

# PRESERVING THE PACHYDERM



ENVIRONMENT

**Is strict preservation through banning the ivory trade or conservation through controlled culls the best way to save the African elephant? The two schools have locked tusks in a battle over the new CITES ban, which pits the southern African states against the rest of the world.**



Betty Press

By NICK CATER

**T**he images of a decade of elephant destruction—rotting gray hulks with skulls hacked apart—have shifted from the bleached African bush to the world's TV screens, but the ivory trade controls introduced early in 1989 following an international public outcry seem certain to maintain the bitter

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controversy—dividing both African nations and wildlife conservationists—over the fate of the world's largest land mammal.

From many millions at the turn of the century, elephant numbers in Africa dropped to 1.2 million in 1979—and have crashed to just 600,000 today. Although both the leather and meat are of value, it is the ivory that has fueled the destruc-

tion by gangs of poachers armed with automatic weapons in East, Central, and southern Africa, particularly in Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, and Zaire.

At a wholesale price of up to \$200 a kilo until recent bans started to bite, ivory has been a profitable commodity for both legitimate and illegitimate traders to export from often impoverished and debt-ridden

African nations. It is then sold on international markets, where it is carved into jewelry, art objects, piano keys, and—its largest single use—the personal signature seals used by the Japanese.

In the past few decades, the customers for ivory—some of it legally taken and sold, but much of it poached and smuggled out of the continent—have grown steadily. As well as growing markets in America and Europe, rising post-war incomes in Japan and other successful economies in the Far East have allowed an apparently large latent demand to be fulfilled by hundreds of tons of ivory—the tusks of hundreds of thousands of elephants—every year. As the demand rose, the hunters became more indiscriminate, and the average tusk weight fell as smaller and smaller elephants were slaughtered.

In a global market for wildlife and its products worth perhaps \$5 billion a year, the ivory trade has been turning over hundreds of millions of dollars annually. While the individual Africans killing elephants have made very little from this theft of their country's resources—as African governments obviously perceive it—personal fortunes have been amassed by a small number of trading families with Chinese origins.

Insecurity in many African nations has exacerbated the threat to the elephant, and in countries like Chad and Uganda, the fighting has cloaked very heavy losses. In Angola and Mozambique, the Unita and Renamo rebel movements are believed to have killed many thousands of elephants and smuggled out the ivory via South Africa or Portugal to pay for arms and other supplies. In Sudan, however, which in the early 1970s was a major "funnel" for the export of poached ivory from all over the region, the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army claims to have re-established wildlife patrols to protect game parks now under SPLA control.

The crash in elephant numbers inspired a flurry of national bans in 1988 on ivory imports by the U.S.,

the EEC, and other states. These controls were given global weight in October 1989 at the meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, of the 103 nations which are "parties" to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Through enforcement by national customs agencies, CITES controls trade in hundreds of animal and plant species, from orchids to orangutans, and their products, such as crocodile skins and leopard furs.

The rules introduced by CITES, which come into effect from January 18, 1990, ban all trade in ivory by any of the Convention's parties until at least the next meeting in 1992. The move follows four years of attempting to run a quota system overseen by the CITES secretariat and its specialist Ivory Monitoring Unit, which a wide range of elephant experts agree has failed to prevent the widespread killing.

However, the decision to shift *Loxodonta africana* from a listing on the CITES Appendix II, which regulates but does not ban trade, to its Appendix I, where trade is not permitted, is not the final situation, as under the Convention there exists a mechanism allowing any nation to take a "reservation," which permits it to continue trading in a species otherwise controlled or banned, like ivory.

The ban came only after days of increasing acrimonious wrangling, particularly between African countries, and several states have fulfilled threats to take reservations allowing them to export or import elephant tusks. The arguments included criticisms of the conservation records of countries like Zimbabwe and Botswana, which claim that the level of protection of elephants by armed wildlife rangers operating shoot-to-kill policies against poachers has meant rising populations. Sports hunting of wildlife and the sale of ivory from elephant culls have been valuable additions to their foreign exchange earnings.

While clearly understanding the direct impact on tourism of elephant

poaching—Kenya's safari-bound Western tourists are worth at least \$350 million a year—such states objected to being penalized, as they saw it, by the failure of countries like Kenya and Tanzania to prevent poaching. The result was a stand-off, with most of Africa and the rest of the Convention parties—including the U.S., UK, and other European nations—backing the ban.

It is expected that several nations, angered by the CITES decision, will enter reservations and set up a southern Africa ivory cartel and world auction center for tusks, possibly in Gaborone. Zimbabwe was the first to submit its reservation, while several others—such as Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and South Africa—were likely to follow suit.

