

LONDON TALKS HIGHLIGHT EXISTING SANCTIONS TO BUST POACHING

FELIX PATTON



is a rhino ecologist, who writes and broadcasts about the species from Africa and Europe. He has an MSc in Conservation Biology and a PhD based on research into individual rhino identification and social behaviour. He is a frequent contributor to SWARA.



Movie star Jackie Chan with a rhino called Spike for a demand reduction Public Service Announcement (PSA).

Organised in conjunction with the London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade (see SWARA April-June 2014) was a Symposium organised by the newly formed United for Wildlife organisation to discuss the coordinated international effort that would be required to combat the illegal wildlife trade. At this meeting, people actively involved in conservation issues presented a number of potential actions to stem the rising tide of the poaching of, and subsequent illegal trade in, especially rhino horn and elephant ivory.

There has been much clamour for new and reformed wildlife legislation to help combat the illegal trade but changing legislation takes time. The Symposium heard that existing systems, if applied in full force, were immediately available.

INVOKE TRADE SANCTIONS

Trade sanctions have been found to be an effective weapon in getting countries to confront issues and make significant changes. The commercial world largely runs on trade agreements which could easily include an obligation to uphold environment protection.

A good example of the effectiveness of trade sanctions is that of when the US

invoked the Pelly Amendment in 1994 against Taiwan for failing to control the trade in rhino horn and tiger parts. Under the Pelly Amendment to the Fishermen's Protective Act of 1967, the President has the authority to prohibit imports when foreign actions are found to diminish the effectiveness of an international conservation programme. President Clinton imposed a ban on the importation of certain fish and wildlife products from Taiwan worth around US\$20 million a year.

Taiwan almost immediately made major strides in combating the devastating commerce in endangered species by enacting amendments to its Wildlife Conservation Law, strengthening enforcement activities and enabling law enforcement authorities to impose sufficiently high penalties to deter people from dealing in rhino and tiger parts.

IDENTIFY & CLOSE THE GAPS

To control wildlife crime, governments and other involved organisations need to identify the strengths and weaknesses of, and gaps in, existing legislative, administrative, enforcement, judicial and preventive systems. Guidance from competent authorities



PHOTO BY: KRISTIAN SCHMIDT FOR WILDAD

The Duke of Cambridge and David Beckham have lent their support to ivory and rhino horn demand reduction campaigns.

is essential as the issues are complex and wide ranging. The International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime - consisting of representatives from the CITES secretariat, INTERPOL (the International Criminal Police Organisation), WCO (the World Custom Organisation), UNODC (the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) and the World Bank - was launched in 2010 and agreed that there was an immediate need for a "Wildlife and Forest Analytic Toolkit". The toolkit is designed to enable any interested party to:



PHOTO BY: PETER KNIGHTS

Former Chinese basketball star Yao Ming watches a parade of orphan elephants at the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust as part of the "Say no to ivory and rhino horn" campaign.



PHOTO BY: ALEX HOFFORD FOR WILDLIFE

Seized ivory tusks and rhino horn, with a street value of around US\$5million, are seen at the Hong Kong Customs & Excise headquarters in Hong Kong, China, 07 August 2013.

“(a) conduct a comprehensive analysis of domestic systems, (b) identify areas of technical assistance, (c) assist in the design of interventions that integrate international standards and norms on the prevention, deterrence and detection of wildlife and forest offences, and (d) assist in training on these issues”.

The set of measures proposed in the toolkit should help to analyse criminal justice systems and other mechanisms to prevent and address wildlife and forest offences.

IMPROVE LAW ENFORCEMENT

National and international law enforcement systems are well established but are not being used fully to help control illegal wildlife trade. This is largely due to a lack of understanding by those in the judiciary as to the severity of such crimes. Wildlife crime has been viewed by many as a ‘victimless crime’ – there

are no witnesses to it other than the perpetrators, the victim cannot talk, items recovered may no longer be in a recognisable form, difficult to determine who has suffered. In addition, the consequences of a wildlife crime are not understood. For example, the fact that a container can be loaded with tonnes of ivory and smuggled across borders should be seen in the context that it might have been radioactive material (rather than ivory) so having national, regional and international security concerns.

Recognising that the activities of the illegal trade in wildlife represent a ‘serious crime’ opens up a series of international protocols that allow for greater transparency and the greater involvement of international security and intelligence agencies. The ‘kingpins’ organising the illegal wildlife trade distance themselves as far as possible from the actual crime thereby avoiding detection but they might well be caught

out by “crossover crimes” such as tax fraud, passport fraud, violence, murder and corruption. The example most often used to illustrate this was the jailing of the infamous American gangster Al Capone for tax evasion as he could not be caught for smuggling illegal alcoholic beverages into Chicago during Prohibition and various other criminal activities, including bribery of government figures and prostitution.

