said there was no rhino horn in the shop, but claimed they could obtain some for us. We asked if they had the bowls for grinding rhino horn.

I bought one of the ceramic bowls with an image of a rhino on the side. The interior of the bowl feels like sandpaper. Users scrape a piece of rhino horn across the rough surface, and then mix the powdery filings with water; the liquid mixture is consumed. We thanked them and continued to the next location.

Although the third shop was within walking distance, it required crossing a main thoroughfare on foot, which in Hanoi, is not a task for the faint of heart. Single file like ducklings, we followed T through the deluge of motorbikes, scooters, cars, buses, bicycles and carts.

Another dead pangolin on display.

This shop’s owner spoke a little English. He told us that “rhino horn is the best” and there is “no substitute”. He quoted us a price per gram (I will not publish the quote here because publicizing such information is irresponsible). We learned he was not willing to sell a small amount of rhino horn.

We asked him for a closer look at a bear paw in a jar of liquid, which he cheerfully retrieved from a top shelf.

“Good for your health”, he assured us.



ENV has released a provocative new public service announcement which aims to increase negative social attitudes towards rhino horn users. [Watch the video here.](#)

capacity building

One of the highlights of the field visit to Hanoi was presenting a course I developed for the ENV Communications Team called “Using Digital and Social Media to Build an International Audience”. The customized course was based on my analysis of ENV’s website, social media presence, and search engine visibility. “Using Digital and Social Media to Build an International Audience” was six hours long, presented in two modules on two consecutive days.

Course topics included content organization and optimization; navigation and search engine visibility; social media footprint and organic promotion; time zones and evergreen posts.

ENV is already implementing these strategies to showcase their expertise and successes in new ways!



Class is in session!





public awareness event

I was thrilled to have the opportunity to participate in one of ENV's mobile wildlife trade exhibits!

The team of staff and volunteers mobilized at the Hanoi Botanical Garden. People of all ages stopped to read the information and talk to the team. I felt encouraged, especially watching parents with their young children talking to the ENV team.

And about that rhino horn grinding bowl: When I arrived home and unpacked, I discovered it had shattered in my bag at some point during my flight.



I feel hopeful about the changing of attitudes regarding wildlife consumption in Vietnam. ENV is indeed leading the way!



Locally Global

On January 16, 2013, I presented "Rhino Horn Trafficking: A Global Threat" to the Berkeley Rotary Club in Berkeley, California.

It was a lunchtime meeting and fortunately, everyone was finished eating before that necessary part of the presentation when I show a few gruesome photos. My talk introduced the five rhino species ("Yes, there's a rhino covered with hair!"), reviewed historical drivers of the trade (traditional Chinese medicine and Yemeni dagger handles), and discussed the current day crisis, i.e., "non-traditional" use and the involvement of organized crime and wildlife professionals. The dramatic conclusion was Operation Crash, which happened right here in the United States. At the Q & A session, people wanted to know: "How much do people pay for a rhino horn?" "Is this similar to the ivory trade?" "Can the horn be removed without killing the rhino?"

Special thanks to Chris Baldwin, Shoulder High Productions in San Francisco (shoulderhigh.com) for filming the presentation for THE PRICE documentary, and to Peter Campbell, Berkeley Rotary Club.



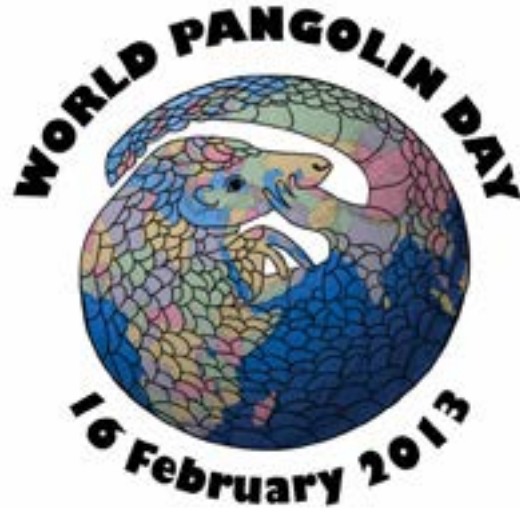
"While it was incredibly unsettling and upsetting to hear what you had to say and to see the photos, that made it all the more important to have you as our speaker."

