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John Hume.

John Hume was born in the Karoo in South Africa but grew up in Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia). He started his career as a farmer but left Zimbabwe in 1982 and returned to South Africa. His business was in holiday resorts and in 1992, he bought Mauricedale Game Ranch in the Lowveld region of South Africa to retire.

Here, he started game ranching in an extensive wildlife system and his emphasis was on rare and endangered species. He bought a few rhinos early on but over the years developed a great passion for these gentle animals.

Today, at the age of 70, he devotes 95% of his time to breeding rhinos in both intensive and extensive systems and he is South Africa's largest private rhino owner and breeder. He has had massive success with their breeding, is extremely knowledgeable about these animals and is deeply concerned over the plight that they are facing.

For more information on matters to do with trade legalisation, visit the website here - www.rhinodotcom.com or the Facebook page [here](#).

To receive regular email updates about the trade from a pro legalisation standpoint, subscribe via this email - tangowjuliet@gmail.com

John, how, why and when did you start farming rhinos?

It was always a dream of mine to retire on my own game ranch. I bought a game farm in South Africa in 1992 and started ranching with mixed game, including rhinos, Sable, Roan, Buffalo, small antelope and a range of other Bushveld species.

How many rhino do you have now, and how many did you start off with? How has the poaching affected your rhino?

I have over 800 rhino now and started off with 5 rhinos. I have lost 9 rhinos to poaching over the past few years.

How important is South Africa's conservation model of private ownership and sustainable utilisation?

Extremely important. South African conservation areas cover about 28 000 000ha, of which the private sector owns about 20 500 000ha – about 75% of conservation land. The economic yield to GDP from wildlife ranching was almost R8 billion in 2008/2009. These ranches rely primarily on hunting revenue and to a much smaller degree, eco-tourism. Sustainable utilization is the backbone of the existence of this sector.

When was trade in rhino horn banned, and what were the poaching figures before said ban was implemented? How did the ban initially impact upon private owners?

International trade in rhino horn has been banned since about 1975. Many countries were (and still are) allowed to trade in it internally. In February of 2009, the national moratorium on rhino horn trade became law in South Africa. For many years before this, poaching figures were minimal, less than 30 rhinos per year. In 2009, 122 rhinos were poached; in 2010 – 333; in 2011 – 448 and this year, we have already had over 460 rhinos poached.

This national moratorium prevented private rhino owners from selling their rhino horn stocks legally and effectively dried up the legal supply of horn.

What contribution do you personally feel you have made to rhino conservation in South Africa?

I have bred 460 rhinos since I started and I plan on breeding 200 rhinos a year from now on.

How would a legalised trade work?

This is a discussion in and of itself but we support the view proposed by Mr. Michael Eustace, which we will touch on very simplistically here: An ethical legal trade in rhino horn should be controlled by a Central Selling Organisation. This organization would broker sales to partners in consumer countries. All horn would have to be registered through a database such as South Africa's RhoDIS (Rhino DNA Index System) and marked and quotas proportionate to the ownership of rhinos would be determined. Only registered suppliers would receive payment for horn. It is imperative that these sales are sustainable. The intention is not to flood the market and encourage speculation responses from consumers. A few regular sales (perhaps 4 or 5 a year) should take place at a secure venue.

How much will the trade drive the value of rhino horn down? Let's say that street value at present is USD 65,000 per kilo, (source - www.iol.co.za/business/international/legalising-rhino-horn-trade-in-focus-1.1284989#. UHqgjMVZVFV). After stockpile auction and 1st year of legalised trade, how much do you honestly/realistically expect it to be and what would you base this figure on?

This is an exceptionally difficult question to answer. The important aspect here is that legal horn prices force the illegal market prices down to unsustainable risk levels. It would be very important to have strict legislation in place for offenders, to support this concept. Ideally the CSO would have the capacity to control market prices – lowering them enough to discourage speculators and by varying prices when necessary to disrupt the illegal market. Also, history has proven that a free market situation works, as it finds its own levels. We would have to consider both of these options in the mechanics of the rhino horn market.

