



Rhino Watch

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CITES 1997 - Report back

During the recent Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) many press conferences were held by the non-government delegations of South Africa, Malawi, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mozambique and Zambia. These conferences were aimed at expressing the views of the rural communities most involved with wildlife. All of the mentioned countries presented a united front supporting sustainable use of their resources. The general view expressed by the delegates, was the importance of wildlife to the communities and that they wished to control these populations without foreign interference. They wanted to benefit financially from the wildlife on their land. Conservation would benefit enormously from this kind of approach, since without income from wildlife, the animals were regarded as pests because they destroy crops and sometimes kill people. The pleas of this group surely had an influence on the outcome of the voting during the Conference.

The white rhino proposal

The proposal from South Africa at COP10 was to remove the restrictions placed on the Southern African White Rhinoceros at COP9. These restrictions prohibited trade in rhino horn and other products. South Africa asked for a zero quota, meaning that no actual trade would be conducted until the next Conference. This was done so that a set of controls could be put in place before actual trading would resume, and to allow South Africa to deal openly with the authorities of consumer countries without any potential negative political ramifications.

The result

The proposal by South Africa to legalise trade in rhino products, was rejected by one vote on 18 June, with 60 in favour of, and only 32 against. On a technical issue, namely that some parties without voting rights participated in the vote, SA appealed against the decision and requested a second vote, this time by secret ballot. It was thought that this would allow some countries, e.g. from the European Union, to vote in favour of the proposal without being identified, despite the general European opposition to trade in white rhino products.

It thus came as a shock when in the second voting on 19 June, by secret ballot, the proposal was rejected with 54 votes for, and 48 votes against - far from the two third majority.

Some probable reasons why the South African proposal did not get the same sympathy as the elephant proposals, which were accepted:

- The southern elephant population is large. Rhino populations, except the southern white rhino, are small.
- There are only two elephant species. There are five rhino species (two African and three Asian) which may hamper control of trade.
- Elephants roam free and cause damage. Rhinos don't cause damage, they live in reserves and on farms.
- SA is perceived as a rich country where the people do not really need the income. Other states need money - especially rural communities.

It was obviously also not taken into account that while elephant tusk is a non-renewable resource, i.e. the elephant must be dead to acquire the tusk, rhino horn is a sustainable resource which can be harvested and will regrow.

The South Africans made a strategic error when they did not insist on a secret ballot the first time round. The CITES secretariat wanted to finish the issue the same day since it was late, and SA accommodated them by agreeing to a public vote. This forced Tanzania, which is a member of SADC (South African Development Community) and who agreed to vote for both the elephant and rhino proposals, to vote against the proposal, because they would lose money promised by a prominent animal rights group. Another factor was that the member of the Trinidad and Tobago delegation, who indicated that they would support the rhino proposal, was out for coffee during the voting. Both these incidents cost us the one vote needed for a two thirds majority. **Daan Buijs**

The illegal trade in wild fauna and flora as seen by a nature conservation law enforcer

Since November 1988 I have been involved with investigations in the illegal trade in wild fauna and flora. It started with ivory and rhino horn in South Africa, in crates so dilapidated that they practically came apart at the Johannesburg International Airport. Suspects were many and non-governmental organisations vehemently fought any legal trade. Poaching was rife. From 1990 to 1995 South Africa lost 78 rhinoceros and 80 elephants but this figure was negligible when compared to other countries. It was said by a representative of Zambia at a Cites conference that most people in Africa did not know the difference between a banana and an elephant tusk but the illegal trade was organised and very profitable. The chain from the poacher to the end-user is a long and intricate one. The almost romantic notion of smuggling syndicates, organised by a millionaire trader in an Asiatic Country, systematically poaching elephants and rhinos in Africa, is not quite true. Even less supported by fact was the idea that these mystical men were under order to kill all rhinos in Africa to increase the economical value of their ivory and rhino horn stockpiles in Hong Kong, or was it Singapore, or maybe Taiwan! Experts on poaching and smuggling of African wildlife from England, Europe and the United States visited our continent and told us, with great authority, what was happening and how we should approach our task. Theirs was to ensure that wild beasts continue to roam Africa so that they may view them whilst on dangerous safaris under constant threat of running out of cold beer.

They explained that when de-horned rhinos were killed, poachers cut off one of the rhino's ears to show to his controller that the rhino no longer possessed a horn. I am not sure whether it had to be a left or a right ear but would think that the stump, weighing more than a kilogram, would be better proof. Just think of the investment left behind in the bush. Didn't the experts tell us that a kilogram of rhino horn was worth 24 000 US dollars? These tough and effective advisors explained to us that because of the ivory ban, black market prices dropped from 50 US dollars per kilogram to 10.25 dollars in one country and 8.35 in another. We, us Africans, watched them in awe and polished our own act.

