Saving The Rhino – Part 1

Paul Ash

Poachers continue to slaughter South Africa's rhinos as the price of horn skyrockets. Time to legalize the trade, Ash asks.

In the autumn of 1892, a man named Frederick Courteney Selous set sail from Africa for England. Selous was in a deep funk. As the original Great White Hunter, he had, with his single-shot, 10-bore rifle, dispatched a great swathe of wild animals during a lengthy and bloody hunting career. Yet, despite months of searching, he had been unable to find and shoot a single white rhino specimen for a European museum. Selous and other hunters believed that, at most, a handful of rhinos had survived the unhinged slaughter of Southern Africa's wildlife in the closing decades of the 19th century.These were now frightened, gun-shy animals probably hiding in remote thickets in the difficult, malarial country between the White and Black Umfolozi rivers. A few years later, Selous wrote: *"But that 20 of these strange old-world creatures are alive today, I very much doubt ... I cannot think that the species will survive very far into the coming century."*

Selous would probably have been greatly surprised to see what has happened a century later in South Africa. Not only has the white rhino survived, but there are now roughly 18,500 of them spread across national parks, game reserves and private farms. In many cases, Selous would not even have bothered to raise his rifle - because many have been dehorned in an attempt to prevent poaching, and horns have been locked in bank vaults.

I recently visited a private rhino rancher (who requested his name be withheld). Formerly what he called a "normal" farmer, running cattle and growing vegetables, he turned to game ranching in the mid-1990s as the wildlife breeding business took off. Now he is just one of a growing number of private rhino owners in South Africa who, between them, own roughly 25% of the local white rhino population. The rancher has been breeding rhinos since 1994 with considerable success. *"I think the white rhino is the most incredible animal in the world,"* he said. *"It deserves to be protected."* The large number of rhinos grazing happily in camps seems to confirm the idea that farming rhinos as if they were merely very large cows works. *"Whether it's grapes or wheat or mangoes, give the job to farmers - they'll do it well."*

As part of his sustained effort to protect his animals, all have been dehorned. At current prices, the rancher's horn stash is worth millions of dollars, but there will be no payday for him or any other rhino owner until the ban on the trade in rhino horn is lifted. That is unlikely to happen any time soon - but legalizing this trade could be their salvation.

Rhinos are protected under the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which forbids trade in rhino horn.

That white rhinos have prospered so well in South Africa is thanks to a legal market for breeding and selling them, driven by rising prices for live animals for both wildlife tourism as well as the vibrant trophy-hunting market. It is no small irony that the rhino, which had been hunted almost to extinction a century ago, has been saved by hunters.

In October 1953, when legendary conservationist Ian Player conducted the first aerial survey of the Umfolozi Game Reserve, he counted 437 white rhinos. In the following years, Player and his team translocated dozens of rhinos to other parks and overseas zoos because they were literally running out of elbow room in Umfolozi. In the end, though, rhino survival is a matter of simple economics, says independent environmental economist Michael 't Sas-Rolfes. "*Trophy hunting is largely responsible for the growth in our rhino population,"* he says. *"The market has saved them."*

Trophy hunting attracts large sums of money from hunters, mostly from the US, Europe and the Middle East, who can afford to hunt a rhino. A trophy hunter may shoot one rhino a year and export its horn, subject to CITES provisions. That trophy hunting has saved the white rhino is a view that many conservationists and animal lovers find unpalatable. But the numbers do not lie: in 1982, trophy hunters paid $5,500 to shoot a white rhino; by 2008, the price had peaked at $54,000 before dropping to about $29,000 in 2010. If the trophy-hunting market ensured some sort of balance in the rhino business, the recent surge in poaching has not only wrecked the peace, but also threatens to drive the rhino to final extinction as the black-market price of rhino horn soars to astronomical levels. For the first time in recent memory, rhinos are worth more dead than alive. Conservationists believe the resurgent trade has been driven by declining stocks of available horn in Asian traditional medicine markets, most notably China and Viet Nam, where, although illegal in both countries, it is often used in preparations to cure fevers. Despite a popular myth constantly peddled in Western media, rhino horn is not used as an aphrodisiac. Tom Milliken, regional director for international environmental monitoring group Traffic, says improving economic performance and rising prosperity in the East means people can now afford traditional cures that were previously out of reach. *"GDP is up, personal income is up and there's lots of disposable income,"* he says.

The problem has been exacerbated by false rumors that rhino horn can cure life-threatening illnesses, adding a new dimension to an already complicated issue. "There is nothing in the traditional literature (to support these claims)," he says.

