

# TO TRADE OR NOT TO TRADE?

## FOR



GEOFF YORK

**John Hume** has one of the largest populations (if not *the* largest population) of privately owned rhinos in South Africa. The owner of farms and reserves across the country, he buys and breeds rhinos, and is a vociferous pro-trade advocate. Here he offers yet another reason to support a proposal to CITES to lift the ban on rhino-horn trade.

**P**robably 160 000 rhinos have been slaughtered in Africa over the past 50 years. One of the major contributing factors was almost certainly that the local populations were never on the side of the animals. We need to change our tactics and help our communities to foster a pride in rhinos and a desire to breed them, instead of to poach them.

We should move some rhinos from our national parks and put them in the custody of the communities and black emergent farmers. Game farmers and breeders should be encouraged to engage surrounding rural communities and teach them to conserve and breed rhinos. If the local people generate a substantial income from these animals, they would literally guard them with their lives.

This would play a significant role in addressing two major conservation issues: poverty and habitat loss. If 4 800 rhinos were donated to communities and the population increased by seven per cent per annum (a conservative estimate based on official figures and my own observations), the community-owned rhinos would number 29 000 in 25 years.

For this approach to be successful, the communities have to benefit from it and fortunately the rhino has the appropriate reward. Its horn. The barrier to this model is the current ban on rhino-horn trade. If we cannot offer local people an



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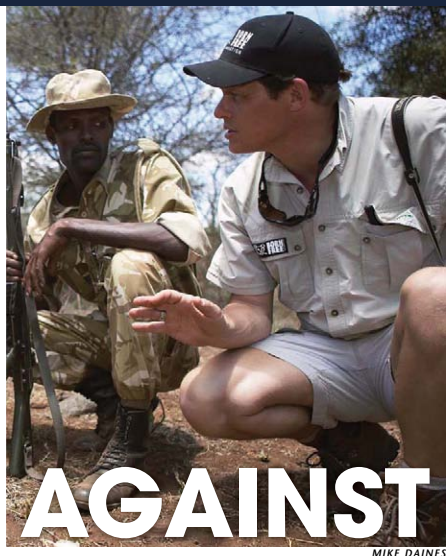
incentive to breed rhinos, they simply will not be interested.

**U**nfortunately we will not stop the demand, but I believe we have the resources to divert the supply of that demand from poached rhinos to those that are still alive or whose horns have long been stockpiled.

If the market for rhino horn were supplied largely by our live rhinos; if communities no longer wanted to poach rhinos; if the private sector were encouraged and incentivised to breed rhinos; and if SANParks were generating a substantial annual income from horn stockpiles, I believe that poaching levels would drop to a minimum.

RHINO WATCH IS BROUGHT TO YOU BY

On the surface, this does seem to be *the* question. In South Africa, debates rage about the potential impact of a legal trade in rhino horn. However, it's worth bearing in mind that, for the current ban on the international trade in rhino horn to be lifted or amended, South Africa must convince two-thirds of CITES signatories that such a trade can be controlled throughout the entire length of the supply chain. South Africa's Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa, has indicated that she will attempt to reach a national consensus on a trade proposal, presumably with a view to submitting it for consideration by the CITES Conference of the Parties in March 2013. (The deadline for proposals is 31 October 2012.)



**Will Travers** is the CEO of the Born Free Foundation, a UK-based charity that campaigns against the exploitation of animals in captivity and the wild, and advocates for Compassionate Conservation™. Here, Travers voices his opposition to the opening of the trade in rhino horn.

I believe that proposals proclaiming that the legitimisation of the rhino-horn trade – even from animals that die naturally – would bring the economic resources needed to support improved rhino protection are based on a total misread of the consequences of trading wildlife products with Asia. In 2008, similar voices argued that the sale of stockpiled ivory to China and Japan through a closed circuit would 'satisfy' demand and lead to a reduction in poaching. ('Closed circuit' means that ivory shipped out of southern Africa would be inspected going into the crates and be inspected again when it was unloaded – 'proof', to some, that illegal ivory could not infiltrate the system.)

The CITES Standing Committee listened to those voices, ignored the warnings of conservationists who believed such a sale would have the opposite effect and approved China, in addition to Japan, as an ivory trading nation. The result? A sickening increase in elephant poaching across much of Africa; massive ivory seizures in the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, China, Kenya, Sri Lanka and the US; and a sustained escalation in the price of raw ivory from an estimated US\$160 per kilogram in 2009 to a staggering US\$1600 per kilogram today. 2011 has been described as the *annus horribilis* for elephants and things are looking just as bad for 2012.

Demand satisfied? No. Poaching contained? No.

So what about rhinos? Some stakeholders argue that rhino ranching or 'farming' can provide a sustainable, steady stream of legal rhino horn for the Chinese and Vietnamese markets, but I believe they are desperately mistaken (see 'Doing the maths'). The Chinese government's stated unwillingness to implement a re-education campaign to drive down demand, together with recent developments in Vietnam, where bogus claims that rhino horn will cure cancer and prevent strokes (cruelly raising false hopes amongst the desperate and raising the prospect of massive profits in the minds of the unscrupulous), can only make matters much, much worse.

Put quite simply, whatever Africa produces from whatever managed scheme will never meet the potential demand, which will, inevitably, continue to

be met through poaching. Legitimising trade (from natural mortality or ranched rhinos) will do no more than incentivise poaching and make it easier to infiltrate illegal rhino horn into any legal process. Not only that, but investigation into the bear-bile trade indicates that a legal trade in ranched products can even *increase* the value placed on wild products, which some consumers see as the 'real deal'.

Furthermore, rhino horn is nothing like ivory, which is worn or put on display. Without sophisticated chemical analysis, ground-up rhino horn is virtually undetectable. Once consumed, it is gone. Enforcement agencies charged with finding, confiscating and prosecuting rhino poachers are already faced with an almost impossible task. We have no right to expect them to carry out their duties – and risk their lives – when we ask them to tackle poachers or intercept contraband rhino horn that is being traded under the cover of a legal trade that we have condoned.

Let us not repeat the mistakes of the past. There are solutions. I believe we have answers to the crisis. Massive education campaigns across the traditional consumer countries; major investment by the international community in the coordinated protection of rhinos in the wild; deterrent sentences for those involved; and

high-level political support for the UN to designate rhinos as a World Heritage Species.

Rhinos need to genuinely stand outside the 'goods and chattels' paradigm and should be conserved as the iconic, natural living treasures that they surely are. We have the real answers, to a real crisis, but legalising trade is not one of them. **AG**

*doing the maths*

Some pro-trade proponents believe that 3 000–5 000 kilograms of horn per year, which equates to an estimated 1.5 million individual doses, is enough to meet demand. This sounds a lot, until you consider the potential of a Chinese middle-class consumer market of 400–500 million people with the disposable income to spend on cars, air-conditioning, refrigerators – and rhino horn.