

Traffic 1987

erial number, a two-letter code for the country, its weight in kilograms, and the year of marking. The marking is to be either punch-died or in indelible ink and marked on the lip area of the tusk (not the hollow end). According to the CITES Secretariat (in a September 1986 notification), all raw ivory – whether commercial, tourist souvenirs, or hunters' trophies – will be marked and be accompanied by CITES documentation. All markings, controls, quotas, and compilations of ivory reported are to be kept on computer at the IUCN Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge, United Kingdom. While it is still too early to determine the system's long-term effectiveness at curbing poaching and illegal trade, CITES Secretary General Eugene Solomons says of the marking-export control system, "We think it is the best system to save elephants, so we have to give it every chance of succeeding."

### ... And the Task Continues

With the stringent controls on ivory trade coming into force, illegal traders are finding the going tougher than ever before. According to the *Traffic Bulletin* (August 1986), Belgian authorities seized the largest illegal ivory shipment ever discovered outside of Africa. Unknown dealers of a shipment of "beeswax" weighing almost 11,000 kilos (11 tons) are being sought by Belgian customs after this shipment was discovered to contain 1,889 unmarked ivory tusks. Based on the physical appearance of these tusks, experts deduce that they were probably taken in haste (bullets were still lodged in some) in 1985 in Tanzania, which already has a severely depleted elephant population. For ivory valued at U.S. \$1 million,

this was a risky method of shipment because of the possibility for customs inspection and discovery. CITES authorities believe this indicates that previous methods employed for laundering ivory are no longer viable. These methods, which allowed for 80 percent of the ivory in the international market to be illegal, included forged documents or obscuring the country of origin by shipping through several countries. It is estimated that less than 50 percent of raw ivory on the market today is illegal. The quotas and marking system should further reduce that figure.

On the elephants' home front, pressure is also building in this war on illegal trade. Zambian authorities, for example, seized 564 ivory tusks, weighing about 6,000 kilos (6.6 tons) in June 1986. The shipment, concealed in a secret compartment of a truck, was on its way to Burundi when stopped in June 1986.

### Black Rhino Population Crashes

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The African black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) population has been cut by half in just two years. Estimates by the African Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group (AERSG) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) set the current population at 4,500, down from 8,800 in 1984. Poaching is virtually out of control, with two populations hit the hardest: the Luangwa Valley of Zambia has fewer than 200 rhinos left, and the Selous Game Reserve in Tanzania has few, if any, rhinos remaining.

AERSG Chairman David Cumming stated in that group's newsletter, *Pachyderm* (February 1986), that the black rhino has "emerged as the top priority" of the AERSG.

### Rhinos Extinct in the CAR?

During an aerial survey of the Central African Republic in mid-1985, no black rhinos (*Diceros bicornis*) were located in an area that once had a high rhino density. While tracks were found of an occasional animal, there are fears that the species will become "extinct in the CAR in 1986 as poaching by Sudanese horsemen" continues (*Pachyderm*, February 1986).

The northern white rhino (*Ceratotherium simum cottoni*), never common in the CAR, probably has not occurred there since the 1940s, according to C.A. Spinage, author of "The Rhinos of the Central African Republic" (*Pachyderm*, February 1986).

### Poaching Wars in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism has trained 100 of the 500 game scouts it will add to its antipoaching force in the Zambezi Valley.

According to the newsletter of the AERSG, *Pachyderm* (February 1986), losses from poaching among elephant and rhino populations in this area have been tremendous. In 1985, 72 rhinos and 23 elephants were killed. In January and February of 1986, another six rhinos and one elephant were poached. Unfortunately for the illicit hunters, in 1986, nine poachers were killed and four were arrested by the combat-ready troops of the ministry.

Poaching penalties have been made more severe in Zimbabwe. Several members of one poaching gang, which killed six rhinos, were sentenced to 11 years in jail and ordered to pay a compensation of Z\$30,000 (U.S.\$17,562).

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# Bird Trade... Bird Bans

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by Jorgen B. Thomsen  
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The commercial trade in live wild birds, like much of wildlife trade, generates controversy. Ecological, humane, ethical, legal, and economic considerations color the debates, often pitting conservation and animal welfare groups against a multimillion-dollar pet and aviculture business that spans the country (Table 1).

Most traders and conservationists agree that the increasing threat of habitat loss underlies the survival potential of many wild bird species. Some experts believe that these pressures, combined with international trade demands, increase the likelihood that rare and commercially valuable bird species will be pushed to extinction.

Recently, the controversy between U.S. bird trade advocates and opponents has intensified. Long-standing federal enforcement problems, ineffective foreign conservation programs, and unacceptably high

mortality of birds involved in trade have prompted several states to take the unprecedented step of enacting or introducing legislation banning the sale of imported wild birds.

## Lax Enforcement of Federal Laws

Inadequacy of federal controls is undoubtedly stimulating the state campaigns to ban wild bird trade. Federal law establishes authority to tightly control birds imports. However, while the regulations outline a complete series of procedures for enforcement agencies to follow, actual practice paints a disconcerting picture. TRAFFIC(U.S.A.) recently released an analysis of federal agencies and procedures entitled *Evaluation of the Psittacine Importation Process in the United States* (see page 18 in this issue). This report concludes

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Wild imported specimens of birds, like these military macaws (*Ara militaris*), are banned from sale in New York state. (Credit: Ginette Hemley/World Wildlife Fund)

