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- commercial exercise
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Ranching for rhinoceros horn – a commercial exercise – A.S. Gouwss

There are mainly two schools of thought on how to prevent the slaughtering of the white rhinoceros in South Africa. The one is the strategy to improve enforcement and keep trade closed, while the second school is of the opinion that rhinoceroses must be utilized by dehorning them and selling the horn legally. While these arguments are fought on different podiums the incidence of poaching increases day by day.

The passion and mission in life of John Hume (the largest private rhinoceros farmer in South Africa) is to save the rhinoceros species from extinction, which he believes is currently inexorably heading in that direction. He owns 780 rhinoceroses and breeds 100 calves per annum. He believes in the pioneer of wildlife management, Aldo Leopold, who wrote in 1933 in his book "Game Management" as follows: "*Game management is the art of making land produce sustained annual crops of wild game for recreational use. Modern science and technology could be used to restore and improve wildlife habitat and thus produce abundant "crops" of ducks, deer, and other valued wild animals.*"

He argues that currently there are three sections of our community, who are slaughtering our rhinoceroses:

- The owner of the rhinoceros who gets a legal permit to kill the rhinoceros and thus the buyer gets a permit to export the horn legally.
- The owner of the rhinoceros who does not wish to be bothered with all the red tape accompanying the application for a permit to kill. He merely contracts with an illegal dealer, they shoot the rhinoceros, bury the carcass, the owner pockets the monies, no VAT, no income tax and we never hear of this sad incident again. These two sections kill mainly, but not only, male animals. It is unfortunate that some females are worth more dead than alive.
- The third section being the poachers who are indiscriminately and brutally killing lactating cows or pregnant females, males, youngsters and any other unfortunate rhinoceros who wanders into their sights. Unfortunately this is the section that is growing the fastest. Recently, a pregnant rhinoceros was poached in the Kruger National Park – she was cut open, the foetus removed and the tiny little stump of a horn was hacked off the unborn rhinoceros calf.

John Hume said the use of horn in Traditional Chinese Medicine is a culture that dates back thousands of years. Whether rhinoceros horn can be scientifically proven to work as medicine is most likely irrelevant to those who consume it as a medicine. A large portion of the world's human population uses healing systems other than the science-based Western

pharmaceutical approach and those people believe that they have the right to do so. Ironically, there is no need to kill one single rhinoceros for the consumers of horn as rhinoceros horn is a renewable resource that can be easily harvested and the consumers do not need a trophy.

If the trade in rhinoceros horn is legalized, the first two sections of slaughtering above would disappear immediately, because which owner of a rhinoceros would kill the goose that lays the golden eggs? He believes this, because a male rhinoceros will grow approximately one kilogram of horn per year and a female rhinoceros approximately 600 grams per year. During the animal's lifetime of 35 to 40 years, horn can be removed periodically with almost no risk of injury to the animal.



He argued that we would certainly not be able to stop the third section immediately – being the poachers – but consider a future for the animal where horn would be legally available to Oriental buyers. It is not currently available, unless they go through the rigmarole of killing the rhinoceros legally. This coupled with the fact that the farmers would have finance and incentive to protect their rhinoceros, will make the legal buying of horns far more attractive to the people that require the horn than dealing with the poachers. He believes that this will turn the tide and in due course we would win the war against poaching. We have to find innovative ways to increase the number of rhinoceroses and find people who want to breed them. His belief is that unless we reverse the current law of zero trade in rhinoceros horn, we will not reverse the current trend.