A multi-agency approach is essential and there exists an Interpol recommended programme for individual countries called NEST – National Environmental Security Taskforce – combining prosecutors, customs, police and wildlife authorities.

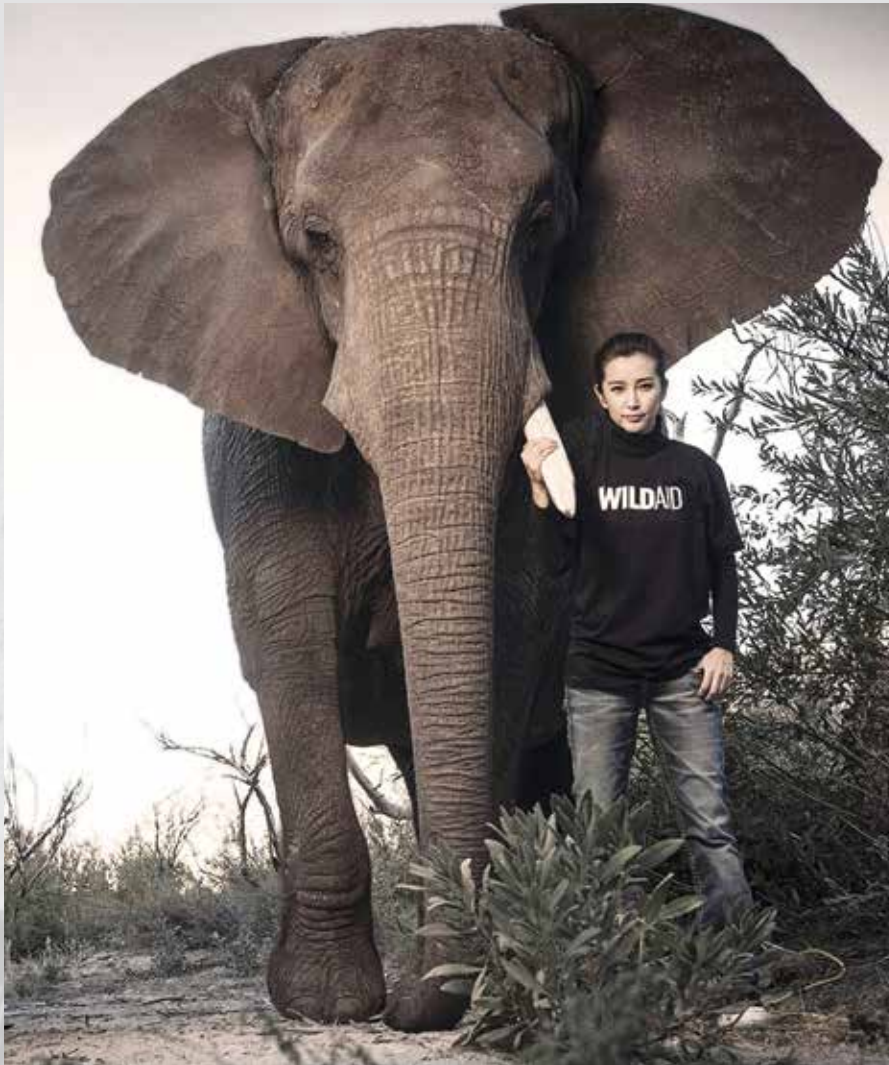
The approach has been taken a step forward by the forming of WEN’s – Wildlife Enforcement Networks – with a multi-agency approach across a region such as the Horn of Africa WEN (involving Djibouti; Ethiopia; Kenya; Sudan; South Sudan; Somaliland; Somalia and Uganda) and the South East Asia WEN (combining Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand.)

A problem that regularly confronts the judiciary is the lack of evidence needed to link a suspected poacher to a poaching incident. Forensic science using DNA analysis is a key so that a confiscated rhino horn or elephant tusk can be traced back to a specific carcass which in turn can be traced to the machete used to remove it and to trace DNA from the carcass on the clothes of a suspect. To get this evidence requires maintaining the integrity of the crime scene (to avoid cross contamination), having adequate DNA collection resources and dedicated forensic laboratories with skilled staff as exist for other serious crimes.