Sallie Weissinger

"Rhishja, thank you so much for your marvelous presentation to the Rotary Club. It was very thought-provoking, and I think the members enjoyed hearing about your passion. It seems this is a problem that most Americans are unaware of. I laud you for your efforts to right this wrong. Berkeley Rotary is known for its excellent speakers, and your presentation was right up there at the top. Thanks again for agreeing to make your excellent presentation. I hope I have the chance to hear another in the future."

Peter Campbell

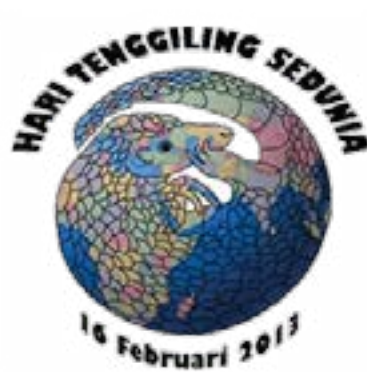
February 16, 2013 marked the Second Annual World Pangolin Day, which is celebrated on the third Saturday in February.



While the hub of World Pangolin Day activity was its Facebook page (facebook.com/WorldPangolinDay), I was also contacted by the Australian Broadcasting Company to do two live interviews the day before WPD, and provide a taped interview which was broadcast on WPD. On February 11, Mongabay.com published an excellent and timely article by Jeremy Hance, "[Pity the pangolin: little-known mammal most common victim of the wildlife trade](#)", which helped promote World Pangolin Day. It was quite a compliment be quoted in the Mongabay piece, along with Ambika Khatiwada (an EDGE fellow working with Nepal's National Trust for Nature Conservation), Dr. Chris Shepherd (TRAFFIC Southeast Asia), and Dan Challender (Co-Chair of the IUCN Pangolin Specialist Group).

The World Pangolin Day page on Facebook gained 599 new "Likes" between February 1 and March 1, 2013, with a whopping 191 of those "Likes" occurring on World Pangolin Day itself! These new "Likes" account for just over 57% of the total 1,041 "Likes" of the World Pangolin Day page as of March 28, 2013.

I created a new video "Meet the Pangolin" which was launched just in time for World Pangolin Day! Thank you to **Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre, Education for Nature-Vietnam, TRAFFIC Southeast Asia, Tikki Hywood Trust, Paddy the Pangolin, Carnivore & Pangolin Conservation Program, and Rare & Endangered Species Trust** for providing images for the "Meet the Pangolin" video!



NEW video!!



We're already planning for World Pangolin Day 2014 on February 15th!





Addicted to PANGOLIN!

I've downloaded Pangolin on my iPhone and I'm addicted! After navigating my pangolin through "Education" (the first ten levels), the \$0.99 purchase for "Exploration" (the additional 40 levels) was irresistible. Look out for those spikes!

[Download Pangolin now from the iTunes Store.](#)

adorable and addictive: 'Pangolin' iPhone Game

When the developers at Feedtank — a small interactive studio specializing in the creation of playful interactive experiences — were looking for a character to star in their new game, they made a surprising discovery: The pangolin.

Co-Founder of Feedtank, Jonah Warren, contacted me two days before World Pangolin Day and explained that he and his team were so moved by the plight of the pangolin, they decided to help raise awareness for pangolins through the new game. We're excited to announce that Feedtank will be including a link to Project Pangolin from the app's info page — a unique opportunity to introduce pangolins to a wider audience!

Here's more about Pangolin (the game):

Project Pangolin: What is "Pangolin"?

Jonah Warren: Pangolin is a physics-based arcade game for the iPhone that turns the classic platformer on its head. Instead of controlling the character, you control the platforms. Your objective on each level is to bounce a small pangolin to a target using a few well-placed trampolines, avoiding spikes and collecting coins and gems along the way.



PP: How did you discover the pangolin for your game?

JW: The idea of the game initially started with an interaction. The idea was to allow the user to bounce a ball around using trampolines, which could be created by tapping the screen with two fingers at the same time. After testing it and being excited by its potential, we started researching animals that roll into a ball ... by literally googling "animals that curl into a ball." After discovering the pangolin, we quickly fell in love with the strange, quirky creature and decided to base the entire game around it. We also decided to embrace its Asian roots, allowing the region's music, typography and decorative arts to influence the game's aesthetic.

