What if the emperor has no clothes?—a reply to Martin

I am responding to the letter by Martin (1999), itself a critique of Spinage (1996, 1998). My understanding of this letter is that Martin is making the following assertions:

- colonial legislation alienated peoples from their wildlife resources;
- this legislation was, moreover, demonstrably unenforceable;
- decentralization and empowerment are the remedies for conservation failure;
- wildlife is decreasing only where the legislation does not allow for its proper utilization.

I address these assertions in sequence.

In the now familiar catch phrase 'alienation from resources', lies an assumption basic to the entire philosophy of community-based wildlife utilization—that before colonial disruption, indigenous peoples practised some form of sustainable harvesting of wildlife resources. Subsequently, such peoples were viewed as having been divorced from this relationship through a process of top-down legislation. These conservation practices were postulated to have enjoyed community-based restraints in regulating resource use (Attwell & Cotterill, 1999; Hackel, 1999).

A more realistic scenario is that this historical utilization was sustainable only under two conditions: low human population density and 'appropriate' (i.e. inefficient) hunting technology. In the absence of these two factors, an African wildlife resource will rapidly be compromised by human agro-ecological impacts, unless a protectionist approach is taken. Indeed, for most southern Africans (here I acknowledge the different scenario for the African tropical forest biome where 'bushmeat' assumes major significance), wildlife is seen simply as a threat to human life or as an obstacle to pastoral or (largely subsistence) agriculture. African culture is supremely anthropocentric, as evidenced by the strong resistance to projects or interventions that appear to place the interests of animals above those of people (Hackel, 1999). How then can southern Africans be 'alienated' from wildlife, the presence of which is largely resented? And must communities now be 're-united' with these resources, given the availability of sophisticated weaponry, largely a function of African liberation wars? Some 500 million military-style small arms are in circulation world-wide, with as many as 70 million copies of the AK-47 assault rifle, a weapon used extensively by communist-influenced nationalist movements (WorldWatch Institute, 1999). Given the historical prevalence of such movements in Africa, the number of uncontrolled weapons now on the continent must be profoundly significant.

As for the alleged failure of colonial legislation, protected areas legislation under colonial (and inherited post-independence) legislation must have been effective at some level, if only to deliver a wildlife resource to the 'new conservationists', on which to experiment now with alternative management options, including community-based conservation (CBC). To assert that state control of wildlife leads 'to almost universal failure' does a monumental disservice to numerous government agencies in southern Africa, where classical protectionist approaches have met with success. A famous example is given by the Natal Parks Board, whose protectionist policies for the white rhino *Ceratotherium simum* led to international restocking programmes, following population recovery from near extinction. Similar, spectacular state-initiated successes have been achieved with the mountain zebra *Equus zebra* and with the black wildebeest *Connochaetes gnu*. Martin (1999) further claims that wildlife declines have been most pronounced in those countries where little attempt has been made to alter colonial law. Not only does he not specify these countries, but he fails to mention those countries in southern Africa (e.g. Mozambique and Angola) where there has been effectively no enforcement of wildlife laws (whether colonial or postcolonial) for decades, but where wildlife populations have been decimated, despite vast tracts of suitable habitats under human population densities lower than in other countries of the region.

Surely it is the efficiency of state control that Martin should be addressing, not state control *per se*? Martin quantifies the costs of anti-poaching measures, and then states that African governments cannot be expected to meet these costs. What he does not do is explore the budgets of relevant African countries, by providing a relative breakdown of, say, defence expenditure against that for natural resource management. Estimates of the cost of Zimbabwe's current military involvement in the Congo (a war fought outside the country's borders, allegedly to preserve the business interests of politicians), are in the region of $US 1 million per day (*Zimbabwe Independent*, 8 October 1999). For 1999, the Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism (within which the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management falls) was allocated 0.5 per cent of the overall budget, against a Defence allocation of 12 per cent. African governments certainly

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want the (enormous) potential returns from wildlife tourism, as evidenced by the third Southern African International Dialogue held at Victoria Falls in early October 1999. At this conference, heads of state resolved to remove all impediments to regional co-operation in tourism, a sector recognized as offering the best opportunities for employment generation. Despite this recognition, African governments seem reluctant to make appropriate investment in wildlife conservation, or have now 'wised up' to the fact that there are donors queuing to make the investments for them. For some African countries, the required levels of investment could be realized from existing funds were these to be diverted from irrelevant (and often corrupt) causes, including the purchase of fighter aircraft for those nations with no obvious adversaries.