Right now, the authorities in various countries are struggling to get a grip on poaching. CITES, which employs just a single enforcement officer, has been largely powerless to stop the boom in the illegal trade.

Many officials and conservationists have pinned their hopes on the recently established CITES Rhinoceros Enforcement Task Force, which brings together wildlife law-enforcement officials from range, transit and consumer countries to share intelli-

Continued on Page 15

Continued from Page 14
Saving The Rhino - Part 1

gence on rhino-related crimes.

Meanwhile, the slaughter continues unabated. So far this year in South Africa, 141 rhinos have been killed by poachers, a figure not far short of the road death toll over Easter. And Sas-Rolfes believes the rising price of horn may be encouraging speculative stockpiling. *"This leads to even more rhinos being killed now to harvest horns for anticipated demand in the future in the hope of earning massive profits."* He says the current poaching levels prove the rhino horn trade ban has failed and that it is time to investigate the possibility of legal trade. *"Whether rhino horn can be scientifically proven to work as a medicine is most likely irrelevant to those who use it."* He believes that legal trade will most likely result in a lower price for horn and so reduce pressure from poaching. A legal trade would also provide an economic incentive to ensure the rhino's survival.

Milliken is more cautious. The issue of demand for rhino horn *"is completely out of focus"*, he says. *"There are huge fundamentals - we don't have a grip on it. One mistake, and we could wipe out an entire species."* He argues that better policing and more vigorous prosecution of offenders would go a long way to curbing the trade. *"If these people are successfully prosecuted, it would be a huge deterrent."*

The recent poaching surge has everyone worried, to the point that South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs plans to commission a study on a legal trade in rhino horn. If it happens, the rancher and other rhino breeders will be smiling. *"What regulation do you have on merino sheep?"* he asks? *"None. And as long as wool pays, you will never have a problem of merino sheep getting too few."*

So it could be for the rhino.

This article appeared first online on May 29th 2011 at http://www.timeslive.co.za/local/article1090690.ece/Saving-the-rhino

Value Added Tax in the European Union

In some Eurozone countries the percentage of VAT added when importing hunting trophies is substantially higher than in others. Shipments destined for recipients in high VAT Euro-states can be routed through Antwerp in Belgium. All clearing of trophy consignments is done at the point of entry into the Euro Zone; this includes the VAT. But VAT is charged at the rate applicable to the country where the goods first enter and Belgium's rate is only 7%. Clearing charges are considerably less in Belgium too as compared with other EU states. It may be worthwhile to consider this.

Information supplied by Highveld Taxidermists (Pty) Ltd, South Africa. Tel: 27-12-650 0000 Fax: 27-12-349-8334 :www.highveldtaxidermists.com

Rare Dama Gazelles Rediscovered

SANDSCRIPT, No. 9. April 2011

Recent fieldwork carried out in Chad thanks to the Pan Sahara Wildlife Survey, generously funded by HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, has yet again turned up ground breaking data on endangered desert species. Accompanied by staff from Chad's parks department and an experienced guide and ex-park ranger, the team surveyed part of the vast Ouadi Rimé-Ouadi Achim Game Reserve. The reserve, approximately the size of Indi-ana, was until civil war broke out in the 1980s a haven for desert antelopes, including several thousand of the now extinct in the wild scimitar-horned oryx. The reserve's dama gazelle population was also truly astounding and it was not uncommon to see upwards of a hundred of these magnificent gazelles in any one day. Following the war and the almost total disappearance of larger wildlife, it was assumed the dama gazelles, now a globally critically endangered species, had gone the way of the oryx into oblivion. And although the odd rumor of gazelles did pop up from time to time no tangible evidence could be secured.

So with the somewhat daunting challenge of finding dama gazelles we set out. Our initial strategy was to talk to local nomadic herders and we were pleasantly surprised to hear news of recent sightings and some good indications of where the gazelles might be found. Once in the general area we then started a systematic search, combining long, vehicle-based transects with shorter excursions on foot to optimize chances of picking up tell tale tracks. It did not take long for our guide, Abdelaziz, to pick up the first spoor and soon enough we finally spotted our first dama gazelle. This was quickly followed by a small group of four, including a youngish animal. It is difficult to say exactly how many gazelles are left but first indications are very positive.