PP: What inspired you to help raise awareness through Pangolin?

JW: After discovering the pangolin, it became hard not to want to learn more about this odd, fascinating creature. It seemed like the more we learned, the more interesting it got. I remember spending an entire Saturday watching pangolin videos on YouTube, entranced by shots of its unbelievably long tongue and its funny half-upright gait. We were also saddened to learn about how often it was poached for its meat and scales. This motivated us to reach out to organizations such as **Project Pangolin** and **Save Pangolins** to see how we could help and / or work together.

PP: Are there any other wildlife-themed projects in the works at your studio?

JW: We currently don't have anything specific planned, as we're trying to focus on Pangolin at the moment. However, we do have lots of game ideas that we'd like to make, so who knows.



At the CoP

The 16th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP16) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Bangkok, Thailand, 3 - 14 March 2013



After experiencing the spectacle of a CoP firsthand, I can say with certainty that overcoming the wildlife trade cartels who have exploited the Convention to line their pockets will take some strategic maneuvering! We were proud to add our voice to the coalition of like-minded NGOs in Bangkok, where we worked together tirelessly to protect endangered species from literally being traded into extinction.

13.....





Upper left, L - R: Dr. Esmond Martin (renowned rhino horn and ivory trade expert), Melinda MacInnis (Annamiticus board member and writer/director/producer of THE PRICE documentary, Rhishja Cota-Larson (founder of Annamiticus), Julian Rademeyer (author of *Killing for Profit: Exposing the Illegal Rhino Horn Trade*). Lower left: Filmmaker Phillip Hattingh and Rhishja. Upper right: Rhishja in action.

In the arena of international diplomacy, change does not happen quickly. It's easy to make accusations and criticize the glacial pace of the CITES process — especially when species are running out of time.

At CoP16, we did our very best to move issues forward by raising controversial concerns in the public forums, collaborating with colleagues, gathering and providing intelligence, making new connections, distributing our "[Troubling Timeline](#)" report — and documenting the CITES process for our film, THE PRICE.



Inside the Queen Sirikit National Convention Center, seating was pre-assigned for the Parties and NGOs — and we were amused at being in such close proximity to certain organizations. We were seated in front of Safari Club International (aptly described by Humane Society International as “a club for wealthy big-game hunters who compete in killing the most animals for the most awards”), behind Conservation Force (yet another well-funded hunting fraternity) — and next to a “tiger economist” lobbying in favor of China’s tiger farms and legalizing trade in tiger parts.

Observing “who’s with who” between sessions and during breaks was an interesting study in politics and lobbying! The pro-trade cartels — be it ivory, rhino horn, tiger parts or shark fins — worked on shoring up support among delegates from China, Japan, and some of the “swing vote” African nations. And it was disturbing to observe that a representative from the IUCN African Rhino Specialist Group was among them, lobbying for the legalization of rhino horn trade!

Of course, we were at the CoP with an agenda, too. We were there to lobby in favor of protecting endangered species and ecosystems from economic exploitation.

Five shark species were in the spotlight, with intense lobbying by Japan to keep them from being added to Appendix II. In the end, the Oceanic whitetip shark, three hammerhead shark species (smooth, scalloped and great) and the porbeagle shark are now all included on Appendix II. Japan tried desperately to secure the “secret ballot” votes of some of the African delegates to re-open the debate, by wining and dining them the night before the plenary session. However, Japan endured considerable embarrassment the next day, when their motion to re-open the shark debate was not only defeated by secret ballot, but other delegates publicly announced they had “secretly voted no”! In another win for marine species, the proposal to include manta rays on Appendix II was adopted by consensus.

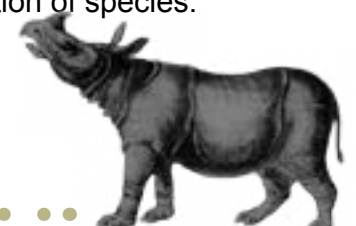


This huge inflatable manta ray was the centerpiece of the manta ray reception. The proposal to include manta rays on Appendix II was adopted by consensus.



Sea Shepherd’s Gary Stokes (pictured above) sums up the unsavory side of the CoP16 scene:

“The smell of corruption and underhand deals around the halls was foul, and it was everywhere. All in one hall you have shark fin traders, trophy hunters, ivory crafts and tuna fishery representatives and anyone else who makes their money from the death and destruction of species.”