Martin (1999) blithely states that 'the greatest chance for survival of protected areas is a genuine handover of control . . . '. But the promotion of decentralization as a panacea is frighteningly irresponsible, largely because it is a wholly untested notion. Without a shred of evidence to support the decentralization proposition, the 'new breed' of African conservationist (read social scientist), now busies him/herself with studying approaches to decentralization, including the nature of tenure systems that moderate the decentralization process. This focus has even yielded 'laws' related to resource allocation between hierarchical levels. 'Murphree's Law', for example, states that each level in a hierarchy will attempt to secure and retain resources from the level above it, while minimizing the flow to the level below (a thesis that Occam's Razor readily reduces to simple human opportunism).

Martin (1999) refers to 'transferring proprietorship of protected areas to local communities under contractual agreements with negotiated terms and conditions'. This is a complex process that requires third-party mediation. Indeed, I doubt whether there is a single example of decentralization without the supportive crutch of international aid and NGOs (together with the inevitable social scientists monitoring the process, and gleefully teasing out the relics and impacts of colonial oppression). Martin claims that where the law 'empowers' landholders to manage wildlife 'with a minimum of government interference', then the result is an increase in wildlife populations. But in his analysis, Martin fails to mention this other form of 'interference'—that of the social scientists and NGOs themselves, who 'manage' the resource on the behalf of communal land peoples (with admittedly the understanding—in some cases at least—that there will be some eventual handover of management). But this final step is seldom realized, and one may question the 'empowerment' of which Martin writes. In another paper, Martin (1994a) sees the (Zimbabwean) state as having devolved its wildlife management powers to individual landowners; while this devolution may be the case for commercial farmers in Zimbabwe, for the communal lands, the state has *de facto* devolved its powers to NGOs linked with CBC programmes. Paradoxically, the very bodies advocating decentralization are now themselves involved in 'top-down' approaches to their 'protegés'. Africans should recognize this for what it is, and cease to allow these 'CBC missionaries' to use them as raw materials for testing concepts of ownership. Besides, why are the voices of 'alienated' Africa invariably projected through the 'medium' of an expatriate (or white) NGO?

Referring to Martin's (1999) contention that wildlife is only decreasing where the legislation does not permit for its utilization, this largely ignores the central issue—competition with burgeoning human populations that in sub-Saharan Africa show no indications of stabilizing. Martin is further mischievous in his choice of roan antelope as an example. In parts of southern Africa, on the borders of its range, this species is notoriously demanding in its habitat requirements (Wilson & Hirst, 1977); for these regions, legislation is unlikely to be a factor in its limited range and viability.

Natural scientists tend to ignore the antics of their socially motivated peers, but for CBC, there are profound implications in giving tacit credence to these postmodernist notions. The CBC process has been given international recognition (due perhaps to the belief of donor agencies that they can perform the dual miracle of conserving wildlife while at the same time 'developing' people), as judged by the levels of donor funding. With such recognition, there is the very real danger that advocacy for total grass-roots devolution of authority (especially if emanating from respected conservationists like Martin), might just be taken seriously by wildlife departments, with potentially catastrophic results. If the postmodernists have their way, we could be left with management of a common resource at village level, a situation with a poor record of sustainability. In Zimbabwe, about 12 per cent of land area falls within the national parks estate. I doubt if the number of Zimbabwean citizens in favour of maintaining this network at the expense of human settlement were to exceed 1 per cent. If decentralization is taken to its ultimate democratic end, we stand to lose wildlife areas to human settlement. Although democratic, it would be at enormous cost to humanity and, moreover, contrary to international pledges to protect biodiversity.