Even if there was a drop by say, 10,000 USD per kilo, privateering would continue to be a profitable business, especially as dealers will use the mystique of a wild poached rhino to sell at a higher price. (Ie wet horn vs dry horn having increased powers, desirability etc) How much of a drop in value will it take to stop poaching, and if this happens, will it still be a profitable business venture for private owners?

At this point, private rhino owners are not receiving any return at all on their horn so anything they may receive from it would be more than they are receiving at present. Any reasonable and intelligent rhino owner would then not dream of killing his animals when he could be producing about 60kgs of horn during a single animal's lifetime. Rhinos would be worth more alive than dead, which would reverse the current trend. More people would be encouraged to breed, conserve and protect rhinos, leading to an overall win for our rhino populations. With regards to demand of specific horn (eg. wet vs. dry), we would need greater research of the demand. South Africa has a stockpile of about 20 tons of rhino horn – this stockpile would be the ideal 'tester' to obtain this and other important data on the economic aspects of a potential legal trade in horn.

Who would set and control the sale value, or would it be conducted on a regular auction basis? How would one settle upon a figure? By basing it upon current illegal street value, or by forcing it right down? That would be in best interest of the fight against poaching, but how would it be in the best interest of the private farmer who would, (I assume), want to see the greatest return upon their investment?

Mostly answered in previous questions. If horn trade is legalized for the private sector and for government, the poachers will suffer. Game ranchers will receive a return on their investment and the poacher's bottom line will be eroded.

What guarantees are there that such sales, (whether as a one off stockpile auction, or sustainable farming), will be properly audited and proceeds be directed to wildlife conservation? Would the same current problems of corruption etc not still be a factor?

Yes, as they always are and always will be in Africa. The legal trade of rhino horn does not guarantee an end to poaching or an end to corruption. It would be impossible to make any guarantees of this kind. However, it is not impossible to see that the benefits of legal trade in horn far outweigh the current prospects for rhinos, if the status quo is maintained.

It would be extremely important that the CSO be audited and monitored to ensure that any and all trade is ethical, responsible and fair. We also feel that there would be a necessity for a body (also subject to auditing and monitoring), consisting of primary stakeholders in rhino conservation and management, to ensure the effective and ethical management of rhino conservation practices and its compliance with RhoDIS.

We believe that this sales model would certainly reduce poaching levels drastically.

Supportive law enforcement would have to be rigorous and consistent.

If the trade is legalised, how much of a percentage do you expect the government to take, and to what ends would this income go?

Sales of horn should be proportionate to registered suppliers. As the government owns 75% of our rhino population, it would be fair to say that we expect them to take 75% of any income. Keep in mind that any private horn sales will be subject to a number of taxes, eg. VAT,

Export.

There is a great deal of pressure on our national and provincial parks to become self-sustaining – this increased revenue would go a long way towards attaining these goals. Rhino security has also become an extremely expensive prospect and a thriving industry over the past 4 years and any income generated would keep our rhinos safer, not to mention the other species that occur in rhino habitat.

Why, if this decision on trade is so important, (from the viewpoint of those both for and against it), has the Govt application to CITES been delayed until 2016? How early after this decision, if approved, could trade commence?

Our government feels that insufficient data is available on market trends and sale aspects. Needless to say, many people are incensed over the delayed responses of government. We feel that this delay is going to cost us probably another 3 000 rhino lives over the next 3-4 years – an unnecessary cost and a tragic indictment against us as South Africans.

How will it affect pro trade private owners if the decision goes against them?

Many more of them will probably continue to disinvest in rhinos as it is simply becoming too risky and expensive to own them. Poaching levels will continue to soar and eventually, as the last refuge for rhinos dwindles along with our rhino populations, horn value will be so grossly inflated that people will be forced to get rid of it, whether through destruction or illegal means. The decisions against trade have not worked for rhino anywhere else in the world - in fact, they have led to near local extinction in many rhino range states. It is time for a different tactical approach.

