

China steps up protection campaign ahead of World Rhino Day

China has been making tremendous efforts in cracking down on international rhinoceros poaching and rhino horn smuggling, ahead of World Rhino Day Friday.

“Ivory and Rhino horn products dating from any historical period should be banned from public trade and auctions,” said Ma Weidu, a renowned antique collector in China, who endorsed WildAid’s latest promotional campaign on rhino protection.

“China’s top-down efforts to crack down on rhino horn poaching and smuggling are admirable and effective in dimming the illegal trade,” said Steve Blake, chief representative of WildAid, an international wildlife conservation agency, in Beijing.

Rhinos around the world are endangered. Rhino populations have plummeted 95 percent in the last 40 years. In addition to demand for rhino horn for use in medicine, there is also significant demand for collectibles carved from rhino horns.

In celebration of the seventh World Rhino Day, WildAid, National Geographic’s Traveler magazine and the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) launched a promotional video featuring Ma Weidu.

“Collectibles rooted in killing are valueless,” Ma says in the video.

Since 2012, China has placed the building of a more ecologically focused society among its development priorities, with protection of fauna and flora a crucial element, according to Blake.

From 2013 to 2016, China organized and led worldwide cooperation against rhinoceros horn smuggling, alongside international law enforcement agency, wildlife charities and various authorities worldwide.

“With more stringent legislation and law enforcement, the world’s black market prices for rhinoceros horn are about one-third of what they once were,” Peter Knights, founder and CEO of WildAid, told Xinhua last month.

All sales in rhino horn have been illegal in China since 1993, and rhino horn has been removed from the Traditional Chinese Medicine handbook. Since 2011 all rhino horn items have been banned from auction house sales as well.

“China, from its authorities to the public, has been playing an important part in eradicating the brutal yet complex rhinoceros horn trade,” Blake said.

Ma also called on major international auction houses to put an end to all forms of rhino horn sales, including antiques.

“Despite the traditional appreciation of such crafts, rhino horn pieces are rarely sold at extremely high prices in China,” Ma said.

Ma pointed out that a number of international auction houses had scandalous sales records of rhino horn, which sent out the wrong message.

“If we must choose between protecting wildlife or cultural collectibles, wildlife is far more important,” he told Xinhua.

AWF Trustee Gordon Cheng welcomed the campaign and called for more global efforts to stop the trade in rhino horn.

“Today marks a new milestone for our Rhino Protection Initiative... We hope our program can help to convey the right messages for many existing collectors and users, and most importantly for the younger generation in Asia and around the world,” Cheng said.

On Friday, National Geographic’s Traveler magazine in Beijing launched its “Travel for Earth” program, focusing on ecotourism and experiences to see the surviving rhinos.

“Rhino-based tourism is hugely important for protecting rhinos,” said Yu Hui of Traveler magazine. “As one of the flagship wildlife species in Africa, tourism to view them generates revenue for both local communities and conservation efforts.”

Ma Weidu’s new rhino campaign will appear on television, online, at airports and outdoor media across China in October 2017.