The southern African states all argue that together they have the capacity to manage the trade efficiently and protect their herds. With the eyes of the world upon them, they are expected to make a strong effort to demonstrate how effective their controls can be. Zimbabwe has also led the way in showing how important it is for local communities to benefit directly in both employment and cash from hunting parties and the organized government culls if those living around game parks—whose farmers suffer the depredations of hungry elephants—are not to assist poachers or kill wildlife themselves.

A tough opponent of the ivory ban was Zimbabwe's minister for natural resources, Victoria Chitepo, who said the plan was "completely unacceptable," adding that before the idea was proposed "there was no consultation with the people and governments of southern Africa. For us in Zimbabwe, elephants like other wildlife are a national resource which is renewable, and we conserve them on a sustainable basis."

To those fearing that any gaps in the total ban could allow illegally poached and smuggled ivory to slip into the world market, there was a more immediate concern. They feared that some African nations

with previously poor records of legal controls on trade, such as Burundi, would also enter reservations, potentially creating ivory "funnels" for poached stocks to escape into the market, especially if processing nations, like China, and consuming states, like Singapore, joined the CITES rebellion. As *Africa Report* went to press, that situation seemed unlikely.

But comforting wildlife campaigners was the CITES conference decision to hold its next meeting in 1992 in Japan, the world's largest single ivory customer. Its wish to host CITES as part of an effort to overhaul its notoriously poor record on wildlife trade and most other environmental issues meant that Japan quickly indicated that it would not take a reservation. A Japanese government statement claimed that

its commercial ivory companies have sufficient stocks to last until at least 1992, when the ivory ban may be relaxed.

Wildlife groups, which have been badly divided between the protectionists, who object to any elephant killing, even in culls, and the conservationists, who often have strong sympathy for the case put by the southern African states, are now pressing for immediate aid to help African states improve their management and protection of the elephant. Potential donor nations and wildlife groups are being invited to a major conference in France in March to work on a strategy for the continent.

With the well-known paleontologist Dr. Richard Leakey as its dynamic new director of the wildlife department, Kenya is already looking for \$50 million in soft loans to

finance a massive program of game park protection, including fencing and better patrols against poachers. Some wildlife specialists have estimated that full conservation and protection of a game reserve can cost at least \$100 per square kilometer a year. It is anticipated that Kenya may also host a conference on elephant conservation, expected in April 1990, to outline the needs of African nations.

Improvements in intelligence about poachers and equipment for game wardens are already having a strong impact on the war against those preying on the elephant, said Dr. Leakey, but an ivory ban was an essential part of the solution. "The elephants of Africa are effectively protected as an endangered species," he insisted. "The key to solving the poaching problem in

## Zimbabwe's Campfire Program

Southern Africa is home to an estimated 300,000 of the world's 622,000 remaining elephants and Zimbabwe, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia defiantly state that they intend to break the CITES ban. The five countries said they must regularly cull their growing elephant populations to keep them at an environmentally sound level. The five said they will form an ivory-selling cartel to auction legally culled ivory in regular sales in Botswana.

The southern African countries criticize well-funded Western conservation groups for backing the ivory ban without considering the consequences in the areas where the elephants flourish.

Zimbabwe led this rebel group, arguing that controlled ivory sales are a better way to maintain viable elephant populations than an outright ban, which they say will fuel illegal ivory sales. Zimbabwean officials point to the total ban on rhinoceros horn, which has not slowed down the voracious poaching of the nearly extinct rhino.

The Zimbabweans say that environmentalists should not listen to Kenya, whose elephant population, according to the Ivory Trade Review Group, has declined from 65,000 in 1981 to 18,000 today, or Tanzania, whose elephants have gone down from 204,000 to 75,000. Instead, say the Zimbabweans, why not follow the model of countries where elephant numbers are increasing, like Zimbabwe or Botswana?

Victoria Chitepo, Zimbabwe's minister of natural resources and tourism, wore ivory jewelry to the CITES meeting to signal her country's strongly held opposition to the ban on ivory sales.

"Why shouldn't I wear ivory?" asked the feisty Chitepo in a recent interview. "We in Zimbabwe have

properly managed our elephant population so that it is growing. The sales of ivory benefit the rural people who live alongside the elephant. To ban ivory sales would take away the economic value that a healthy elephant population has for those people. Without that value, the people will just kill the elephant as a nuisance."

She said Zimbabwe was tired of the "patronizing approach" of Western conservation groups which sought the ban without consulting the southern African countries.

Zimbabwe has successfully fostered a thriving elephant population which has grown from an estimated 33,000 in 1965 to 52,000 today, according to annual surveys using internationally accepted methods. During that period, 44,000 elephants were killed to control the population, yet the country maintains that it still has nearly 19,000 more elephants than the environment can carry.