The Pro-Trade lobby are calling for trade, at the very least, to be open in SA. In other words, SA horn may be traded within SA borders. How would this benefit SA farmers? Who is going to buy horn if they cannot then sell it outside of South Africa's borders? Would horn not simply end up in the wrong hands and find its way out of SA as it does now, making the legal trade a market for illegal horn and the real profits be made smuggling it illegally?

This is an important point. Prior to the national moratorium, rhino poaching figures were minimal. Undoubtedly, any horn being sold internally was reaching the international consumer market and the only way it could have done this is illegally. The relevant point here is that our rhino populations were not threatened and being poached at unsustainable levels before the national moratorium was passed. Rhinos were not dying to provide horn, as they did not have to. Our rhino populations were healthy and growing. Black Market prices were relatively low as there was minimal risk in obtaining the horn and the supply wasn't limited. By cutting off the legal supply, we have boosted the illegal supply and fueled the illegal trade.



How would sales actually work? What are you putting forward as a working model?

A series of auctions (perhaps one a year for the next five years) of rhino horn, using the current stockpiles of horn makes perfect sense to us for the following reasons:

1. We are currently losing almost 2 rhinos a day while SA and other range states have tons of horn in stockpiles. Every syndicate member that is arrested with rhino horn and every confiscated horn that gets added to these stockpiles spells death to yet another rhino. For every horn we are able to sell, we may just be saving the life of a rhino and this point must be emphasized to the authorities and the public.
2. One of the massive hurdles in the trade/no trade debate is the lack of accurate market figures. Many people who are opposed to trade claim that we will never be able to satisfy the demand for horn but this is something that we can never estimate until we have accurate and realistic market figures. These auctions, assuming they are carefully planned and managed with clear objectives and monitoring techniques in place, will give us the economic facts we need in terms of market structure.
3. These auctions will generate a desperately needed income injection for rhino management and protection, especially for our national parks, which are currently hardest hit by poachers.
4. If, after 5 years, poaching figures have not come down and the legal sales of horn have not eased the immense pressure that is currently on our rhino populations, we can simply stop the auctions and start focusing on a new strategy to save our rhinos. We, as South Africa, would have lost nothing at all, as the horns in stockpiles are currently worthless when in fact, they should be the currency for invaluable information-gathering and accurate data and research.

You say we should open trade for up to 5 years and if it does not stop poaching or at least make a big difference then trade can be stopped again. On what study or credible information do you base the fact that a legal trade will stop or reduce poaching? Secondly, knowing how long a decision like to legalise trade or not takes, how would one stop trade again if it has been shown not to work after 5 years?

We have a wealth of studies and information from conservation economists, wildlife ranching practices, government, educational institutions and individuals that we have based our opinions on. We encourage readers to join our mailing list for these sources and this information. If legalization of trade in horn did not work for our rhinos, then we don't know what will. Perhaps we would have to consider moving all of our rhinos into centralized and intensively protected areas, away from borders and we would have to protect them in these 'fortresses'. This would be a sad day for our rhinos and yet another failure for humans.

Who and by what means can it be guaranteed that buyers in Vietnam / China would not stockpile horn at their end and sell it by trickling small amounts out gradually, thus keeping prices artificially inflated?

By ensuring that the trade is ethical, sustainable and regular and making sure that consumers know this. Free markets work, closed markets do not.

How do you think those who are currently dealing in and benefiting from poaching will react to trade being legalised?

I'm sure they will be terribly upset to know that their profit margins are taking drastic cuts. The small percentage of people who own rhinos and are benefiting through poaching will stop killing their rhinos and start breeding them. The legal market will undercut and out-supply the Black Market in a short and effective space of time.