Shark victory: the Oceanic whitetip shark, three hammerhead shark species (smooth, scalloped and great) and the porbeagle shark are now all included on Appendix II. Take THAT, Dr. Giam!

Conflict of interest **EXPOSED**

An investigative report spearheaded by Gary Stokes of Sea Shepherd Conservation Society revealed that Dr. Giam Choo Hoo used his position within CITES as the Alternate Representative for Asia to lobby for the interests of the Singapore and Hong Kong Shark Fin Traders, of which he is also a representative.



One morning while on a walk through the park behind our hotel, I discovered a Malayan snail-eating turtle (*Malayemys subtrijuga*) who had accidentally flipped on his (or her) back and was literally cooking to death in the hot tropical sun!

For the next 30 minutes, Melinda and I took turns carefully immersing the turtle in the park's pond. At last, the little turtle seemed to have regained some strength, so we placed him (or her) in a damp shady area, concealed by plants.



Fortunately, freshwater turtles and tortoises managed to gain much-needed ground at CoP16, thanks to proposals submitted by the U.S., China, Vietnam and Japan. A total of eight proposals to amend the CITES Appendices for nearly 50 freshwater turtle and tortoise species were considered. It was decided by consensus that 26 species of freshwater turtle should be included in CITES Appendix II, with zero export quotas for a further 16 Appendix II-listed freshwater turtle species, and four species were transferred from Appendix II to Appendix I.

Unfortunately, polar bears lost again. The Parties rejected the U.S. proposal to transfer the polar bear from Appendix II to Appendix I, with 38 in favor, 42 against, and 46 abstentions. It is disappointing indeed that this iconic species must continue to endure increasing commercial trade, along with shrinking habitat due to climate change. (No mention yet of whether or not polar bear paws are part of this trade — although a survey of illegal bear markets published in 2000 did find polar bear bile being marketed as “golden silk polar bear bile”!)

Regarding the elephant crisis, I doubt if there was anything more appalling on the CoP16 agenda than “Decision-making mechanisms and necessary conditions for a future trade in elephant ivory”, a document which advocates setting up an ivory selling system based on the Kimberley Process (I’m not kidding! You can download it [here](#)).

Prior to CoP16, WWF challenged Thailand’s Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to declare a total ban on ivory sales, but instead, she seemed to sidestep the challenge. In her opening statement, Prime Minister Shinawatra pledged that her country would “work towards amending the national legislation with the goal of putting an end to ivory trade and to be in line with international norms”. The Head of WWF’s CITES delegation, Carlos Drews, responded by saying that “Prime Minister Shinawatra now needs to provide a timeline for this ban and ensure that it takes place as a matter of urgency, because the slaughter of elephants continues.” Meanwhile, China and ivory were barely mentioned in the same sentence!

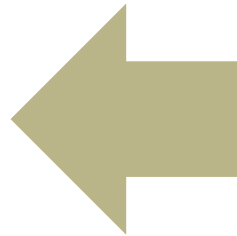
The bottom line: There was plenty of lip service paid to “the elephant crisis” beforehand, but when it came down to meaningful discussion by the Parties, the world’s largest land animal somehow managed to be swept under the rug.

And I’m disappointed that tigers received just a few moments in front of the Parties during the two-week meeting. I think China needs to be put on the spot regarding the effect that its captive breeding facilities are having on wild tiger populations, and to be publicly taken to task over attempting to pass these commercial operations off as conservation efforts. At least one positive step was taken: It was decided that the CITES Secretariat would “oversee a review of efforts to combat illegal trade and to end trade in parts and products of captive-bred tigers” with reporting on such efforts due in 2014.

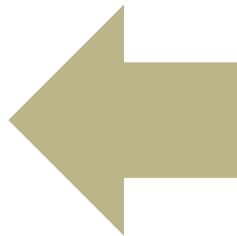




Avinash Baskar of the Wildlife Protection Society of India discussed how WPSI uses its wildlife crime database to analyze trends, identify hotspots, and disseminate statistics for public awareness and policy.



Mick Reilly of Swaziland expressed support for reducing demand for rhino horn in consumer countries: "Demand reduction strategies are vital and must be fast-tracked. We need the full cooperation of consumer and transit countries."



