

Facts about Rhino Horn

- Four rhino species and one subspecies are protected as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. This law makes it illegal to import or export rhino and rhino parts and products; it also prohibits interstate commerce. Rhinos are also protected globally under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.
- These animals face extinction in part because of the world's longstanding lust for their horn, which has been valued for centuries as a carving material and medicinal.
- Rhino horn is made up primarily of keratin – a protein found in hair, fingernails, and animal hooves. When carved and polished, horn takes on a translucence and luster that increase as the object ages.
- In ancient Greece, rhino horn was believed to have the ability to purify water.
- Persians in the 5th century B.C. thought that rhino horn vessels could be used to detect poisoned liquids, which would bubble when poured into such cups.
- Four world religions (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity) at times shared this belief, as did the crowned heads of Europe up through the 18th and 19th centuries. And, in fact, chemists have concluded that there may be some truth in the theory – if the poisons happen to be alkaloids, which might react with the keratin in the rhino horn.
- Artisans in China used rhino horn for ornamentation as long ago as the 7th century. For hundreds of years, it was customary for Chinese nobles to mark the emperor's birthday with the gift of a carved rhino horn "libation cup."
- Museums and private collectors worldwide prize these antiques for both their beauty and monetary value.
- In Yemen, rhino horn was long used for making the handles of special curved daggers that are presented to adolescent boys as a sign of manhood and devotion to Islam.
- The ornamental application of rhino horn was a "high society" decorative "fad" in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through the 1920s, items made from horn ranged from walking sticks and door handles to pistol grips and limousine interiors.
- The medicinal use of rhino horn also dates back centuries.
- Medical practitioners in such Asian countries as Malaysia, Korea, Vietnam, India and China used it as a treatment for many different symptoms and illnesses.
- In traditional Chinese medicine, ground rhino horn was prescribed for lowering fever and ameliorating such disorders as rheumatism and gout.
- Other uses in traditional medicine included treating snakebite, boils, food poisoning, and possession by spirits as well as curing headaches, hallucinations, high blood pressure, and typhoid.
- Scientists have little evidence to support belief in the medical efficacy of rhino horn, and many practitioners of traditional medicine have stopped using it in light of the species' plight. Yet such belief persists and is fueled by "urban legends" old or new about its powers as an aphrodisiac or cure for cancer.
- Medicinal use continues to create demand for rhino horn – a demand that poses a threat to the continued survival of rhino species in the wild.