What is your response to the argument that legal trade will open up a new market, therefore, increase demand, (as was the negative consequence of the last ivory stockpile auction), increase its value, and therefore run the risk of inciting a greater level of poaching than we are seeing now?

It is completely illogical that anything that can be physically bred, protected and conserved would run out. Rhino horn is a natural and sustainable resource and we have over 20 000 rhinos in the country, 25% of which are in the private sector.

Even if the current demand for rhino horn (based on poaching levels and horn seizures) increased four-fold, we would still be able to supply the market. Comparing sustainable rhino horn trade to isolated bulk ivory auctions is a non-sequitur. The ivory sales were disastrous for a number of reasons, not least of which was the 10-year moratorium imposed as a condition of these auctions – this forced a speculation reaction in consumer countries. African countries got less than 30% of the market value of ivory at the auctions due to inadequate planning and market research – a clear disaster that also encouraged buyer speculation. At all costs, these mistakes must be learned from and avoided in any rhino horn trade.

Unlike ivory, rhino horn is a product which is consumed – therefore demand is likely to grow to from an expanding middle class, especially as its use moves away from TCM uses. How can sustainable farming/legalised trade meet demand for rhino horn in the long term, if demand continues to rise to the point where supply simply cannot compete?

I think this growth in demand would take some time. With legalized trade will come increased incentives for rhino breeding operations. We have a vast amount of land available throughout rhino range states. The day we reach a point where demand outstrips supply will be the day that the rhino will be doomed anyway. With the status quo and current poaching levels, that day is approaching very fast for rhinos. By legalizing trade in horn, the worst we can do is buy our rhinos a substantial break from the current poaching levels and the best we can do is rescue the species.

Taking the trade argument one step further, why not breed rhino to sell to China and Vietnam so they can continue building their own sustainable farming facilities?

Under the current status, this may appear to make sense but if a free market existed, this would be unnecessary. Neither of these countries have a particularly positive history for their own natural resources – would we really want to sell them ours? Rhinos are one of Africa's natural resources and the trade in their horn would have positive spinoffs for many species that live in rhino habitat, for our impoverished communities, for the area under natural habitat, for greater conservation measures, for the government, for the rhino owners and for the

rhinos themselves. It would make no sense at all to sell this.

Looking at the lifespan of one rhino, how often would you harvest its horn, therefore, how often would you tranquilise it and what stress and negative effects would this cause the animal?

Rhino horn regrows at the rate of about 1kg per male and about 600g per female per year. Rhinos live for about 35-40 years so you would probably be able to harvest 8 – 10 horns in its lifetime or about 60kgs per rhino.

The tranquilising drugs and dehorning procedures are extremely safe when administered and performed by qualified veterinarians. Long term effects of these drugs used in darting a rhino approximately once every 2-3 years appear to be minimal, according to veterinary studies; however, more long-term research is needed to be sure. Rhinos undergo a small amount of stress at the actual darting but once they are tranquilised, the stress factor is non-existent. It does not hurt a rhino to dehorn it as horn is composed primarily of keratin, so the 20-minute procedure is similar to trimming a horse's hoof.

Behaviourally, the effects are minimal, particularly on White rhinos and they will continue to survive normally. Dehorning rhinos also leads to far fewer fatal wounds in territorial disputes – another advantage of the procedure.

We administer a very small survival risk to our rhinos to remove a very large risk. As an analogy, I ask you: why would you have a colonoscopy? For your own good.

There is a relatively comprehensive study on dehorning, done for the EWT – again we encourage readers to contact us if they are interested in this material.

How will legalisation protect rhino in countries where ownership is not private?

State rhinos will benefit in the same way as those on private land. Sale of horns = greater revenue = better security options = conservation funds = land expansion = rhinos being worth more alive than dead = greater incentives to breed rhinos = more rhinos.

How will the State parks' and publicly owned rhino benefit if the trade becomes legal?

As above.

Following on from this question, if you were able to sit at a Government round table, what would your proposals be to protect wild rhino from poaching?