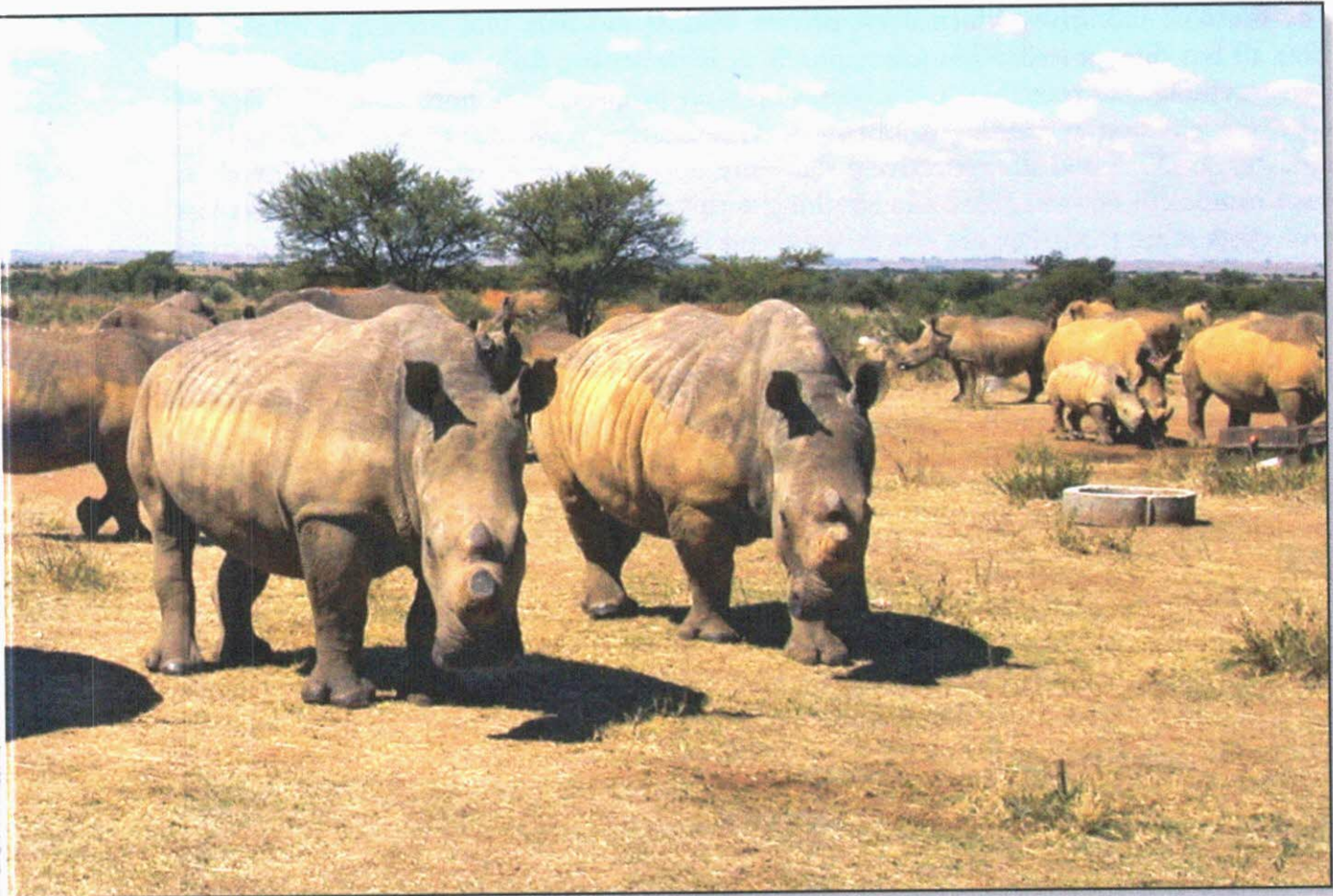
During 1977 rhinoceroses were listed in Appendix 1 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), thereby banning all international commercial trade except in exceptional circumstances and in pre-Convention specimens. Since 1994 the South African population of white rhinoceros was down-listed to Appendix 2 and this allowed trophy hunting and trade in live animals.



Hume said that the rhinoceros trophy hunting market has encouraged increased private sector investment in live rhinoceros production and expansion of habitat in the last 20 years. Today, white rhinoceros numbers in South Africa stand at some 15 000, up from some 6000 in 1993 with 25% of these animals in private hands. However, this Southern African success story remains under threat because of the world's refusal to recognize a legitimate demand for rhinoceros horn. It is unfortunate that South Africa's Appendix 2 down-listing for the white rhinoceros did not extend to rhinoceros horn.

He is convinced that the trade ban does not end trade. Making it illegal simply raises the risks, and therefore costs of trading. In theory, if all consumers are law-abiding, a trade ban should reduce demand. In practice consumers are not always law-abiding. If demand for a product persists after a trade ban, the black market supply will continue if the price is right. Many of the people involved in the trade are simply responding to market signals. The problem with price-inelastic demand is that when you restrict supply, the illegal trade actually becomes more profitable, not less.