The trade in pangolins

CITES CoP16, 5th March 2013, Bangkok, Thailand

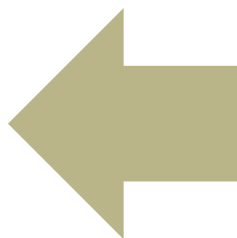


Dan Challender^{1, 2}

¹Co-Chair, IUCN-SSC Pangolin Specialist Group
²PhD Candidate, DICE, University of Kent



The plight of the pangolin received some well-deserved attention, thanks to a presentation about the illegal pangolin trade given by Mike Hoffman, Dr. Simon Stuart, Dr. Chris Shepherd, and Dan Challender.



Meanwhile, we would like to see all eight pangolin species included on Appendix I.



Wildlife activist and photographer Karl Amman displayed this contraption from Vietnam for grinding rhino horn. The horn is placed in the bowl (which has a sandpaper-ish interior) and then the gadget whirls it around, kind of like an old-timey record player.





L - R: Mick Reilly (Swaziland delegate), George Mbata (Swaziland delegate), Melinda MacInnis (THE PRICE / Annamiticus), Ted Reilly (UNEP Global 500 Laureate, Swaziland delegate).



Melinda and Rhishja



Dr. Bibhab Talukdar, Chair of the IUCN Asian Rhino Specialist Group



Dr. Tom Milliken, TRAFFIC & rhino horn and ivory trade expert



RHINOS RHINOS RHINOS

RHINOS turned out to be a contentious topic at the CoP16, thanks to South Africa's attempt to push for a legal rhino horn trade. Although a formal proposal was not on the agenda, it is a distinct possibility for CoP17 in 2016. During the first week of the CoP16, the South African delegation orchestrated a series of side events which were supposed to convince the audience that "legal trade is the only way forward" because "more of the same is not working".

(Of course "more of the same" — letting corrupt members of South Africa's private wildlife industry evade legal consequences — is not working. Dirty players who have a vested interest in profiting from rhino horn, including Dawie Groenewald, are back to business as usual! But the delegation didn't exactly see it that way.)





Dr. Mark Jones, Humane Society International

The South African delegation's first side event was called "Rhino Conservation".

There was a satisfyingly awkward moment for the panel when Dr. Mark Jones and Dr. Ron Orenstein of Humane Society International raised questions about South Africa's export of live rhinos to China for the commercial horn-harvesting project (the subject of our "[Troubling Timeline](#)" report).

"What constitutes 'appropriate and acceptable destinations' for South Africa's live rhino exports?"

An unconvincing response was elicited from South Africa CITES official Sonja Meintjes, who said that her office asks for written confirmation from the importing country's CITES Scientific Authority that the "destination is acceptable" as well as a statement from the importing country's CITES Management Authority that rhinos will "not be used for commercial purposes".

The second event, 'Rhino Safety and Conservation', spurred another lively Q and A session, thanks to Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) and ourselves.

EIA pointed out that the intention to continue to commercialize rhino products is stimulating demand for rhino horn.

"Given that South Africa was unable to control its own domestic hunting industry, how can we have any confidence that South Africa could control an international market?"

Our question to the "Rhino Safety and Conservation" panel:

"We know from history that demand reduction strategies do work. What kind of role do you think the private rhino owners might play within the international community's demand reduction strategies, for example, supporting education and awareness campaigns in consumer countries to discourage the use of rhino horn?"

Neither of our questions were answered in a direct manner, and while this was perhaps due to the event running overtime, the audience was encouraged to attend "Rhino Economics" — South Africa's third event.



South Africa’s “Rhino Economics” event was a lavish affair held at the Imperial Queen’s Park Hotel, featuring fine South African wines and an impressive array of catered delights. The “Rhino Economics” panel, led by Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa, attempted to make the case for a legalized rhino horn trade.

Perhaps the most animated speaker at this event was Pelham Jones, Chairman of the Private Rhino Owners Association. Jones said in his first speech that “NGOs and social media are aiding and abetting” the killing of rhinos in South Africa. He didn’t go on to explain that odd statement. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that NGOs and social media are succeeding in getting the word out to the international community about South Africa’s not-so-squeaky-clean private wildlife sector (canned lion hunts, lion bone trade, using trophy hunts to launder rhino horn, etc.). Earlier in the day, he expressed his displeasure directly to me regarding the questions we were asking at the rhino events — confirming that we were indeed asking the right questions!

