

## EVENTS

Another emotive international wildlife trade conference has come and gone. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which came into force in 1975, held its 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties in Bangkok, Thailand, from 2 to 14 October 2004.

Such meetings are held every two or three years. The last meeting was in Santiago, Chile, in 2002, and the next is planned for 2007 in the Netherlands. The purpose of the conference is to review the status of endangered wildlife that may be threatened by international trade.

people, Uganda's of eight, and that of the United Republic of Tanzania 11. The Prime Minister of Thailand opened the conference. Many species and their traded products were discussed – vertebrates, invertebrates, and plants – over the 12 days, but this report will highlight just a few of them.

Ivory is always one of the most contentious issues. Namibia proposed to sell for export an annual quota of 2,000 kg of raw ivory, but this proposal was defeated because the Parties are still awaiting the outcome of the single sale of 60 tonnes of tusks from three southern African countries agreed at the 2002 CITES conference in

now be able to take home these items from Namibia, for their own use only, not in order to sell them.

Kenya proposed a ban on the trade in ivory for 20 years. There was little support for this, so the delegation changed the period in the proposal to six years, but still the proposal was not accepted. It failed because the viewpoint of most of the Parties was that the structured, step-by-step approach to the ivory trade that came out of the CITES conference in Santiago has served the Parties better than any moratorium.

Concerning rhinos, two proposals – from Namibia and South Africa – to permit the sport hunting of five male Black Rhinos

# Contentious as always



Photos: © ESMOND MARTIN

*CITES 2004 produced its customary crop of controversial proposals and decisions.*

**Esmond Martin and Lucy Vigne take stock ...**



**'Full house': Southern White Rhinos in Swaziland (left) are nearing carrying capacity. Above: Stored tusks bought from the Government of Zimbabwe may be carved for sale by local craftsmen.**

Where a species is threatened with extinction, and where such a destiny is – or may be – affected by trade, the Parties to CITES (member states) may have that species put on to Appendix I, which bans all international trade. Where a species may become threatened with extinction unless trading in it is strictly regulated, it may be put on to Appendix II. Parties present their proposals for species, and these proposals are passed only if they receive two-thirds of the votes cast by all the Parties present.

More than 2,000 people attended the Bangkok conference, including representatives from NGOs (non-government organisations) and a large press corps. Kenya's official delegation consisted of 12

Santiago. The delay in this sale is due largely to the fact that the MIKE (Monitoring of Illegal Killing of Elephants) system is still not in place.

MIKE will probably be ready with baseline information on the status of elephants in the wild by late 2005. Then, perhaps some African states may apply for annual quotas, as Namibia tried to do this time. Namibia also proposed – in a motion accepted by a margin of 71 to 23 with 35 abstentions – to sell for non-commercial export ivory *ekipas*. These are small, button-like ornaments used for barter, or worn traditionally as status symbols by the Owambo people. *Ekipas* have become high-value jewellery items. Tourists will

a year from each country, and to allow the trophies to be exported, won the necessary two-thirds vote. The main reason given in the proposals was to obtain money for rhino conservation and to alleviate the problem of surplus male Black Rhinos.

Many of the leading NGOs believed the proposal for South Africa was premature, as the South African authorities do not have proper controls in all nine provinces, and some sport hunting for White Rhinos on private land has been mismanaged. The hunting is unlikely to begin for some time yet, however, as most of the hunters are American, and the US Endangered Species Act does not allow imports of Black Rhino trophies.

Since the late 1970s there have been many new sportsmen who have not been able to hunt Black Rhinos, thus making it impossible to get all of the 'Big Five' (Black Rhino, elephant, Leopard, buffalo, and Lion). The first Black Rhino to be hunted under the new decision may thus earn the government or private owner as much as US\$ 300,000.

There was also a proposal from Swaziland to have the option of selling for export live White Rhinos. Although Swaziland has only 63 White Rhinos, these are near to carrying capacity in some areas. Swaziland also requested permission for the occasional sport hunting of White Rhinos, and for the go-ahead to export the resulting trophies. Swaziland won its proposal by 88 to 15 with 21 abstentions.

Probably the most controversial issue was Kenya's proposal to transfer the African Lion from Appendix II to Appendix I. However, as Kenya was unable to produce adequate evidence of trading as a reason for the decline in Lion numbers, it had to withdraw the proposal. The decline is really the result of habitat destruction, of dwindling prey species, and of killings inflicted in human-Lion conflict situations, not international trade.

