

CITES 2010

Success or failure?

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) held its 15th Conference of the Parties (CoP) in Doha, Qatar, in March of this year.



CITES is responsible for regulating international trade in endangered species of plants and animals, with a remit to ensure that any such trade doesn't put species at risk of serious depletion or extinction. It does this principally by listing species in "appendices", depending on the perceived level of risk. Species most at risk go into appendix I where no trade is allowed; appendix II allows for limited, regulated trade, and so on.

CITES is an important international regulatory mechanism, and does have real "teeth" in that its 175 member countries are expected to enshrine its regulations, resolutions and decisions into their own national legislation. They are also required to provide evidence to show they are being adequately enforced. Sanctions are available for countries that don't comply.

Sadly, CITES suffers from the same problems faced by other international conventions concerned with conservation and biodiversity loss, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Whaling Commission (IWC); namely vested interests, politics, bribery and coercion!

At Doha this year, several species desperately in need of protection from trade were up for discussion, including Polar bears, Atlantic bluefin tuna, and a number of shark and coral species. Most attempts to protect these species failed in spite of masses of good scientific evidence to show that they are being depleted at completely unsustainable rates. These failures were largely due to efforts by those countries that have a vested

CITES 2010: Successes and failures

✓	Prevention of elephant ivory sell-off
✓	Protection of Madagascan plants
✓	Protection of certain Latin American amphibians
✓	Protection for the Bolivian Satanic Beetle
✓	Protection for Iran's Kaiser's newt from the pet trade
✓	Strengthened protection for rhinos, antelopes, tigers, snakes, and freshwater turtles
×	Atlantic bluefin tuna protection
×	Hammerhead shark protection
×	Porbeagle shark protection
×	Red and pink coral protection
×	Increased protection for beleaguered trees from the timber industry

interest in the trade. Japan brought a huge delegation to the conference, and openly and unashamedly wined, dined, and coerced others into blocking protection for the beleaguered bluefin tuna, in much the same way they try to influence decisions at the IWC. The Chinese used their influence to block efforts to protect sharks because of the commercial value of the horrendous shark fin trade.

There were a few conservation successes, notably the rejection of Tanzania and Zambia's efforts to be allowed to sell ivory stockpiles. Kaiser's newt, only found in Iran and threatened by the pet trade, got a listing, along with Bolivia's Satanic beetle, several species of Central American amphibians, and a number of Madagascan plant species. Protection measures for antelopes, tigers, rhinos, some snakes, and some freshwater turtles were strengthened. However, while we celebrate the successes, it is important to remember that when it comes to really high value species in trade, such as commercial fish species and many species of tree important to the timber trade, CITES often fails to provide much needed protection.

Sadly, the fate of some of the world's most endangered commercially traded species is left at the mercy of short-term politics. The irony is that once they are lost, it's not only the animals and plants that will suffer.





Could extinct woolly mammoths be threatening their live elephant cousins?

When the 1990 CITES ban came into force, the trade in elephant ivory had decimated many elephant populations. Africa's elephants had been reduced by about 50%, with populations becoming increasingly fragmented.

Despite the ban, elephants continue to be threatened by illegal poaching. However, there is another perfectly legal trade which might have an impact on elephant populations; namely the seemingly improbable trade in woolly mammoth ivory.

An investigation funded by Care for the Wild International (CWI) and the Aspinall Foundation carried out by ivory experts Esmond and Chryssee Martin, has revealed some surprising facts about this trade. For thousands of years woolly mammoth tusks have been collected from the frozen tundra of Northern Russia, and traded. After a decline during the communist years, trade has been increasing again since the elephant ivory ban. Currently around 60 metric tonnes of woolly mammoth tusks are exported from Russia annually, principally to Hong Kong in order to supply carvers in mainland China.

Thousands of recently-carved mammoth ivory products are legally sold each year in Asia, North America, and Europe.

The worry is that legal mammoth ivory could be used as a front in order to launder illegally poached elephant ivory. If this were happening, then the continued survival of elephants could indeed be threatened by their extinct cousins. At the moment, however, Dr Martin argues that this doesn't appear to be the case. "We don't find mammoth ivory products for sale in Africa, because they are currently too expensive", said Dr Martin. "If we did, they could be used as a cover for elephant ivory. As things stand, we don't believe the mammoth ivory trade is adversely affecting either the African or Asian elephant".

While whole mammoth tusks are relatively easy to distinguish from elephant tusks, differentiating some small carved items can be difficult. Although it seems that there is little or no attempt to disguise items made of elephant ivory as mammoth ivory in Western countries, if mammoth tusks or carved items made from them were to start to appear in markets in Africa, there could be a problem.

The key place for mammoth ivory carving is mainland China, while Hong Kong is the main centre for sales of these items.

As Dr Martin suggests, it is imperative that we continue to gather information on the demand for elephant and mammoth ivory, legal and illegal, raw and worked, in Hong Kong and mainland China, if we are to develop a true understanding of the complex dynamics of this trade and its influence worldwide.





Mobile clinic to the rescue once more

In 2006, Care for the Wild International (CWI) provided our project partner Wildlife Friends Foundation of Thailand (WFFT) with equipment for their mobile veterinary clinic.

The clinic travels all over Thailand to treat and rescue sick and injured animals. We would like to bring you news of a recent rescue made possible by the generosity of our supporters.

A few months ago, WFFT received news of a female elephant needing urgent treatment. "June" had spent her life working for people. The team visited June at her elephant camp home and were shocked to find her shaking, thin and covered in severely infected wounds and abscesses. They provided emergency treatment for her wounds but could not bear to leave her to a life of misery and so began to plan her rescue.

Soon the day of June's rescue arrived. She was very calm as the team led her onto a large truck for the long journey to WFFT's rescue centre. On arrival, she was a little unsteady on her feet but allowed herself to be led into a large paddock where she will stay whilst undergoing treatment for her wounds. It was immediately obvious that June realised she was in safe, caring hands and she was soon tucking into a large pile

of fruit. June is now safe but her wounds still need a lot of care which will require months of expensive medical treatment. She will also need a lot of food to bring her up to a healthy weight, and care from the team at WFFT to help her to recover from all the years of abuse she has suffered. Her rescue would not have been possible without the wonderful support we receive from the public.

The work of the mobile clinic is vital to the future health of many of Thailand's wild animals. Thailand is a notorious centre for the abuse of wild animals in the tourism industry, and wildlife tourist attractions can be found all over the country. Many of the animals at these places have received professional care and treatment from the clinic and, where possible, we rescue mistreated animals and bring them to the sanctuary of WFFT's rescue centre. If you would like to support the work we do to protect wild animals and care for those in need, then please take a look at our fundraising pages to see how you can help.