

The ivory ban from Zimbabwe's perspective

Zimbabwe has come under considerable criticism for its stand against the ivory trade ban. Much publicity has been given to those in favour of the ban but very little attention has been given to Zimbabwe's case.

In *Oryx* (24, 2–3) the editor expressed the opinion that countries with healthy elephant populations like Zimbabwe should have voted for the proposal to ban trade in ivory since this would have meant 'a small sacrifice to them'. I disagree with this view on two points:

1. Countries such as Zimbabwe with elephant populations that are increasing have not been given sufficient hearing. How can they therefore be expected to make sacrifices when they are barely consulted?

2. The sacrifices asked for are by no means small.

The Ivory Trade Review Group did not consult Zimbabwe before recommending the ivory trade ban to CITES (Anon., 1989a; Pitman, 1989; Zimbabwe Wildlife Conservationists, 1989). No publicity was given to the well-managed herds in Southern Africa (Anon., 1989b) and decisions to ban ivory have been based on the consideration of the elephant population in Africa as one herd. There are over 100 elephant populations in Africa, some of which are increasing (Anon., 1989a; Anon., 1989b; Zimbabwe Wildlife Conservationists, 1989).

Zimbabwe has proved it is able to manage its game. It still has the healthiest rhino population in the world and for many years has had to reduce its elephant population to protect the habitat. Despite this evidence of good game management, those concerned with saving elephants have chosen to listen to countries that have not been able to protect their herds rather than those countries that have.

Conservation of game outside the national parks in Zimbabwe has, since the 1975 Wildlife Act, been based on the premise that if wildlife is a valuable asset that can be utilized on a sustainable basis, then there is good reason to protect wildlife populations both within national parks (as a genetic pool) and without

(as a utilized resource). Game utilization has proved to be viable in both the commercial and communal sectors of Zimbabwe with a consequent extension of and protection of land as wildlife habitat. Elephant utilization has been integral to making this industry workable and to changing negative attitudes towards wildlife.

To rural communities, national parks take up valuable land, and wildlife is a nuisance, raiding crops and livestock. Their wish to eradicate wild animals is understandable and the poacher is deemed as doing them a favour. The survival of wildlife depends on the attitudes of the African people. For this reason, wildlife utilization schemes have been introduced in Zimbabwe to resolve conflicts between wildlife and people. This enables the people who suffer the deprivations caused by wildlife to benefit from the wildlife resource. The elephant, having the highest economic value, is now tolerated outside protected areas (where 10,000 elephants occur) because it is valuable and many wildlife utilization schemes depend heavily on sustainable elephant offtake for their income (Anon., 1989a).

The wildlife utilization schemes conserve habitats and wildlife outside protected areas, provide greater profits than conventional subsistence farming and allow the most profitable and sustainable use of marginal lands. In areas where such schemes have been initiated incidence of poaching has reduced.

If Zimbabwe is unable to trade in ivory it could have the following effects:

(a) a loss of much needed foreign currency due to the inability of other countries to protect their elephant herds;

(b) on a national level, less incentive to invest in wildlife protection as returns from this will diminish. The opportunities for non-consumptive utilization are limited;

(c) on a local level reduced returns from elephant utilization could mean fewer clinics and schools built, less incentive to continue with wildlife utilization schemes and less incentive to preserve wildlife habitat;

(d) if the incentive for careful elephant use is removed then elephants outside protected areas are likely to meet the poacher's bullet.

There would be no incentive for local people to report sightings of poachers;

(e) thousands of people in Zimbabwe are dependent on elephant by-products for their livelihood (Anon., 1989c).

While the transfer of elephants to Appendix I still allows culling and domestic use of skin and ivory, internal demand for these products is limited and does not generate foreign currency. Although sport hunting is not affected by the ban, there is a limit to the number of animals that can be utilized in this manner. In Zimbabwe culling is and will be necessary to prevent land degradation and to protect lives. The ban seeks to deny Zimbabwe the opportunity of earning foreign revenue from its good management policy, simply because other countries cannot protect their game.