Apart from dama gazelles, the fieldwork also con-firmed the reserve as being almost certainly the best remaining reservoir in the whole of Africa for dorcas gazelles. In all we saw over fifteen hundred. And while camels in some areas out-numbered gazelles by 6 to 1, the prospects for their conservation are extremely positive. Significant efforts have been recently under-taken by the Chadian Government to curtail illegal hunting. On our return to Chad's capital, N'Djamena, we were able to present our findings to senior government officials and to discuss how best to conserve the precious gazelle populations of the reserve. Further work in the coming months will consolidate options, including the possibility of reintroducing scimitar-horned oryx.

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader"

John Quincy Adams
6th President of the United States

Bilateral Collaboration Between South Africa And Viet Nam To Address Rhinoceros Horn Trade

Source: TRAFFIC Bulletin, Vol. 23/2, 2011

The escalating death rate of rhino in South Africa are due in large part to the growing demand for ground rhinoceros horn in Asia. As traditional medicine, it is believed to cure a range of ailments, with recent, unfounded claims that it can cure cancer.

One country in particular that has emerged as a main driver of the international illegal trade in rhinoceroses is Viet Nam, as increasing wealth has corresponded with an increasing appetite for expensive products like rhinoceros horn.

In order to address the growing illegal rhinoceros horn trade between Viet Nam and South Africa, TRAFFIC organized and participated in a mission to Viet Nam in October 2010 to facilitate bilateral talks among officials in both countries. Between 18 and 22 October, five delegates from the South Africa National Wildlife Crime Reaction Unit met government officials in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City, including Customs, Environmental Police, INTERPOL, and the Association for Traditional Medicine, among others. Discussions focused on increasing understanding of the trade and strengthening enforcement.

Both parties agreed to develop a Memorandum of Understanding which will form the basis for collaborative law enforcement action in the future. It is anticipated that this document will be ready to sign when the Vietnamese delegation visits South Africa later in 2011. This is an important first step and will formalize the relationship for working together to combat the illegal trade in rhino horn.

The South African delegation also promised a donation of equipment to Viet Nam to help track horns in the country that have been legally obtained from trophy hunts. While trophy hunting of White Rhinoceroses *Ceratotherium simum* is permitted in South Africa under strict regulations, the lack of a system to register and track privately-owned horns in Viet Nam is allowing them to enter commercial trade illegally.

The visit was hosted by Viet Nam's CITES Management Authority with support from TRAFFIC, and made possible through the financial assistance of WWF-Germany, WWF African Rhino Program and the US Government, which pledged to support such an initiative at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES in March 2010.

Implications For CITES If African Elephants Split

Source: TRAFFIC Bulletin, Vol. 23/2, 2011

Tom Milliken Elephant and Rhinoceros Program Leader, TRAFFIC

A number of research papers published in recent years suggest the existence of two or even three genetically distinct species of African Elephant: the savanna elephant, the forest elephant (of Central Africa) and, possibly, the West African elephant (see http://biology.ucsd.edu/news/article_091202.html and http://www.plosbiology.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pbio.1000564). Such findings of genetic differentiation will need to be confirmed before any formal taxonomic revision of the African Elephant *Loxodonta africana* (or its recognized subspecies in forest areas *L. a. cyclotis*) can be proposed. It is, however, worth considering the implications of any change in taxonomy from a CITES perspective. If forest elephants in West and Central Africa and/or populations of West African elephants were ever recognized as separate species, they would remain listed in Appendix I under CITES, just as they are at the present time. Thus, in terms of treatment under the Convention, the effect would be moot, but there could be other follow-on consequences.

First, if the status of the savanna elephant (whose *Loxodonta africana* populations in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe are listed in Appendix II) were considered independently of either the poorly known and smaller populations of forest elephants in Central Africa and/or without the small, fragmented and highly endangered populations of West African elephants, a lesser category of threat might actually be applied to the species in the *IUCN Red List of Threatened Species* (where it is currently listed as Vulnerable). Although this may not necessarily result in a change in the CITES listing for *Loxodonta africana*, it might open a door for consideration of the savanna elephant species being listed in CITES Appendix II.

Secondly, distinguishing ivory from these distinct species may have implications for the successful implementation of these CITES listings. Experts can usually differentiate whole tusks of forest elephants from those of savanna elephants as they are generally much straighter, narrower and the material much harder to carve. However, worked ivory products and small ivory items would be almost impossible to distinguish from other elephant ivory types.

