

## Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe

### Elephants downlisted amid tears

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THE 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species ended in Harare amid fanfare and celebration from the Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia delegations after they successfully won a two-thirds majority to have their elephant downlisted from Appendix 1 to Appendix 2.

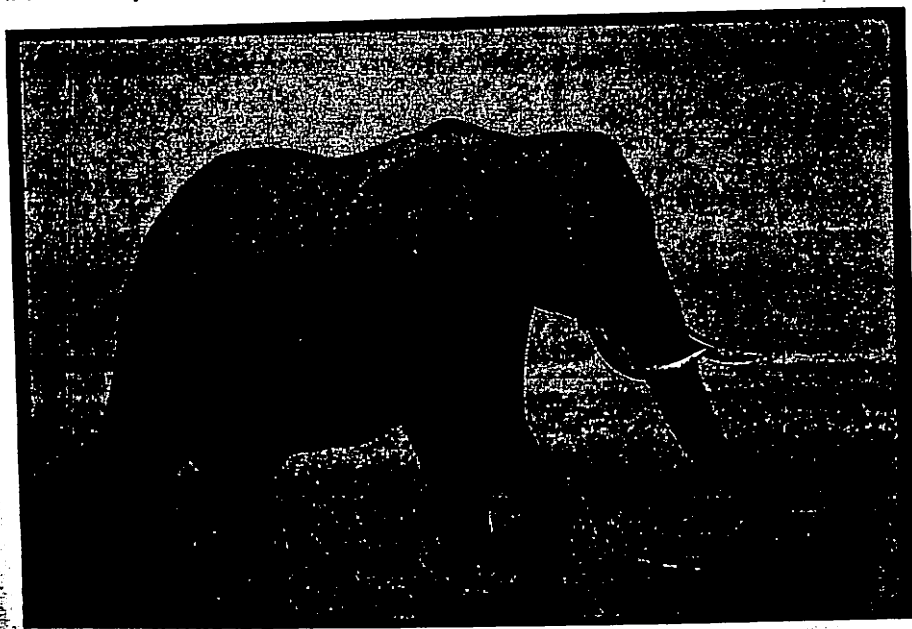
As delegates from the three parties and other interested non-governmental organisations like the Campfire broke into song and dance over the "victory", several representatives of animal rights groups were shedding tears to what they called the start of "extensive poaching of the African elephant". Director of the Board of the Species Survival Network, Mr Will Travers immediately declared that the downlisting decision would lead to increased poaching activities in not just the three proposing countries, but in the African Range States and even the Asian Range States as well.

"We respect the decision of CITES but have strong reservations on the downlisting of the African elephant. This will have an immediate effect of increased poaching as poachers prepare for the possibility of a resumption in international trade in ivory. It's actually a strong signal to poachers," he said. The SSN is a grouping of about 40 animal rights groups including the notorious Humane Society of the United States, the Environmental Investigation Agency which campaigned for the 1989 ivory trade ban with its pictures of "terrible" elephant culls in Zimbabwe and Greenpeace. It was a woman and two men from Greenpeace who actually cried over the downlisting saying "this means we are going to lose this beautiful and majestic animal for good".

"Allowing ivory trade will threaten all elephants in the world," said a Greenpeace observer wiping out her tears.

But the three Southern African countries have to wait for the next 18 months before they can start exporting among them a total of about 65 tonnes of ivory to Japan. First they have to meet certain conditions under the watchful eyes and supervision of a CITES Working Group, formed to examine their trade control mechanisms. As part of the conditions the three countries working together with the CITES secretariat and Traffic would establish an international reporting and monitoring system for legal and illegal international trade. If the working group is not happy it can recommend that ivory not be sold for the next six months prior to the next CITES in Indonesia.

The chairman of the Zambezi Society, Mr Dick Pitman, said they were confident that the responsible authorities would live up to the requirements of the CITES parties during the moratorium period.



"But we should now watch out for sponsored poachers. Any poaching incidents must be investigated thoroughly, from now on, to determine their inspiration as some animal rights groups are known to do anything to have their own way," he said.

Several local NGO's echoed Mr Pitman's sentiments saying poaching was "very successful" in East Africa in the 1980's because poachers were being "sponsored by very powerful animal rights groups".

Downlisting of the elephant means that the three, besides getting the nod for a resumption in ivory trade after 18 months, can also export live animals to appropriate and acceptable destinations. They can also export sport hunting trophies and Zimbabwe alone can export elephant hides and other products.

Although the voting was by secret ballot, the United States and Australia announced that they had voted against the downlisting because "of the concerns of gross inadequacies in controls expressed by the Panel of Experts Report".

However, an average of 20 abstentions emerged after results were announced by the committee chairman, Mr David Brackett of the IUCN's Species Survival Commission. It is understood, the European Union members, comprising a total of 14 members abstained after the representative unsuccessfully tried to have the issue discussed before voting.

Mr Brackett argued that delegates had enough time to study the working group's document and "today we will go straight to voting as we have spent a lot of time on this issue".

Zimbabwe alone has an elephant population that is twice the carrying capacity thereby putting a strain on the habitat. In fact, elephants had destroyed forests and other vegetation in areas like Hwange and Mana Pools National Parks. This had greatly affected the habitat. This was the main argument presented by Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia during the 10 day convention following amendments to the downlisting standing rules at the Kyoto conference in 1994.

The ban meant that products like ivory and hides from culling, which according to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management is done as a management tool and "not as a way to earn income" would lie idle straining national parks in keeping them.