Recent events have proven that the CITES approach is a dismal failure. The demand for rhinoceros horn is stronger than ever and is driving a new wave of intense poaching. The illegal trade is driven by the high price for rhinoceros horn. The price is unnecessarily high because a world-wide trade ban has made rhinoceros horn artificially scarce. The irony is that as CITES measures are progressively implemented and tightened, the trade becomes



ever harder to monitor or control, which leads to calls for even tighter restrictions. The end result could be the complete closure of all legal markets (including trophy hunting), thereby severely reducing the incentives for private investment in rhinoceros conservation, with disastrous consequences for rhinoceroses.

He feels the ban on the trade in rhinoceros horn has been a dismal failure and during its existence we have probably had 100 000 rhinoceroses poached in Africa. It is an unfortunate part of world politics that this will not make CITES pro-active in changing this legislation. The next COP is in Bangkok in March 2013, but an enormous amount of preparation for this is necessary and his opinion is that the South African government is simply not doing it. Thus the slaughtering will continue unless we can do something about it.

Hume said that white rhinoceros conservation efforts were driven by South Africa, which has developed a vibrant market economy for wildlife within the last 50 years. This economy rests on three pillars:

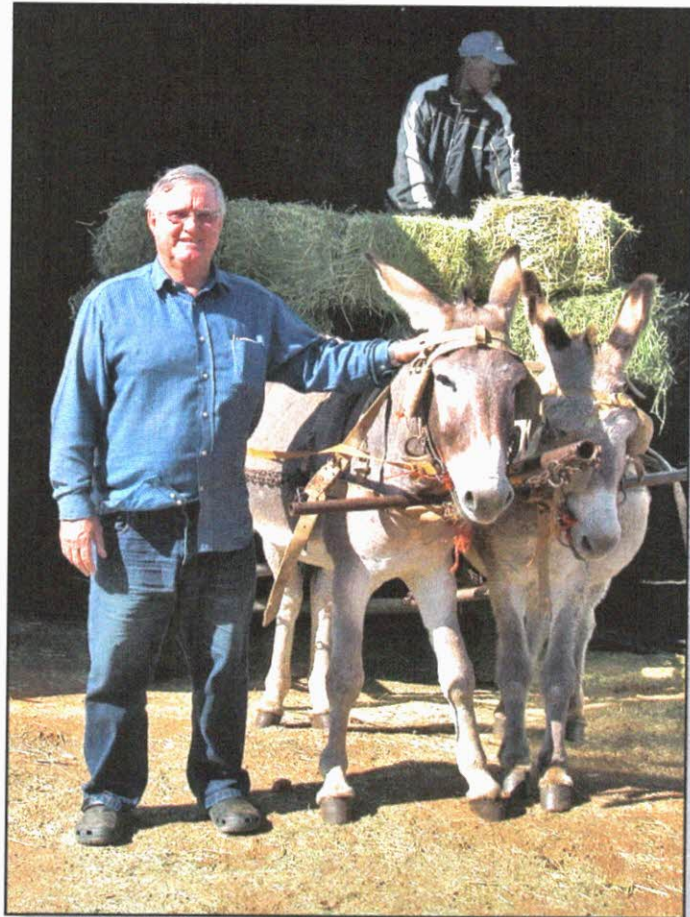
- Recognizing and actively developing legal markets for things that people value about the rhinoceros, such as tourist viewing and trophy hunting.
- Allowing private landowners to legally own rhinoceroses, thereby giving them strong direct incentives to manage them responsibly.
- Enabling all landowners (private, communal or public) to retain the money they earn from selling.

The financial incentives which drew private wildlife ranchers into owning a rhinoceros have all but disappeared. Rhinoceros poaching is increasing daily. It is life-threatening to have anything that resembles a rhinoceros on your property. The horn is so valuable that poachers will stop at nothing to obtain it. The regulatory authorities have restricted the industry so much and so ineffectively that only once your paperwork weighs as much as your rhinoceros are you able to do anything with them and security for your rhinoceroses now costs more than they are worth – the end result being that most rhinoceros owners want to get rid of their animals and would be far better off investing money in alternative species which they are able to utilize.

He believes that emerging black farmers and communities could become very viable rhinoceros ranchers with the help of the international communities that could purchase the rhinoceros on their behalf from our game reserves, which are fully stocked. We could teach them how to farm with rhinoceroses and the fact that they would have the goose that lays the golden eggs, would encourage them to protect their animals with their lives.