REDUCE DEMAND

Recent research indicated that Vietnam had become a major market for rhino horn. Recognising the need to stem, and hopefully reduce, the demand for rhino horn in consuming countries, advertising campaigns were initiated. These were based on the fact that

PHOTO BY: VERN EVANS PHOTO/WILDAD



China's top actress and singer Li Bingbing stars in a Public Service Announcement for a campaign against the ivory trade.

OBTAIN ADEQUATE FUNDING

It was suggested that much more than US\$100 million would be needed to enact the many solutions that would lead to securing the future for elephants, rhinos and other endangered wildlife. For example, the Tanzanian president has said that he would destroy the country's ivory stockpile if the international community would donate US\$30 million in its stead.

The level of funding required is massive in conservation terms but relatively minor in terms of funding for such as poverty alleviation or security. The UK overseas aid budget alone, over the next 10 years, was reported to be £140 billion. Conservation needs to get its fair share of worldwide international aid by changing its narrative from say "saving elephants" to "creating sustainable livelihoods". To get this funding, the donor organisations need to act more cooperatively and not just competitively. To be fully effective, the funding must get channeled through all sizes of organisation as often it is the smaller NGO's that are taking direct action in the field.

The two day Symposium comprised over 20 formal presentations plus points made during discussion sessions so it is impossible to cover everything raised in an article. All the presentations and discussions can be viewed on line through youtube by searching for International Wildlife Trafficking Symposium – A United for Wildlife event hosted by ZSL.

United for Wildlife is a collaboration of seven international conservation organisations – Conservation International, Fauna and Flora International, International Union for the Conservation of Nature, The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, World Wildlife Fund and the Zoological Society of London – convened by HRH Duke of Cambridge, committed to focusing increased attention on the most pressing conservation issues of our time. ●
See www.unitedforwildlife.org

owning a horn meant that a rhino had to die or on the premise that rhino horn as medicine was 'the same as chewing your fingernails'. The effectiveness of these campaigns was tested and found to be wanting as the drivers for the demand for rhino horn were not fully understood.

The key Vietnamese consumers tended to be older, wealthy and well educated, mostly business people and entrepreneurs. They wanted rhino horn to give as a gift to elderly family members, relatives, friends, their bosses and business partners. By owning a rhino horn, they were affirming their wealth and status and by giving it they were showing respect.

The information contained in the advertising was not seen by these

consumers as being relevant to them – "they did not kill a rhino, the poacher did", they were not using the horn for medicine. In addition, the consumers did not believe/trust the messages as they were being presented by foreign organisations.

What has been seen to have an effect is the use of national celebrities to deliver the message. Public service announcements by the retired Chinese basketball star Yao Ming and actress Li Bingbing were well received especially when added to by locals using internet based social media – China has 690 million online users. Yao Ming fronted a campaign to reduce the consumption of shark fin in China and in two years there was a reported 50% to 70% drop.

CREDIT: WWF-GREATER MEGALONG



WWF/Traffic advert - Vietnamese citizens are being encouraged to stop buying or consuming rhino horn through a series of advertisements developed by WWF and TRAFFIC as part of their campaign against Illegal Wildlife Trade.

THE NEPALESE EXPERIENCE

The rhino range state that is held up as perhaps the main example of where rhino poaching has been held in check is Nepal. In the three-year period 2011-2013 only one rhino was poached. Following extensive poaching during the Maoist insurgency from 1996 to 2006, all levels of wildlife crime control were reformed from the community level to the political level. A fully committed Prime Minister demanded inter-agency collaboration and became Chair of the National Wildlife Crime Control Bureau.

Today, staff of the Department of Forests, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) and the Nepalese army all share information and work together

to fight wildlife poaching and trafficking. Wildlife rangers and the Nepalese army patrol protected areas with support from community-based anti-poaching units outside the parks.

Communities provide the DNPWC with information, which allows officials to target poachers and dealers. Active enforcement by the crime investigation bureau of Nepal's police is crucial to breaking up illegal wildlife trafficking networks with more than 700 criminals arrested for wildlife-related crimes including many "kingpins". Nepal's forest law empowers district forest officers and chief wildlife wardens to deal with offenders and impose prison sentences of up to 14 or 15 years. This means that any poacher who is caught can expect to be dealt with quickly.

Nepal ensures local communities benefit financially from the parks and ecotourism not only through employment but also from sharing revenue, such as entrance fees and license fees from tour and lodge companies, with local people. By receiving as much as 50% of the revenue, local communities value live rhinos more than dead ones.

The growing rhino population will inevitably attract poaching groups and Nepal is addressing the problem by employing the Wildlife and Forest Crime Analytic Toolkit and collaborating with the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) in order to strengthen even further its approach to wildlife crime.