Our question to the panel at the “Rhino Economics” event:

“Wildlife trade researchers, for example TRAFFIC, have revealed that the rhino crisis is currently being driven by non-traditional uses of rhino horn such as a cancer treatment and status symbol. Regarding the cancer treatment, this was also mentioned in the Secretariat’s report in 2010. Can you comment on the ethics of promoting a product which encourages very ill people to consume rhino horn instead of seeking medical treatment?”

Will Travers of Born Free addressed the panel.

“What I would suggest to you, honorable panel is that this is a huge risk that you are contemplating. It is likely to incentivize poaching, it is likely to unleash uncontrolled demand. It is likely to impose huge costs both on yourselves and on other countries with rhino populations — costs which can simply not be afforded.”

Carlos Drews, Head of the WWF delegation to CITES, commented that “a legal trade may endorse the notion of rhino horn consumption, and we cannot anticipate what that will do to demand” and that WWF “will not be in a position to support any steps in this direction”.

Dr. Mark Jones from Humane Society International brought up the issue of other rhino range states.

“There are other rhino range states out there and I ask you, when you’re going through this process of considering these issues to make sure that you consult with all the other rhino range states, including those in Asia, and take on board their considerations, because like it or not, the actions that South Africa takes is likely to affect those range states.”



Edna Molewa, South Africa Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs

In an emotional plea from the stage, Pelham Jones took the microphone again, comparing legalizing the rhino horn trade to the Wright brothers. He argued that South Africa should be given “the opportunity to take a bold, pioneering step, very much like the Wright brothers when they discussed flight many, many years ago. There was an audience similar to what we have with us tonight, who debated. They said they will crash, they will burn, they will die. And today we have an aviation industry that has revolutionized mankind.”

After the question and comment session, Minister Molewa addressed the audience. Regarding our question about the ethics of encouraging the use of rhino horn as a cancer treatment, she said “We don’t believe in that, but unfortunately there are people who believe in that” and that South Africa cannot force them to believe otherwise. She indicated that as long as “somebody” believes rhino horn cures cancer, then the demand should be met. In other words, ethics don’t matter, as long as the rhino horn suppliers can fatten their wallets!





Allan Thornton of the Environmental Investigation Agency challenged South Africa's notion of legalizing rhino horn trade.

Following the “Rhino Economics” event, Minister Molewa and her team held a press conference, where she initially stated there are no plans from South Africa to propose a legal trade in rhino horns.

For a brief moment, I saw a ray of hope as the Minister emphasized education, international collaboration and demand reduction as a plan for the way forward. But my hope was immediately extinguished when the Minister went on to say she wants to “continue the discussion” on legal trade in rhino horns.

South Africa's press conference was open to NGOs, although it is worth noting that the panel on several occasions attempted to avoid answering NGO questions! Finally, Allan Thornton from Environmental Investigation Agency was allowed to speak and he pointed out that indeed continued discussion of legal trade stimulates the demand for rhino horn and runs counter to demand reduction efforts.

“The genesis of the demand in Vietnam seems to us to have started in South Africa, with efforts to stimulate that demand. The opportunities for the syndicates arose, it seems to us, from the breakdown of controls in the trophy hunting industry, where the industry of sport hunters, as they call themselves, did not self-regulate. And government oversight was insufficient to prevent the widespread massive abuses that occurred.”

Thornton further pointed out that, “Having this discussion, which you say is not about legalizing rhino horn trade, sounds a little bit like Iran saying ‘we’re not building a nuclear bomb’ because it is evident to me that this will clearly stimulate more demand.”

Minister Molewa responded by saying, “We believe that this discussion is necessary. What it does, or what it could do, about unintended consequences is something that we have to deal with.”

Unsurprisingly, the Minister confirmed in a *Mail & Guardian* interview with [Julian Rademeyer](#), published on March 21st, 2013, that indeed she believes legalizing rhino horn trade “is the right direction”.

We look forward to joining our colleagues again in 2016 at CITES CoP17, in South Africa.

Our position regarding “discussions” in favor of legal rhino horn trade:

Speculation on legal trade in rhino horn is in direct conflict with demand reduction and undermines the efforts of the international community to implement demand reduction strategies. For this reason, Annamiticus does not support nor facilitate “discussions” in favor of legal rhino horn trade.