Some of the other important outcomes for the world's larger species included transferring the Irrawaddy Dolphin from Appendix II to Appendix I; having the Great White Shark put on Appendix II; and moving the Bald Eagle, because of successful conservation measures in the US in respect of its national bird, from Appendix I to Appendix II.

CITES 2004 was a well organised conference, but many NGOs regretted not having had more opportunities to speak about the species proposals in the major sessions due to lack of time. This is in contrast to past conference sessions where there has been greater NGO participation. Countries that succeeded in getting controversial proposals adopted spoke both eloquently and succinctly, and came with very well prepared presentations.

It was clear in Bangkok that what won votes for the contentious proposals was primarily a combination of good politics and strong emotion. It appeared to be imperative in these cases also to politic among Party states, using forceful lobbying to attract votes. Science should always be the principal criterion, but this was not always the case in Bangkok. At future conferences, good scientific data need to be accorded the higher priority.



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## An unmitigated triumph

The Kenyan capital, Nairobi, was on 1–3 November the venue of an eagerly awaited international conference on African rock art. The conference, entitled *The Future of Africa's Past: African Rock Art in the 21st Century*, did not disappoint.

With more than 80 delegates from 20 countries in attendance (including 17 African nations), the conference – hosted by the **Trust for African Rock Art (TARA)** – was truly continental in scope. Its line-up of speakers read like an international *who's who* of rock art expertise, not just from Africa, but from around the world.

Heading this line-up was Prof Jean Clottes from France, renowned for his involvement in the discovery and publicity of the 32,000-year-old Chauvet Cave paintings in SE France. On the evening of 1 November, Prof Clottes – President Emeritus of the International Committee of Rock Art, who was visiting Kenya for the first time – set the tone with a spell-binding lecture on *The Oldest Cave in the World* to a highly appreciative capacity audience at the National Museums of Kenya (NMK)'s Louis Leakey Memorial Hall.

Other participants included Prof Wilmot James, of the Human Sciences Council of South Africa; Dr Benjamin Smith, Director of the Rock Art Research Council in Johannesburg; Dr Abdellah Salih, a Moroccan rock art authority; Dr Paul Taçon, from the Australian Research Council, and Prof Megan Biesele, from the University of Texas.

Opening proceedings, the host country's Minister for National Heritage, the Hon Najib Balala, pledged his and his Ministry's strong support for the preservation of Kenya's rock art heritage, underlining the uniqueness and vulnerability of such early cultural records. During the conference, Dr Janette Deacon, a South African archaeologist, praised Kenya's Government for being in the vanguard of a new wave of increased commitment to protecting and promoting rock art as national heritage.

The conference concluded by acknowledging the significant progress made by many communities over the past decade in safeguarding Africa's greatest, yet least

known art. It raised concerns, however, over future protection of Africa's estimated 100,000 sites, due to increased vandalism and theft. It stressed the importance of engaging local communities in the drawing up of development plans, and called on all African Governments to assist with the long-term protection, management, and sustainable development of Africa's rock art heritage.

To coincide with the conference, TARA unveiled an Exhibition of African Rock Art at the National Museum in Nairobi. This will remain open to the public until March 2005, by which time 150,000 visitors are expected to see it, many of them children. Combining a photo gallery with multimedia displays, this exhibition has been hailed as one of the most creative and interesting seen in Nairobi in recent years. Museum directors from Uganda and Tanzania, in Kenya for the conference, have requested that the exhibition travel to their countries during 2005.

One of the most fascinating exhibits is a reconstruction of western Kenya's Kakapel rock shelter (*detail above*). Gazetted as a monument in July 2004, Kakapel features art from different periods and in various styles, and is one of Kenya's most important rock art sites. In 2005, TARA will be working with the NMK to restore damage to the site caused by vandalism, and to set up an interpretive centre and otherwise develop the site for responsible tourism.

The cocktail party laid on to mark the exhibition's opening brought together a 300-strong crowd – of ambassadors, CEOs, museum administrators, academics and other interested people – and featured speeches by the NMK Director, Dr Idle Farah; the General Manager of Safaricom, Michael Joseph, and TARA's Chairman, David Coulson.

At this event, the Safaricom Foundation pledged US\$ 15,000 towards the funding of restoration work, and construction of the interpretive centre, at Kakapel.

– *Précis by Gordon Boy, from a report by Amolo Ng'weno*