We have sat at these tables and our proposals were the same: legalise trade in rhino horn to save our entire rhino population.

Dehorned rhino are being poached now, as the price of wet horn soars. How will trade legalisation help prevent such occurrences?

Only a very few dehorned rhino have been poached. At this stage, it is far more lucrative for poachers to find horned rhinos to poach as the rewards far outweigh the risks and because rhinos in our national parks are relatively easy targets. This is verified by a comparison of national park's poaching figures (very high) vs. private sector poaching figures. Dehorning is not a solution to poaching, it is simply a deterrent. If it is not performed in conjunction with a strict and effective security program, it is pointless. As our horned rhinos are eradicated, more dehorned rhinos will be poached. Trade legalization will offer the consumer the option of buying legal, ethical, registered, sustainable horn with no risk as opposed to illegal, cruel, unsustainable horn with massive risks.

What impact do you think the legalising of trade in rhino horn may have on other species which are being heavily poached due to demand for body parts?

We hope that it will bring about an understanding that concepts of preservation are noble but unsustainable – Kenya's wildlife disaster is a case in point. If we cannot find innovative ways to integrate humans and wildlife, we will fail the wildlife. Each of these conservation issues need to be scrutinized and analyzed individually to determine the best course of action. Rhinos are one of the luckier of these species in that they do not have to die to provide the product.

Does the fact that communities are disenfranchised from the country's wildlife contribute to rhino poaching? What about a model based upon CBNRM, (community-based natural resource management), in which such communities around South Africa become stake holders with the rhino as a flagship species?

We should move some rhino 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 with rhinos. If the communities are generating a substantial income from these rhinos they would literally guard them with their lives. It will change the general attitude towards poachers in the rest of the country and particularly around their own communal rhinos.

This will play a significant role in addressing two major conservation issues: poverty and habitat loss.

If we donated 4 800 rhino to the communities in this manner and they increased them by the same percentage that we have increased them for the last 50 years, we will have 29 000 rhinos owned by the communities in 25 years' time.

In order for this model to be successful, the communities will have to benefit from it and fortunately the rhino has the appropriate reward.

As a simple model, if you distributed these rhinos to 120 communities on average they would get 40 rhinos each. Initially, they would probably get 160kgs of horn off their rhinos and thereafter 40kgs per year. At the prices currently being quoted by the media this would be an enormous income and poverty alleviator for these people. These communities would need about 600ha of land for 40 rhino.

How can the South African government do more to protect this iconic species in country, and what about the African Union? Why aren't they doing more to protect the rhino across all remaining range states? What could they do which would make a visible difference? How is the government helping the private owner, no matter which side of the line they sit on?

The South African government can help by taking a wise stance on the trade issue and doing so boldly and with confidence, without being affected by the rest of the world's views and perspectives. SA is the only country in the world that has managed to conserve over 20 000 rhinos and it is up to us to continue to do so. Following the examples of other range states would be about the worst thing our government can do. The African Union's support would be appreciated in these endeavours. They are not doing more to protect rhinos in other range states because there is no incentive to do so. When we change this perspective, the trend will change too.

The government does not do anything to help the private sector. In fact, the private sector helps the government by paying taxes, levies and permitting fees and generating tourism.

What is your opinion of CITES: what power do they really wield? And in your opinion, is the CITES trade ban contributing to/fueling the poaching?

The role of CITES is a bureaucratic one, not a practical one. CITES is made up of 175 member parties and as a combined voice, they wield power. They do not make or take decisions on internal conservation trade issues, only on international ones.

We definitely believe that the ban on trade has fuelled poaching endeavours and here is our proof:

The ban on trade was implemented in 1977.

