



Poachers steal from us all when they kill wildlife

BRITISH JOURNALIST Ben Davies reports on the shocking exploitation of Asia's endangered wildlife in "Black Market", a fascinating tale of organised crime and the brave individuals battling to save our precious heritage.

Davies teamed up with producer Adam Oswell and photographer Patrick Brown for the work, which was partially funded by such conservation agencies as WildAid, Conservation International and Care for the World.

"I wasn't a conservationist," says Davies, "until I saw the cruelty and the scale of the torture."

A freelancer known for his investigative stories, the 45-year-old Brit was approached four years ago to do the book.

Lots of painstaking research work followed, involving 25 trips to 11 countries, often going into the forest with poachers and illegal traders and posing as a dealer or buyer.

"It was only a question of telling them what I wanted and they'd get it."

Tracking down the illegal traders in Nepal, India and Cambodia was more dangerous than Davies had anticipated.

"Until then, I had no idea of the staggering scale of the wildlife trade. In northern India, for example, rhinos were electrocuted, their horns gouged out, and then taken to Hong Kong for the last leg to China where it was sold as an aphrodisiac."

"The Indian contact received US\$300 (Bt12,300), which is nothing compared to the going price of \$50,000 in the Chinese market."

It was only a matter of time before organised crime moved in for a share of the illegal business, which is now worth more than Bt6 billion annually.



AUTHOR BEN DAVIES, left, with Adam Oswell, co-producers of the new book of the illegal wildlife trade, 'Black Market'.

"The returns are about the same as the cocaine or heroin trade and there's less chance of being caught," says Davies, who sought the help of Britain's Scotland Yard as well as law-enforcement authorities in the US.

"Although most people were very supportive, there were also big political issues to be worked out."

He is particularly critical of Burma and China where up to 80 per cent of wildlife traffic ends up, and the lack of political will in Thailand, which he describes as a transit centre for the wildlife trade.

"They did not want to be perceived as confrontational since they have to do business with the government in question. This is not a valid argument," said Davies.

A few NGOs were also less than supportive, apparently worried at how the Chinese would respond to the book, and the knock-on effects on their work.

Davies has become a passionate conservationist.

"I am now crusading for wildlife. I'd like to aim my book at members of the public, who, like me, had no idea about the problem. It all comes down to education."

Plans are underway to translate the book into Chinese so that the world's largest destroyers of Asia's wildlife can rectify their mistake before it's too late.

"They should be told that there is an alternative."

Davies dedicates his book to the "brave men and women who risk their lives to conserve some of the world's most endangered animals".

Part of the proceeds from sales are being used to develop further awareness of this critical issue facing Asia's wildlife.

In the book's foreword, famed conservationist Jane Goodall writes: "Without forests or wildlife, the world will be subject to untold natural disasters. Time is running out."