"Now we can earn something from them and the money earned will be used to protect other species and for general conservation," said a senior National Parks official who was a delegate at the just ended CITES meeting.

Parties to CITES increased by three to 139 after Yemen, Japan and Bolivia were co-opted just before the 10th conference.

The end of CITES - is this scene of tranquillity to be continued now that the elephant has been downlisted? Members of the animal rights groups think not.

Elephant populations in Zimbabwe, Botswana and Namibia were downlisted from Appendix 1 to Appendix 2, the latter of which permits conditional trading in ivory. The members of the Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe backed this decision.

## ... But South Africa loses

SOUTH AFRICA, which through its successful conservation programme has seen its white rhino population grow to over 7,000 failed by just two votes to get a two thirds majority to have CITES launch an investigation into the impact of a resumption in trade in white rhino horn.

Populations of white rhino in South Africa were listed on Appendix 2 at COP 9 with an annotation allowing trade in live animals and hunting trophies. The effect of downlisting was to be reviewed at COP 10 in Harare and South Africa had recommended that there be a zero quota in horns.

The proposal would have allowed South Africa to investigate the possibility of establishing a bilateral trade in horn, with future annual export quotas submitted to the parties for approval. However, this was rejected by the parties, who felt that accepting such a proposal would see the few rhino in Asia being wiped out by poachers while others said public attitudes towards rhino horns had changed since 1992, when the price slumped and "opening trade in horn could reverse this trend".



White rhino at Umfolozi Game Reserve.

Approximately 133 rhinos were auctioned at a Kwazulu-Natal game auction last year.

But some delegates and observers felt South Africa was being "punished" for its successful rhino conservation programme described as the best in the world. The country boasts 7,095 of the 7,563 white rhinos in the entire Southern Africa region.

"Instead of being rewarded through incentives for its success in rhino conservation, South Africa is being punished and that really negates efforts," pointed out an official of the Africa Resources Trust.

Rhino, especially the black rhino, is under threat of extinction with countries like Zimbabwe having less than 300 left, thanks to intensive protection zones established in 1992. This was a result of the belief, particularly in Far East countries, associated with the rhino horn with some using it for spiritual dagger handles and aphrodisiacs in countries like Yemen and Hong Kong.

However, the white rhino was not under serious threat, especially in South Africa owing to its aggressive conservation programme that is now being copied by at least five Southern African countries. A delegate from Zambia said South Africa should be rewarded for its success and "we in Zambia will support them, as they helped us increase our rhino numbers".

## Members give nod to downlisting stance

THE majority of Wildlife Society of Zimbabwe members agree with the qualified position adopted by National Council supporting the proposal by the Zimbabwe Government to have elephant downlisted from Appendix 1 to Appendix 2 to allow for a controlled trade in ivory.

However, most members expressed concern at the Government's willingness and ability to ensure that the ivory trade system was not abused. They said the Government should ensure the earnings go directly to the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management and the rural people through Campfire "and not to executives and ministers".

To this end the members felt the WSZ should act as both watchdog and a pressure group.

A total of 414 members responded to a questionnaire sent out to all members (2,312 within Zimbabwe) by National Council at a cost of \$3, 886.70 in both stationery and postage. Out of these, 346 supported national's conditional backing of the elephant downlisting proposal as set out in Punchline of the January/March issue of Zimbabwe Wildlife.

This stance caused a furore among some members, with a couple resigning over the issue saying they did not agree with such a policy. However, in the questionnaire only 20 members were opposed to downlisting although they said they agreed with the principle of sustainable utilisation.

A total of 48 members gave unconditional support to the downlisting proposal.

In the questionnaire, the majority of members felt that National Parks must be fully privatised and the Campfire (disbursement) figures and administration should be monitored by an independent body.

They also expressed the wish that ivory sales be done on the open market and not just to one partner, Japan, and that such ivory sales must be audited.

The cost alone (\$3,886.70) should act as a reminder to members how expensive it is to run such enquiries and the question is should such obviously expensive enquiries be made to ALL members in future, when in fact only 14 percent of the total membership responds. Food for thought.

## No listing for Big Leaf Mahogany

THE United States and Bolivia failed by about nine votes to have Big Leaf Mahogany listed on Appendix 2, which would have meant regulated trade in the species.

Results of a secret ballot which was preceded by lively arguments for and against with many delegates standing up against the listing saying that the species, used mainly for furniture, was not threatened, saw 67 parties voting in favour while 45 voted against. There were nine abstentions.

For the proposal to be considered valid, the US and Bolivia, one of the main exporters had proposed that Big Leaf mahogany be listed with an exemption for Asian plantation-grown timber.

A similar proposal tabled by the Netherlands at the last conference of the parties fell just six votes short of the required two thirds majority. But in Harare the failure rate was higher for various reasons.

Strong opposers of the listing said the proposals failed to get support of the parties because they were too weak in scientific and technical data. The threat of the mahogany is mostly from the conversion of land for other uses rather than trade in mahogany.

Greenpeace, who produced literature worth thousands of dollars in support of the listing, said it was appalled by the rejection to list the tree on Appendix 2. They said this rain forest tree was under increasing threat adding that after nearly three years of intense logging, Big Leaf Mahogany had disappeared in some places and is threatened in nearly all others.

"Listing it on Appendix 2 would have benefited producers without harming the responsible logging companies. A wide range of scientists agree that it is being logged at largely unsustainable rates," said a spokesperson of the organisation. However, an official from the National Forestry Chamber of Bolivia, Mr Jorge Avila admitted that the listing criteria was "totally wrong" hence the lack of support from the parties.