In the desire to impose the untested proposition of decentralization on Africa, there is a cautionary parallel to be found in demographic transition theory. Out of the Bucharest International Population Conference of

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1974 emerged the nostrum 'development is the best contraceptive', a myth on which the West proceeded to base its aid strategies for a continent with the highest rates of human population growth the world has ever experienced. Without any evidence to support this simplistic proposition for Africa, the international aid industry marginalized interventionist approaches to population control (e.g. family planning). The results are self-evident: for Zimbabwe at least (once a leader in community-based distribution of contraceptives), fertility rates 25 years after Bucharest are probably as high as ever (despite government claims to the contrary), with nearly threefold growth in population. The human demographic transition is a highly complex phenomenon with no single form and no common set of causes (Borgerhoff Mulder, 1998), and thus one cannot use historical processes in one continent (Europe) as predictive bases for another (Africa). The African continent experiences unique reproductive motives, only some of which are now being recognized by demographers (Jones *et al.*, 1997), and any demographic transition in sub-Saharan Africa will be driven by forces quite distinct from those postulated for Europe. The lesson is clear: we should be extremely cautious of basing major decisions on untested claims.

In CBC, we appear to be dealing with a phenomenon akin to that of religious evangelism. The CBC movement has gurus, missionaries and converts; faith is a prerequisite (decentralization and grass-roots empowerment will bring salvation), and realities are denied (human population growth is not a major issue). As for any overzealous response, alarm bells ring. But it is Martin's last sentence that is particularly curious: 'only when the costs and benefits of protected areas are properly internalized in a single set of accounts, is it likely that the 'Spaceship Earth' syndrome will result in the necessary homeostatic mechanisms coming into play to limit population growth'. The metaphors obscure the real meaning here, and one is left to guess at what is being implied. If Martin is suggesting that decentralization will ultimately yield a homeostatic mechanism that will operate at a population level, then he is indeed making an extraordinary and unprecedented demographic claim. Yet I have no problems with his prognosis of eventual homeostatic control, but depart from Martin as to its origins. Martin provides no model as to how this is to arise through changed perceptions of tenure and control of resources (if that indeed is what is suggested); my own feeling is that homeostasis will be achieved through the distressingly familiar outcome of exponential population growth against limiting resources—warfare, famine, disease and the collapse of ecosystem processes. It has become politically correct to dismiss Malthusian realities, but the cost to African biodiversity will be enormous.

Given the complexity of ecosystem dynamics, it has long been a conservation dictum not to foreclose options. This is precisely what Martin's advocacy may lead us to—a state from which we cannot regain a protectionist approach if the community-based emperor is indeed shown to have no clothes. Martin himself is a supporter of the adaptive management approach to wildlife (Martin, 1994b), but adaptive approaches rely on a range of available options on which to base revised management directions. Martin is to be commended for his innovative thinking and revolutionary ideas. He has forced many to redefine and clarify conservation approaches and objectives. But his delight in playing the iconoclast may have more serious repercussions, including loss of African biodiversity at even higher rates than currently experienced. Let science rule our management decisions, not inspired sociological guesswork.

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Strategic conservation interventions: a case study from the Agulhas Plain in southern Africa

For years I have found *Oryx* to be a source of innovative thinking on conservation issues. Contributions from many parts of the world have shown that there are no standard solutions for the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems and that strategies must adapt to social, political and cultural conditions. The traditional policy of prioritizing the establishment of strictly protected areas has been criticized by many authoritative contributors as being ineffective in affording the expected level of protection, and as being increasingly more difficult to implement in the context of land scarcity and shrinking conservation budgets. They say that such policy may also abandon unprotected areas to unregulated exploitation, leaving protected areas as sinking arks in a dusty emptiness.

Accepting that the establishment of protected areas often remains the only way to protect particularly fragile ecosystems, restricted-range species and very specialized species, some contributors propose, in the conclusion of their papers, that land should be fenced off and excluded from any use other than conservation. They do this without reviewing exhaustively and evaluating alternative and complementary strategies that could be more effective and avoid confrontations between rangers and developers.

An example of such a deficiency in analysis was evident in Heydenrych *et al.* (1999). The only strategy that was considered for saving the fynbos ecosystem was purchasing land and gazetting it as a protected area. The authors stress that the 'land is very expensive' but give no information on how much it costs per hectare to buy, fence, staff and manage the area. Which country can afford to conserve its natural landscape in that way?

Possibly, this is the best way to conserve a patch of fynbos but the paper does not review current legislation (and its shortcomings) and practice for cheaper alternative protection measures. For example, why can a natural reserve not be gazetted without purchasing land (with or without indemnity); and why can natural vegetation outside protected areas not be conserved by passing and/or enforcing appropriate regulations (not only those specifically aimed at conservation, but also those existing in the land-development, land-use and forestry sectors)?