As a consequence, a period of uncertainty would likely prevail until a method were developed to verify the differences and specific training materials were produced. Such an outcome might finally result in CITES moving more forcefully to close the unregulated

Continued on Page 17

Continued from Page 16
Implications For CITES If African Elephants Split

domestic ivory markets in Central and West Africa that are so problematic as drivers of illegal ivory trade.
The IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group (AfESG) has encouraged all research groups to work together to resolve this important genetic issue by pooling their data, obtaining DNA samples from parts of the elephant range that have not been sampled (especially south of the Congo river), and has issued a statement to encourage this process
(see also www.african-elephant.org/tools/pdfs/pos_genet_en.pdf).

Editor's Note: This article of Tom Milliken underlines the importance of the Joint Research Project for the Conservation of the African Elephant – a cooperative effort between the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF), the International Centre of Ivory Studies (INCENTIVS) of the University of Mainz, the University of Regensburg (Ger-many), the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (FANC) and the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC). Scientists are developing a reference database for the geographical origin of African elephant ivory and a precise method on how to designate the age of ivory tusks.In a Press Release the CIC called "Hunters for Support: African Elephant Ivory Samples Needed" see also Pages 4 and 5, African Indaba, Vol. 9, No 1.
As there are still not enough ivory samples throughout the African elephant's range available for the project, the FANC and the CIC would like hereby to ask all elephant hunters for assis-tance. Contact Dr. Rolf Baldus, who leads this project within the CIC at rolfbaldus@t-online.de or Mrs. K. Hornig at hornigk@bfn.de for further details and instructions

Hunting Lions: Unpalatable But Necessary For Conservation?

Dr. Luke Hunter, Executive Vice President of Panthera

Many conservationists, animal-lovers and commentators have applauded the efforts of a consortium of wildlife and animal welfare organizations fighting to add the African lion as an endangered species under U.S. law. If successful, the listing would effectively prohibit American hunters from bringing the skins and skulls of lions back to the United States. It would not prevent hunters going on safari to kill a lion but very few will bother if they cannot bring home some reminder to hang on the wall.

Normally, I would be among those applauding. Shooting a big cat in the name of "sport" nauseates me, and I've spent a career working to conserve the world's great cats. I have logged thousands of hours in their magnificent presence. When I watch a male lion grooming his cubs or see a female leopard haul a carcass her own weight up a thorn-tree, I am mystified that some people take pleasure in killing their kind with a high-powered rifle. I'm not especially averse to culling -- like all wildlife biologists, my work occasionally necessitates killing animals, such as euthanizing injured wildlife -- but it certainly isn't fun. I simply do not understand what drives a hunter to shoot a creature as magnificent as a lion for a trophy and bragging rights.

Yet I question the effort to list the African lion under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). There is absolutely no doubt that far too many lions are being shot for sport. The process of approving the numbers for hunting (technically, the legal quota that can be exported by hunters) has long been flawed by shoddy science, population estimates little better than guesswork, and relentless lobbying by the hunting industry which is powerful, rich and persuasive. Hunting not only risks taking too many lions but it also disrupts the species' complicated social structure. Prime male lions -- the most sought after trophies -- guard their females from pride take-overs by strange males. Take-overs are catastrophic to lionesses because victorious incoming males kill any cubs belonging to the previous pride males; infanticide hastens the females' return to estrus, giving the new males their own opportunity to sire cubs. It is a natural part of lion society but excessive hunting removes too many males and the essential mantle of protection that allows females to raise a generation of cubs. Between shooting adults and the related loss of cubs, poorly regulated hunting drives lion declines; it is unequivocal.

But that does not mean that all hunting is necessarily bad for lions. Just as strong, empirical science has shown that over-hunting is bad for lions, it also demonstrates that hunting can be sustainable. By setting very conservative quotas and raising age limits to ensure that older male lions are targeted, the worst effects of lion hunting can be mitigated (Packer et.al). There is scant evidence of the hunting industry embracing such measures on its own but the few exceptions -- and they do exist -- show that hunting does not inevitably come with costs to lion numbers.

Indeed, it even has the potential to benefit lions. In Africa, sport hunting is the main revenue earner for huge tracts of wilderness outside national parks and reserves. Many such areas are too remote, undeveloped or disease-ridden for the average tourist, precluding their use for photographic safaris. Hunting survives because hunters are usually more tolerant of hardship, and they pay extraordinary sums - up to US$125,000 - to shoot a male lion. The business requires only a handful of rifle-toting visitors to prosper which, in principle, helps protect those areas. The presence of hunting provides African governments with the economic argument to leave safari blocks as wilderness. Without it, cattle and crops- and the almost complete loss of wildlife they bring- start looking pretty attractive.

Continued on Page 18