We went back to the bush and what did we discover? The old truth about Africa was still the same: time is on Africa's side, and if you cannot respect this, it will eventually destroy you. There is simply no quick solution. The first conclusion we came to was that most elephants were killed because there was simply no reason to protect them. These huge plundering beasts, who destroy crops and threaten to kill the owners, simply could not compare economical value to goats

and cattle. It has so much meat and the tusks could be buried as an investment. Our foreign experts did not concern themselves with the destruction of the environment by domestic animals. To quote my friend, Adan Dullo of the Kenya Wildlife Service, "An expert, is a bullshitter working far away from home".

Secondly, we had to square up to the fact that the market for rhino horn was not nearly as well developed and lucrative as we were told. The maximum value for rhino horn is 3 000 US dollars per kilogram and there is no difference in price between that of a black and a white rhino. This was confirmed by my own visits to the far East.

We also discovered that rhino horn was not used as an aphrodisiac. What a shock this was as we always distinguished between a fake and the genuine product by biting it and waiting for the "reaction".

Where do we stand today? New initiatives in Africa can save our African natural heritage. The Lusaka Agreement directed at the illegal trade in wild fauna and flora creates an international task force that can do cross-border investigations, coordinate joint operations and handle controlled deliveries. We can now follow a load of contraband to the end-user or trace it back to the poacher. In Africa we have the best anti-poaching men and are in the process of training more. The Interpol Subgroup on Wildlife Crime has been founded and renders invaluable assistance to us. To a certain extent the illegal trade in rhino horn and ivory has been wiped out - recovery figures are about 10% of what they were in 1992. Cooperation between range countries in Africa and end-users in the Far East is good. Yes, the scenario is one of optimism.

Apart from financial assistance, what more do we need in Africa to produce even better results? For one, our law enforcement structures will have to be updated to cope with possible increases in illegal trade. We cannot even forensically trace the source of illegal wildlife products as a database has not been fully developed and the forensic tests are too expensive for most law enforcement agencies. We certainly hope that some non-governmental agencies will financially assist us in these projects.

The controls over permit systems in Africa are not up to standard. Auditing thereof is almost nonexistent. Cites II permits are issued by traders with little intervention from official organisations, and maybe not everyone in Africa know by now the difference between an ivory tusk and a banana after all. Superintendent P Lategan: Endangered Species Protection Unit: South African Police Service

Die aankoop van wild

Met die prys van wild in ag geneem kan wildboere nie bekostig om wild sommer lukraak aan te koop nie. Voordat die transaksie beklink word, moet die koper bepaal wat sy behoefte is en diensooreenkomstig wild aankoop. Die koper moet dus die rede vir sy wildsaankope deeglik oorweeg.

Wild word om hoofsaaklik drie redes aangekoop:

Hervestiging

Indien die koper die hervestiging van wild beoog is jong diere gewens. Met jong diere word bedoel diere wat reeds oor die speenskok is, maar nog nie geslagsryp is nie.

Dit is moeilik om wild se ouderdom te bepaal en wanneer volwasse diere aangekoop word, is dit moontlik dat daar ouer diere onder hulle is wat nie meer vrugbaar is nie. Wanneer volwasse diere aangekoop word bestaan 'n verdere moontlikheid dat die diere dragtig kan wees. Dit stel baie eise aan die dier in die aanpassingsperiode en kan tot gevolg hê dat 'n kalfseisoen oorgeslaan sal word.

Die voordeel met jong diere is dat die aanpassing by die nuwe omgewing gewoonlik maklik is, en dat daar 'n bekende periode is wat die diere kan produseer.

Trofeëjag

Vir die doeleindes van trofeëjag word oorwegend groot trofeëdiere aanbeveel, waarvan die trofeë lengtes verkieslik bekend is. Hierdie diere pas moeilik by 'n nuwe omgewing aan, maar die trofeë sal nie beïnvloed word nie. Daar kan dus kort na vrylating gejag word.

Toerisme

Wanneer wild aangekoop word met die doel om toerisme te bevorder, speel die ouderdom van die wild nie so 'n groot rol nie. Mak diere dien gewoonlik goed in hierdie doel. Kyk uit vir diere wat van 'n Natuurreservaat afkomstig is, indien beskikbaar. **Dr Dirk Neetling**

Die artikel is gepubliseer met erkenning aan die Noordelike Wildvereniging, Nuusbrief Februarie 1997

Dr George Hughes gives presentation to consortium in the UK

The Chief Executive of the Natal Parks Board, Dr George Hughes, visited the United Kingdom at the invitation of a group of 25 non-governmental organisations involved with raising funds for rhino conservation. The groups have formed a loose consortium which holds an annual symposium to share ideas.