THE PRICE UPDATE

by Melinda MacInnis
Writer/Director/Producer

As the filming for our documentary THE PRICE draws to a close, it has been invaluable to be able to document some of the vanguard global efforts taking place to protect the last of our world's wildlife. Filming in far flung locations in Africa and Southeast Asia, as well as Western cities such as Washington D.C., we've found much to be inspired by. There is no shortage of brave and tireless individuals and NGOs working to educate the public, raise funds to protect habitats, and stir local and international governments to action.

And yet, the more we have uncovered and the further we have traveled in the investigative process, the more dire the statistics and scientific truths become. The earth's wild species are losing their fight for survival against human consumption.

It has been our great pleasure this last year to document the enterprising work of groups like Education for Nature Vietnam, Vietnam's first ever domestically derived environmental group. Vietnam is a world hotspot for wildlife trafficking and consumption which makes the work of ENV's small army of staff and young volunteers all the more vital. Working across all fronts, ENV works in schools throughout the country, runs an extensive wildlife crime unit monitoring the exotic restaurant, medicine and pet trade, and works closely with the Vietnamese government to help support its enforcement of wildlife laws. Despite the horror of filming at bear bile extraction facilities - which ENV is fighting to shut down countrywide - we left Hanoi with a sense of hope. There are thousands of young people in Vietnam who were outraged by the recent extinction of the Javan rhino in their country and who are fighting for the future of wildlife.

In the last year, we've also conducted interviews with representatives from TRAFFIC, IUCN, Panthera, the African Wildlife Foundation, the Humane Society of the United States, Humane Society International, WWF, Species Survival Network, and more. We've documented the groundbreaking work of groups like San Diego Zoo Global and the International Rhino Foundation, who create networks of international cooperation between zoos, governments, and NGOs to help increase the populations of imperiled species like the Sumatran and Greater One-Horned rhinos. Fighting to protect the world's rhinos and procure and protect their much needed habitat is an uphill battle, but it is also creating pathways for international cooperation that can serve as models for an untold number of other endangered species.

In March of 2013, the meeting of the 16th Conference of the Parties to CITES was held in Bangkok, Thailand, and we were there to document the decisions being made concerning the trade in the last of the world's elephants, rhinos, polar bears, tigers, sharks, turtles, and dozens of other imperiled plant and animal species.



Unfortunately, much of the public is still unaware of the existence of CITES, its role in determining the fate of many of our most beloved and important fellow creatures, and the legal international markets it regulates for trade in substances like ivory, shark fin, and manta ray gills.

While at CITES CoP 16, we were able to document the role that scientific data does and often doesn't play in determining international trading policy, and to explore the powerful influence of world NGOs in building political consensus and will. We were also able to continue documenting the work of two of our film's protagonists, Ted and Mick Reilly, as they represented Swaziland and looked for common ground with the Vietnamese delegates in moving forward with rhino horn demand reduction strategies and the upholding of international smuggling laws in Vietnam.

And finally, it was with great satisfaction that we were able to film Annamiticus founder, Rhishja Cota-Larson, as she stood her ground under the direct gaze of the powers that be and relentlessly pointed out legal loophole abuses and discrepancies in international rhino policy at meeting after meeting.

THE PRICE will be wrapping production this summer.



Closing thoughts

Thank you for joining Annamiticus on the maiden voyage of our newsletter, The Annamiticus Quarterly! We hope you found it to be informative, educational, and enjoyable. Our next issue will feature the International Rhino Keepers Association Workshop (held from May 5th — 9th and hosted by the San Diego Zoo Safari Park) and much more!

We'd also like to give a HUGE RHINO-SIZED THANK YOU to our AWESOME supporters, who make our work possible. Your donations help us produce high-impact educational content, build the digital communications capacity of our partners in the field, and promote a greater understanding of the threats to endangered species with field visits to regions where threats to endangered species are unusually high and under-reported.

Want to learn more about Annamiticus? Visit our website at annamiticus.com, connect with us on our Facebook page (facebook.com/Annamiticus), and follow us on Twitter ([@annamiticus](https://twitter.com/annamiticus)).

Until next time ...

PEACE LOVE ANNAMITICUS!