Those countries in favour of the ivory trade ban have not tried controlled wildlife use for human benefit and yet their action and condemnation of Zimbabwe's stand could jeopardize the success of this country's innovative schemes. The belief that a ban on legal trade in ivory will help to control the illegal trade is at best naive and, at worst, could be the quickest way to send our pachyderms to extinction. Such an approach did not work for the rhino so how can we expect it to work for the elephant? A ban drives the trade underground and sends prices soaring. Since the banning of the trade in ivory in October the demand for mammoth tusks from their frozen remains preserved in Siberia has soared and there is fear it could be used as a cover for illegal ivory (Ziana-Reuter, 1989). Is the next step to ban the legal sale of mammoth tusks whose value has increased since the October ban on ivory? The biggest threat to the rhino is that the horn is now an investment for when the species becomes extinct (Martin and Martin, 1989; Varisco, 1989). Let us hope that the same does not happen with elephant ivory. We have not learnt from our failures in saving the rhino. There is a case for trying a different method to a trade ban, and Zimbabwe could lead the way.

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Galápagos giant tortoises face major new threat

During a visit to the Galápagos Islands in May 1989, I spent three days and nights in and around Volcano Alcedo on Isabela. I knew that Alcedo was supposed to have one of the most intact populations of giant tortoises found in the Galápagos, but I was not prepared to see the number of tortoises that we encountered, nor the range of behaviour that we were able to observe. In one-and-a-half days we counted a minimum of 1200 giant tortoises.

Unlike some other parts of the Galápagos, the Alcedo portion of Isabela has not been frequented by goats within recent history. However, goats do exist in the south of the island, around Puerto Villamil. Movement of goats northward into the region of Volcano Alcedo has been blocked in the past by the Perry Isthmus, an area of mostly unvegetated, extremely rough volcanic rubble.

We saw a group of seven goats on the lower slopes of the volcano—clear evidence that goats are now dispersing across the Perry Isthmus (or, much less likely, have come from elsewhere). Given their high reproductive rate and foraging habits, it is probable that they would drastically alter the vegetation and would remove forage and cover needed by the tortoises. The likely result would be major declines in the giant tortoise population on Alcedo.

My purpose in writing is to solicit advice regarding what might be done to control this problem. The Galápagos National Park is owned by Ecuador and managed on a rather small budget. Manpower, money and equipment will be serious constraints in attempts to control the goat population.

The following ideas have either occurred to me or have been pointed out to me by others. Comments on these, as well as other suggestions, will be appreciated.

1. Because the terrain is so rugged it appears unlikely that ground hunting could extirpate the goat population, but the possibility of aerial hunting from a helicopter, such as is done for deer and other species in New Zealand, would appear to be a possibility. However, there are currently no helicopters stationed in the Galápagos and neither money nor expertise appear to be available. Would New Zealand, as part of its international conservation efforts, consider sending a helicopter and expert team of shooters to eliminate the goats that have invaded the Alcedo region?

2. Another approach might be the introduction of disease-carrying sterilized male goats into the Alcedo region. While these animals themselves might have a small immediate impact, if they could transmit a fatal disease to other goats then this might, over a period of a few years, result in eradication of the goat population.

3. Perhaps even without the introduction of sterile males a disease could be introduced into the current goat population that would result in their demise.

4. Efforts to eradicate those goats that have already dispersed to Alcedo would also clearly have to be coupled with attempts to control

future dispersal into the area, perhaps by barrier fencing or changes in management practices in the southern portion of Isabela that would bring the source of the dispersing individuals under control or would physically block their dispersal.

Any steps taken would have to be part of an integrated management plan in which the potential impacts of any actions on all resident indigenous animals are taken into account. Agricultural activities in the southern portion of Isabela will also have to be considered. However, the problem seems to be of such importance and of such urgency that suggestions from and action by the international scientific community are needed. I shall appreciate hearing from anyone regarding suggested solutions.

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Rhinoceros poaching in Zimbabwe

I spent from November 1986 to November 1989 working in Zimbabwe for the department of Veterinary Services. I kept a very close eye on your magazine's details about the rhino poaching and unfortunately believe your figures of poached rhino to be way below the actual number of carcasses found. My last two weeks in that country were spent in Hwange National Park: during that period alone 10 black rhino were killed in the park by two different groups of Zambian poachers, and one Zimbabwe scout was shot (not fatally) by one of the Zambian poachers. Every time I stayed at Mana Pools National Park, the Zimbabwe anti-poaching units were out looking for Zambian poachers after butchered, dehorned carcasses of black rhino had been found.

If any of your authors are compiling information on Zimbabwe rhino poaching, I would be willing to supply names and addresses of people in authority in Zimbabwe who can provide details about numbers shot.

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