- When Black rhinos were listed as Appendix I animals in 1977, there were still more than 50 000 left. Today, there are about 3 800 left and they are critically endangered.
- The Northern white rhino, that number between 2 000 – 4 000 animals in the 70's is extinct in the wild today, much like the Javan rhinoceros.
- In Swaziland, the "Rhino War" lasted from 1988 - 1992, during which time this country lost 80% of its rhino population to poachers.
- In Mozambique, the rhino is all but extinct.
- In 1992, Botswana had less than 20 White rhinos left and the Black rhino was locally extinct.
- In Tanzania, numbers of both species of rhino have declined drastically over the past 50 years. There were approximately 10 000 Black rhinos here in the 1960's and by 1984, there were only 3000. 6 years later, in 1990, there were less than 100 Black rhinos left in Tanzania.
- There were about 20 000 Black rhinos in Kenya in the 1960s. Today, there are about 700.

Rhino poaching figures in South Africa rarely reached double figures prior to 2008, but this is not because the trade ban was effective. This was because other African states were having their rhino populations decimated to feed the demand.

Why should SA continue donating or selling rhino to other range states, if their security is not guaranteed?

They shouldn't. But banning trade in live rhinos will be yet another step in the wrong direction. At this point, live rhino sales are one of the very few ways that rhino owners and breeders can still generate an income. If we remove this option, we are only adding more fuel to the rhino's pyre.

How are stockpiled horns managed? What happens to them once they have been removed from the rhino, or been retrieved from poachers/traffickers? When a horn is recovered from the latter, does it become property of the state, whether or not its origin can be traced?

Once removed, rhino horn goes directly to a secure location, generally a bank vault. Yes, seized horn becomes state evidence and property.

How are rhino horns treated against decay? I've heard it said that diesel is used to prevent infestation by beetles and other bugs – if true, such a stockpile sale would take place with all parties knowing the possible health risks of their consumption would it not?

We do not have much knowledge of diesel treatment although we have heard of this method being used many years ago too. Regarding toxicity, we would imagine that one would be able to detect diesel fumes in a horn and even if a diesel-treated horn were consumed, it would be in a minuscule and diluted quantity and probably harmless. However, we cannot verify or deny any of this. My horns are kept in insect-proof boxes in secure locations.

With regard to the public funding of Rhino NGOs, in your opinion, what is the best way for such orgs to use the money – raising awareness or directly assisting the fight on the ground? (Please explain with reasoning.) Indeed, do you feel that the plethora of NGOs are doing enough for the private owner, whether they be pro or anti trade?

We are not associated with or assisted by any rhino NGO's so we cannot offer opinions on whether they do enough for private owners. As for whether they do enough for our rhinos in general, the answer is no. Escalating poaching figures verify this. The legitimate ones may provide some relief of the symptoms of the crisis but they do not help the cause. Until we can solve this crisis at root level (supply and demand), we will continue to inadequately treat the symptoms. Also of concern is that we currently have about 250 rhino NGO's and periodically they are in the news for misuse of funds, fraud, etc. Many people, on all levels are riding on the back of the rhino crisis without providing any valuable contribution to the solution of the problem and in the worst cases, exploiting it.

As a businessman, how do you respond to those who argue that your main interest, first and foremost is profit, over wildlife conservation and that such conflict of interest negates the relevancy of your pro trade for conservation position?

If anyone's passion can also offer a financial return, would it not be all the more successful and rewarding? Any legitimate conservationist knows that conservation needs to pay for itself and that notions of passive preservation and wild, open, untouched spaces are idealistic in today's developing world, if the poaching scourge is not stemmed. If all conservationists were millionaires, the world would be a different place and a much happier one for our wildlife. I sincerely hope to make a healthy profit from my horn sales as this will enable me to further protect my rhinos; it will encourage many more people to breed and protect our rhinos and my vision of Africa having 100 000 wild, horned and safe rhinos again will be realized.

At this rate, with no specific policy in place, (and based on an average of 50 poachings per month), what is the future of both privately owned and wild rhino in South Africa?

Bleak.

The views expressed therein are solely those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect those of Safaritalk.



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John Hume

- private

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