

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON CONSERVATION OF

ELEPHANTS & RHINOS



PETER LOW
is a farmer on
the northern
shores of Lake
Naivasha,
Kenya.



The July-September, 2016, issue of the East African Wildlife Society's (EAWLS) excellent magazine, SWARA, is packed with various perspectives on the survival, or otherwise, of elephant and rhino.

Both these magnificent species, with which we are privileged to share our environment and for which, therefore, we have a weighty responsibility, are blessed or cursed -- depending upon which side of the debate one's sentiments lie -- with growing, during their life-span, parts of their anatomy which are -- for whatever reasons -- highly desirable by mankind.

As articulated by contributors Jonathan and Angela Scott '*the sheen and texture of ivory makes it exquisite to the human eye and to the touch*'; whilst correspondent Rebecca Hodge refers to '*...cures for cancer, aphrodisiac and other "medicines"*' which are attributed, dubiously or otherwise, to rhino horn.

These qualities or attributes are what should, with appropriate management, ensure the very survival of elephant and rhino, faced with ever-shrinking habitat brought about by our apparent lack of ability or responsibility to control our own numbers. The fact of the matter

is that the composite value of a species -- be it for viewing, product delivery for consumptive utilisation, or, indeed, power over other species and the forces of nature -- will determine competitive survival, including our own.

The long-term survival of elephant and rhino is currently severely challenged by the devastating poaching menace abounding within the restrictive habitats established variously as national parks, conservancies or wildlife ranches.

The EAWLS's Executive Director, Julius Kamau, in the July-September 2016 issue of SWARA most appropriately states "*that addressing the poaching menace from both the demand and supply sides requires multifaceted approaches and concerted effort by all parties.*"

The "conventional" conservation lobby seems hell-bent on extinguishing the value of ivory and rhino horn through a two-pronged approach of, firstly, eliminating the supply of the products through destruction; and, secondly, educating people to overcome their demand for the products by suppressing their desires for the same in the interest of survival of the animals that provide the products -- in this case ivory and rhino horn.

Unless "conventional" conservationists negatively perceive and

60-70

Lifespan in years of an african bush or forest elephant

accept the inevitability of progressive species' extinction through failure to control poaching, the effective elimination of product supply will require continuous costly and wasteful destruction of ivory and horn obtained through natural attrition and the population control measures necessitated by restrictive habitats.

It is not entirely clear whether these conservationists oppose population control through human intervention (management) or whether they oppose this being carried out as a means of generating revenues. Whatever the case, the fact remains that populations have to be controlled as evidenced by the significant environmental damage caused to the Tsavo ecosystem by an over-population of elephant.

SPORT HUNTING PLEASURE

Surely economics dictate that if revenues can be derived from population management through



OPINION

tightly controlled and regulated product marketing and, dare one mention it, trophy hunting licencing fees, these revenues should contribute to effectively protecting species within their restrictive habitats.

Trophy hunting, as distinct from poaching, only targets those individuals within a population whose genetic contribution to maintaining optimum quality of that population has been achieved. The professionals who conduct trophy hunting make real, practical and effective contributions to eliminating the poaching menace. This is because maintenance of sustainable specie populations is what provides their livelihood. As with all human endeavour, tight regulation by the mandated authority through incorruptible and appropriately-feed licencing will always remain necessary.

“Conventional” conservationists believe that it is morally wrong and unacceptable for animals to be hunted for sport of pleasure -- and it is indeed beyond this writer’s comprehension that there are individuals who derive such pleasure. However, provided properly conducted, the sporting aspect remains beyond question. On the morality and acceptability issues, one wonders whether such conservationists also believe that it is morally wrong and unacceptable for individuals to engage in sexual activity unless for purposes of procreation.

Turning to the

demand side of the conundrum, Karl Amman in the same July-September, 2016 issue of Swara has expounded a well-argued and un-emotive opinion, based on what he has witnessed in the countries where the most significant demand for ivory and rhino horn occurs.

From this it is clear that attempts to eliminate supply and outlaw trade in the relevant products have not impacted demand-driven market-prices. The inflated commodity values serve to fund ever more sophisticated and well-resourced syndicates to perpetuate poaching in order to augment a supply, which had apparently already been guaranteed in the short to medium term by hoarding, in anticipation of diminishing availability of legal ivory. The hoarding preceding the most recent trade-ban contributed to the astronomical commodity price-escalation.

40–50

Lifespan of a white rhino in years

35–50

Lifespan of a black rhino in years



FROM THIS IT IS CLEAR THAT ATTEMPTS TO ELIMINATE SUPPLY AND OUTLAW TRADE IN THE RELEVANT PRODUCTS HAVE NOT IMPACTED DEMAND-DRIVEN MARKET-PRICES.

It is also depressingly apparent that those meeting the demand from China have gone “underground” or moved to alternative jurisdictions and are using 21st century inter-territorial mobility and internet technology to enhance demand.

This all speaks to the fact that extinguishing demand is beyond the realms of reasonable possibility. As expressed by Karl Amman: *“The Chinese traders and markets once again demonstrate how very good they are at beating the system and generally being miles ahead of any kind of enforcement...to protect...the wildlife.”*

In a potentially challenging ultimate paragraph Amman writes: *“...those*

NGOs peddling feel-good demand reduction tales might well turn out to be part of the problem.”

In conclusion, therefore, some suggestions for the “multifaceted approaches and concerted efforts” required of us all by the EAWLS’s Executive Director:

- Continue to insist through effective lobbying and the ballot box, if necessary, on the elimination of greed and corruption from the ranks of those charged with protecting and regulating our wildlife.
- Lobby for adequate budgetary allocations by both national and county governments to allow the Kenyan Wildlife Service (KWS) to adequately remunerate and equip personnel.
- Relegate as impractical attempts to eliminate demand for ivory and rhino horn.
- At the forthcoming 17th Conference of Parties to CITES not to be part of the lobby for a total ban on global trade, but to lobby vigorously for the full engagement and necessary financial contribution by signatories to the Convention to an extremely tightly regulated inter-governmental trade protocol in wild-life products.
- To ensure continued confiscation of all illegal elephant and rhino products (including any intercepted in transit); collection of all such products from natural attrition; and the registration and safe-keeping of the products for judicious and regulated market supply.
- Explore, operationalise and regulate as necessary all the revenue-generating potential of wildlife species -- including consumptive utilisation and

ensure that such revenues are only directed to enhancing the protection of wildlife in restrictive habitats.

WILDLIFE RANCHING FOR CONSERVATION

Finally, a mention of the importance of wildlife ranching to conservation efforts. This alternative and appropriate land use over vast tracts of arid and semi-arid lands, provides a gene pool for endangered species such as rhino in habitats infinitely more desirable than zoos. In order to attract the necessary investment and ensure the optimum opportunity cost, the occupiers or owners of the land must be able to sustainably exploit all the revenue-generating possibilities of the wildlife species they host.

The Wildlife Conservation and Management Act 2013 states inter alia:

- *Wildlife conservation and management shall be devolved wherever possible and appropriate to those owners and managers of land where wildlife occurs.*
- *Wildlife conservation and management shall be encouraged and recognised as a form of land use on public, community and private land.*
- *Benefits of wildlife conservation shall be derived by the land user in order to offset costs and to ensure the value and management of wildlife do not decline.*

It is understood that the operationalisation of these provisions requires approval of management plans by the designated authority. Let us hope that as part of the “concerted effort” required by us all to conserve wildlife and eliminate the poaching menace that the owners/managers of lands most appropriate for wildlife conservation will be forthcoming with management plans and that approvals will not be unnecessarily delayed or denied. ●