"Our elephant population is going up and up," said Willie Nduku, director of Zimbabwe's Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management. "If we had not culled them, we would have a population of 134,000, which the land could not sustain. The elephants would have destroyed their food source, created a semi-desert and the elephants would have starved by the thousands." Wildlife experts said such a scenario occurred in Kenya's Tsavo Park, where the elephant population became unsustainably large and it devoured and destroyed not only its own food source, but also the food of other wildlife. Eventually, hundreds of Tsavo's elephants starved to death, according to specialists.

Nduku said Zimbabwe strives to "protect the ani-

eastern Africa is to end the ivory trade."

Inevitably, the run-up to the 1992 CITES meeting will see potentially explosive arguments as African states, whether or not they took reservations, attempt to persuade the expert panel set up by CITES that they do fulfill the criteria laid down by the conference—rising elephant populations, effective wildlife management, tight ivory trade controls—for their animals to be returned from Appendix I to Appendix II to allow regulated trade with quotas.

Dr. Simon Lyster of the World Wide Fund for Nature said: "The reservations situation obviously holds some risks, but I hope that at least we have created a breathing space for the elephant. Now those who care about the elephant must

put their money where their mouths are and really help African countries in the fight for better conservation."

Also backing the CITES ban was Dr. David Western, director of Wildlife Conservation International, the field science division of the New York Zoological Society, who had also been the chairman of the Ivory Trade Review Group set up by CITES to examine the state of the elephant.

He said that the CITES decision "puts the interests of the African elephant first, while providing incentives for every country to improve its conservation and management programs. The immediate end to the ivory trade will give the elephant an excellent chance for recovery."

And in a remark clearly addressed to southern African states, Dr. Western added: "WCI

appeals to all countries to work within the framework of the CITES convention—and for the African governments and international community to redouble their efforts to protect the species in the wild."

In many ways, the debate over the elephant has only just begun, and it mirrors the discussions under way about the best way to conserve almost any species in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world—including the Nile crocodile, the leopard, the white and black rhinos, and even African trees and other plants. Jacques Berney, the deputy secretary-general of CITES, pointed out at the conference: "A simple protectionist stance cannot be the answer when a product like ivory is one of the only commodities Africa produces which has maintained its value in recent years." ○

males' food source and to protect the whole ecosystem. The benefit we derive from that comes from the excess animals, from the sale of their skins, meat, and ivory. Our people are now participating in managing the elephant population. That means elephants are spreading throughout the country; they are not just in our parks areas."

The international crusade against ivory sales comes just as Zimbabwe is pioneering an innovative land use program designed to build a mutually beneficial relationship between the elephant population and the peasants who live nearby the pachyderms.

Conventional wildlife preservation plans, such as in Kenya and Tanzania, set aside large tracts of land as parks. Usually the people bordering such parks resent them as rich tourists' playgrounds which bring them no rewards. Poaching of wildlife in those parks became rife as the poor peasants either sought the meat and valuable ivory or they allowed international poaching rings to operate in their midst.

The Zimbabwean plan, called Campfire (Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources), encourages rural communities to determine how their land and wildlife will be used. The communities then reap the economic benefits from the tourism, hunting, and ivory sales that take place.

Ephraim Chafesuka is the chairman of the District Council of Guruve, a poor area which borders the Zambezi Valley parks and safari areas. His district was one of the first to be given the authority to manage its own wildlife and he explains how Guruve has already gained school buildings and a clinic from the proceeds of hunting safaris and the sale of ivory and skins from the culled elephants. The much-valued elephant meat, in an area where malnutrition is rife, is distributed to the people.

The theory behind the Campfire program is that

when the people get economic gains from the elephant and other wildlife, they will want to grow those populations like a crop. And it appears to be working. Poaching has decreased drastically in the 26 rural communities that are Campfire areas, according to the Zimbabwe Trust.

The proceeds from elephants and their ivory are the linchpin for the Campfire plan and the plainspoken Chafesuka argues against any ban on ivory sales. "Why should Zimbabwe get the blame for Kenya's inability to manage its wildlife?" he asked.

Following the vote in Switzerland to ban ivory sales, Zimbabwe immediately issued its objections to the decision and stated it reserves its right to sell ivory and elephant hides. Convinced of the rightness of their elephant management strategy, Zimbabwe and its four neighbors appear ready to defy the international ban and sell ivory. Zimbabwe stands to lose about \$10 million in annual ivory sales if it honors the ban, according to experts. But if it established the rebel ivory-selling cartel, it could count on Japan, which consumes 40 percent of the world's ivory, to buy up the "legal" ivory from culled elephants.

The most important issue for Zimbabwe's government and conservation groups is to get their ruraly based wildlife program to succeed.

"We want our rural people who live nearby the parks, which are generally marginal areas, to value elephant populations and other wildlife because they bring substantial rewards to the human communities," said Nduku, the director of National Parks and Wildlife Management. "Our plan is working and should be a model for other countries. But instead we are being punished and those countries which cannot sustain their elephant populations are being rewarded."

—Andrew Meldrum  
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