The paper offers an excellent review of the status of conservation in the Agulhas Plain, threats to the vegetation and priorities for conservation, but it does not tell us anything new when presenting the concept of protected areas as the sole strategy for achieving conservation goals. We all know how effective secluding land from human intervention can be for conserving natural ecosystems but we also acknowledge that we are facing emergencies and have to develop more complex and applicable methods. I would like contributors to dedicate more effort to the appraisal and evaluation of conservation strategies and techniques in order to improve *Oryx* further as the most authoritative international journal for the conservation worker.

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CITES and elephant monitoring

We were interested to learn from Trent (1999) that the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) has established a database 'to monitor the poaching [of African elephants] or movement of illegal ivory trade throughout the world' and that EIA is asking to be 'informed of any poaching incidents, illegal ivory trade and ivory seizures'. We were also encouraged to read the statement of the Campaigns Director of EIA that his organization 'respects the decision of the Parties to CITES to downlist . . . three elephant populations . . . and will continue to work within the CITES community to ensure the effective implementation and enforcement of the Convention.'

The discussion of this matter arises from the decision of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (at its 10th Meeting, in June 1997) to transfer from Appendix I to Appendix II the African elephant populations of Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe with a number of strict limitations regarding the trade that may be authorized. This decision was packaged together with two others, one establishing conditions to be met before an experimental commercial trade in raw ivory could be authorized and the other establishing a process for creating a system for monitoring the illegal killing of elephants and the illegal trade in products from elephants.

The responsibility for deciding when the conditions for allowing the experimental commercial trade in raw ivory had been met was vested in the Standing Committee of the Conference of the Parties to CITES. Early this year, the Committee determined that the conditions had been met. Consequently, significant portions of the government-owned registered stocks of raw ivory in

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Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe, which had originated in those countries, were exported to Japan, as approved by the States party to the Convention. Until the CITES appendices are amended again, no further commercial trade in raw ivory will be permitted.

In the meantime, however, the international monitoring system referred to above has also been put in place under the supervision of the Standing Committee. This system has three essential elements.

First, in collaboration with IUCN, a system (called MIKE) has been developed for monitoring illegal killing of elephants. As a first phase, a pilot programme has been established for collecting data in the field on the incidence and patterns of illegal killing of elephants, initially in Central Africa. (The locations for the fieldwork are not being disclosed.) The implementation of this system will help elephant range States to build their capacity to monitor their own elephant populations and provides the basis for long-term monitoring of the trends in elephant killing.

Second, the CITES Secretariat receives information on illegal hunting of elephants. This may be received from official sources (on Incident Report Forms) or from non-official sources, including press cuttings and letters from NGOs and private citizens. These reports provide the basis for short-term monitoring.

Third, the Conference of the Parties (in 1997) recognized the database established by TRAFFIC in 1992 for maintaining information on illegal trade in ivory. The database has been refined and developed to include information not held previously. A complementary database maintained by the CITES Secretariat includes sensitive enforcement information. This database provides the basis for monitoring trends in illegal ivory trade.

If the Secretariat receives information from non-official sources, it undertakes enquiries to verify the accuracy of the information received. It has undertaken to work with the Parties that report an important increase in illegal killing of elephants or illegal trade in elephant specimens, to establish the veracity of such reports (where necessary) and the linkage, if any, to the experimental commercial trade in raw ivory. (Information on any escalation of illegal hunting of elephants will, however, become more precise once MIKE begins to produce better information on 'background' rates of poaching.)

If the Secretariat concludes that there has been an important increase in either illegal hunting of elephants or illegal trade in elephant specimens owing to the experimental commercial trade, it will recommend to the Standing Committee that all legal international trade in African elephant specimens under the provisions applicable to Appendix-II-listed populations be halted, pursuant to the Decision of the Conference of the Parties No. 10, 1, Part A, paragraph (g). The Standing Committee may then recommend to all Parties to halt their trade and may request the Depositary Government to propose the return of the three Appendix-II populations of African elephant to Appendix I.

We very much hope that if any of your readers, including EIA, has information about illegal killing of elephants or illegal trade in elephant products (ivory in particular), they will inform the Secretariat as quickly as possible to ensure that, when action is required, it can be taken with the utmost speed.

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