Dr Hughes attended this gathering on 17 May 1997 at the London Zoological Society and gave a presentation on the South African proposal to investigate the possibility of setting up a legal trade in rhino and elephant products. This proposal was presented to the 10th international conference of CITES held in Zimbabwe.

"It is a great honour and I am very pleased to have been invited to address this group of conservationists as it demonstrates a willingness on the part of these organisations to understand the South African situation," said Dr Hughes.

"The South African proposal has already gained the support of many professional conservationists throughout the world and has also drawn criticism from animal rights movements," he added.

While the ban on trade in ivory seems to have slowed the slaughter of elephants in some parts of Africa, the ban on trade in rhino horn has had little effect on halting the slaughter of rhinos.

Some 90% of the world's rhinos have been killed by poachers since the imposition of this ban and South African conservation agencies are concerned that unless a more imaginative solution to the problem is found, this slaughter will continue to escalate in spite of costly security measures in some areas.

Newsflash

Czech Zoo Director, Josef Janacek, has come up with the idea to turn a huge former secret Soviet base into a vast animal reserve for the endangered white rhino. He envisions the base being transformed into a 250-hectare natural park of forest and high grasses. According to Mr Janacek, the project will mainly focus on the 250 white rhinos which are in captivity in Europe. "They are ageing and getting fewer, with only five to six births for every 10 deaths. They need space and they need to live in bigger groups than in zoos. At the Soviet base they will have all this. And given that they will come from different zoos, we will be able to overcome the problem of inbreeding".

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is to make a decision on Mr Janacek's proposal.

Ethical professional hunting

The Natal Parks Board is to undertake an investigation into any possible connection between KwaZulu-Natal and the "canned lion" hunts which have been reported as having taken place in other provinces of South Africa.

"The Natal Parks Board abhors any form of "canned" hunting and will apply the full measure of the law to ensure that this absolutely unethical and indeed, unlawful, activity does not take place in KwaZulu-Natal," said Dr George Hughes

"The Board subscribes to the philosophy of sustainable utilisation of natural resources and in terms of this philosophy, recognises the value of ethical sport hunting and we support this industry through appropriate action and legislation," he said.

The Board is a member of The South African Professional Hunters Committee which is chaired by Mr Gary Davies, a Natal Parks Board staff member charged with the sport hunting portfolio.

NPB response to SABC allegations

The Natal Parks Board rejected the SABC television news item broadcast at 20:00 on 10 June 1997 implying that the Board was involved in illegal activities involving rhinoceros horns.

"The Board has a stock pile of rhino horns collected from naturally dead animals and breakages during translocation operations within KwaZulu-Natal. This is considerably less than the estimated 60 000 claimed in the SABC TV broadcast", said Dr Hans Grobler, Natal Parks Board Deputy Chief Executive.

"These horns are mainly from white rhino and there certainly has never been more than 10 000 of these animals in South Africa since the turn of the century," he added. The Natal Parks Board has a very solid, international reputation as a successful nature conservation organisation that has been built up over the past fifty years with the support of the people of the KwaZulu-Natal and of South Africa as well as a very considerable number of individuals and professional organisations in other countries.

It is therefore regrettable that the SABC TV news broadcast questioned the integrity of the Board and its staff in spite of overwhelming proof to the contrary and without any apparent investigation to verify the facts.

News Flash

Counter poaching operation in the Kruger National Park receives sponsorship

A recent presentation was held by Ramrod Manufacturing and their overseas principals, Tasco Optics, Maglite Flashlights, Spyderco Knives and Ram Accessories to the Kruger National Parks Honorary Rangers Counter Poaching unit. This involved over R400 000 in equipment being supplied to the Honorary Rangers and the Game Scouts in the Kruger Park.

The equipment will be used by the highly trained Counter Poaching Rangers and Game Scouts in the field making their job a lot easier under difficult conditions.

"This huge R400 000 equipment sponsorship from Ramrod and their overseas principals is, we hope, the start of huge things to come in the way of funds and equipment for our Honorary Rangers and Game Scouts," said Robin Fisher, Chairman of the Honorary Rangers Counter Poaching Committee.

The committee members of AROA would like to thank the following organisations for their support of Daan Buijs' attendance at the recent CITES:

- ◆ Du Toit Wilddienste
- ◆ Sable Ranch (Pty) Ltd
- ◆ Sandringham Private Game Reserve

The Rubbing Post

As a service to AROA members, *Rhino Watch* publishes all requests from those interested in buying or selling rhinos. We invite our members to make use of this service and to fax the details to Lucinda Scholtz at (011) 453-9834.

For purposes of confidentiality, reserves will not be named when disclosing details of the availability of rhinos in our advertising.

Editor: Lucinda Scholtz