Currently the commercial farmer, any emerging black farmers or communities are completely disincentivised from ranching with rhinoceroses even to the extent where currently rhinoceros owners want to get rid of their animals. Rhinoceros ranchers ask the question as to why a sheep farmer can shear his sheep and legally sell the wool without killing the sheep, a peach farmer can grow his trees and pick the fruit without being forced to chop the tree down, but a rhinoceros farmer must kill his animal to sell the horn. This thought disheartens him so much that he wants to get rid of his animals. It is an unfortunate fact that most rhinoceroses are worth more dead than alive. The legalization of the trade in rhinoceros horn would immediately change all of this and we would encourage farmers to farm with rhinoceroses and empowering them financially to protect their existing animals from the poachers.

Tanya Jacobsen is a student in nature conservation working for John Hume on his farm Mauricedale. She did research on the parallel between the rhinoceros and the vicuña. Prior to European colonization, the vicuña was considered to be sacred and only royalty were allowed to wear the wool. This



Mr. John Hume taking lucerne to his animals

prevented needless killing and vicuña populations were not threatened by human beings. They numbered approximately two million animals. Since the time of the Spanish conquest to about 1964, there was unrestricted hunting of the species as Europeans discovered the luxurious fibre and it was harvested, at the cost of thousands of vicuña lives.

During the mid-1960s, it was estimated that vicuña numbers were down to only about 6000 animals – they were teetering on the brink of extinction and they were declared endangered. In 1966, a nature conservatory was established for the vicuña by the Peruvian government, with the assistance of the U.S. Peace Corps, the World Wildlife Fund and the University of La Molina, Lima. Unfortunately, these conservationists were up against a formidable force of poachers that came from the impoverished local communities and that were employed by the affluent demand of the fashionista.

The conservationists were also ardent in their goal, however, and game wardens were trained in conservation and anti-poaching measures but this was a slow, labour-intensive task and it was difficult to incentivise people with the mere offer of a job when the poaching racket was far more lucrative in the short-term. In 1975, vicuña were listed as a CITES appendix 1 species and all trade in their products was prohibited. Is any of this sounding at all familiar?

In the 1980s, a Peruvian textile company and a fashion designer played a significant role in the vicuña success story. Grupo Inca, the textile manufacturers, initiated the “Shear a vicuña to save a vicuña” campaign and developed a business plan where they would pay local communities to protect vicuña populations and gather vicuña wool sustainably. The wool would be manufactured into garments and sold internationally and a large portion of the generated profit would go back to the communities. The CEO of Loro Piana, an Italian luxury-fashion company, also saw the linked incentives in helping local impoverished communities to provide a “cash crop”, satisfying his customers and potentially saving a critically endangered species.

The combined efforts of these visionaries, the Vicuña Convention and the conservationist sector as well as the fact that vicuña numbers were climbing, CITES agreed to lift the trade ban on parts of the vicuña populations of Peru and Chile. They were listed as Appendix II species, strict control measures were put in place for certain herds and all farmers had to comply with CITES regulation but vicuña could be farmed, herded, sheared and their wool sold on the world market, without a single animal coming to any harm.

A national survey of vicuña in Peru alone in 1994, revealed that their numbers had jumped to about 66 500 animals – a staggering 1100% turnaround! In 1994, CITES relaxed the trade ban for vicuña in all of its range states and the majority of populations were listed as Appendix II species, for the exclusive purpose of allowing trade in their wool and with restrictions on this trade. Just three years later, in 1997, Peru’s national survey of vicuña counted just over 100 000 animals and in 2000, there were 120 000 animals. The last survey, done in 2007, has placed Peru’s vicuña population at 188 000 animals (55% of the global population), with the entire vicuña population, in all of its range states at 342 727 animals – an incredible feat in a mere five decades and an undeniable recipe for success.

In 1996, the National Council for South American Camelids (CONACS) started a programme based on community-based wildlife management (CWM). As the vicuña is a migratory species that covers millions of hectares of land, the Council understood the importance of educating, training and garnering support from the local communities. These people have been struggling for centuries to survive in the harsh terrains of the high Andes and traditional values and ecological knowledge would enable them to make a valuable contribution to the fight for the vicuña, as well as provide a much-needed income. CONACS organised traditional “chaccu’s”, where community members herd vicuña in a corral, capture them and shear them before releasing them back to their grassland habitats. Jacobsen asked why this success story cannot be duplicated for the rhinoceros of South Africa.