SPECIES under siege

by Michael 't Sas-Rolfes

In March 2013, the world's governments will meet in Bangkok, Thailand, for the 16th Conference of the Parties to CITES, the United Nations Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species. Formed in the mid-1970s, CITES has had a significant impact on the global biodiversity conservation policy, extending to South Africa's game ranching and wildlife conservation sectors.

Customs - ivory and rhino horn unpacked. **(Photo by Gallo Images)**

Staff at the Johannesburg Zoo march against rhino poaching on November 11, 2011 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The staff decided to take a stand against the illegal trade and the devastating toll it is taking on our Rhino populations. **(Photo by Gallo Images)**

Many conservationists regard CITES as a successful treaty and argue that it has helped numerous species threatened by illegal trade. Others are less convinced. With iconic species such as rhinos and elephants, the jury is still out: furious debates rage as to whether CITES is an appropriate conservation measure or whether it has now become part of the problem.
Unfortunately this whole issue is quite complicated and to understand it we need to look more closely at both how the Convention works and what makes the South African wildlife industry tick.

Simply put, CITES uses a three-tier system to protect species that are considered to be threatened by illegal harvesting and trade. The lowest tier (an Appendix III listing) is seldom used and relatively unimportant. Under the next tier, CITES Appendix II, countries agree not to allow trade without export and import permits from all parties involved. These permits are typically issued by the countries' designated conservation agencies, while customs officials are tasked with enforcing compliance.

The final tier, a CITES Appendix I listing, amounts to an effective trade ban, with the transfer of specimens allowed only under exceptional circumstances for "non-commercial purposes". (This may include the transport of trophies from bona fide trophy hunts, as is the case with rhinos.)

A perceived advantage of CITES is its relative simplicity. The rules are fairly easy to understand and follow. Unfortunately they are somewhat less easy to enforce, given the potentially massive numbers of affected species and many possible trade routes and smuggling techniques.

In reality, the average customs official probably only knows less than a few dozen of the many thousands of listed species (South Africa alone has listed more than 1 100 different animals and plants) and will tend to focus on these with a high profile such as rhino horn. And, despite its high profile, the apparent rate of detection for rhino horn smuggling remains well below 5% of animals poached.

CITES is a "command and control" type policy. It relies on a "top-down" approach which assumes that most people (including the enforcement agents) are law-abiding citizens, concerned about conservation. However, implicit in its philosophy is a Western, developed country mind-set and approach to conservation, which does not translate well to developing countries with different cultures, notably in parts of Africa and East Asia. Unfortunately, many if not most CITES-listed species occur in these very developing countries.

Customs - Rhino horm piles. **(Photo by Gallo Images)**

The CITES approach is closely linked to the United States' Endangered Species Act (ESA), which is similarly oriented towards "top-down" control of wildlife. The ESA mechanism assumes that all wildlife is public property and must be managed according to a system of restrictive rules backed by enforcement. It provides no positive incentives for conservation, only punishment for transgressions.

The limitations of this approach were recognised as early as the late 1980s, prompting criticism from numerous commentators during the 1990s. Some concluded that CITES was a political success, but largely failed in its conservation objectives. Others, such as the economist Timothy Swanson, argued that CITES provided an appropriate mechanism for certain instances, but not for others.

Kenya has publicly burnt elephant ivory worth £10m in an attempt to focus attention on rising poaching deaths. **(Photo by Gallo Images)**

Consider two extreme examples:

1. An open-access ocean fishery with a moderately valuable species.
2. A large, relatively immobile terrestrial herbivore, yielding products of high commercial value (such as a white rhino).

In the case of the fishery, trade restrictions or bans raise the cost of harvesting and thus reduce the incentive to harvest along with the harvest rate – the species is helped. However, as Swanson argues, large commercially valuable terrestrial species are different from ocean fish in some critical respects.

Most importantly, there is no material economic "holding cost" for ocean fish. Conversely, terrestrial species compete with others (including humans), either directly or indirectly, for food and space. We typically do not need to invest additional resources into physically managing and protecting ocean fish, but to maintain rhinos and elephants we mostly need to set aside land with other potential uses and pay for security, using resources that could be invested elsewhere.

As human pressure builds up around areas where such large terrestrial animals live, we must increasingly find ways to justify investing in them rather than switching to other species or types of land use that may serve local people's needs and wants better. That is simple economic reality.

Our justification for protecting such species may be based on ethical notions, but someone still has to pay the bills, even if it is the taxpayer, and all sources of funding have their limits. In developing countries these limits tend to be lower, so if the species themselves can generate economic benefits, they are more likely to be protected.

Consequently, trade restrictions that shut down markets and reduce potential economic value may be the exact opposite of what is needed to protect such species. After all, no person in their right mind would advocate banning the trade in mutton and wool as a measure to protect sheep!

The challenge for CITES is that as human populations expand and resources become increasingly scarce, more and more commercially valuable "wild" species become threatened by overexploitation. Economists would argue that stronger property rights and market institutions would increasingly allow custodians of these species to capture some of their economic value and thus provide incentives for them to protect the remaining stocks. Yet CITES does nothing to encourage such custodianship – in fact it sometimes actively discourages it.

The early 1990s gave rise to another global conservation treaty, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The CBD differs markedly from CITES in that it is an enabling treaty that emphasises the positive economic benefits of biodiversity, promoting sustainable use and the equitable sharing of these benefits.

However, it is also far more complex in its implementation and does not provide the simple framework for rules that are easily interpreted and codified by national governments. Many developing countries have also sought to use the CBD as a financial transfer mechanism to procure funds

Bied aan:

KETA PRIVATE NATURE RESERVE

3de PRODUKSIEWILDVEILING

27 APRIL 2013, 11:00 te Mpatamacha Wildsentrum

AANBOD:

(Uit die kudde van Terry McLintock) Marken
30 Buffels (Keta Genetika vir die eerste keer op veiling) 5 X 34" - 37" koeie
2 Seekoeie
25 Zambies / Matetsi Kruising Swartwitpense
4 Witrenosters
1 Swart Rooibokram
5 Split rooibokooie
30 Njalas
25 Bosveld Gemsbokke
8 Kameelperde
120 Rooibokke
13 Tsessebes
20 Bosveld Elande
5 Livingstone Elande
15 Waterbokke
40 Koedoes
12 Sebras
40 Blouwildebeeste
15 Rooihartbeeste
13 Volstruise
40 Blesbokke
4 Steenbokke
6 Bosbokke
4 Rooiribbokke

Gasverkoper:
MAURICEDALE GAME RANCH

18 Soenis
6 "Common duikers"
9 Blouduikers
2 Rooiduikers
6 Bosbokke
3 Swartrenosters

passionate about wildlife

Vooraf bespreekte plaasbesoeke welkom. Helikopterdiens beskikbaar vir plaasbesoeke vanaf Vaalwater.
Skakel Jana Britz 014 765 0264 / 083 615 7605

Verskeie Jagpakkette kom ook onder die hammer!

GPS: S24°05´419" E28°17´592"

Brandon Leer
082 570 5863

Marietjie: 083 378 8038
Jossie : 082 388 2693
Kantoor: 087 150 9268
mpatamacha@telkomsa.net
www.mpatamachawild.co.za

Maak asb seker dat u goedkeuring/vrystelling/Tops-permit en WR Sertifikaat in orde is vir aankope op bedreigde/skaars/beskermde spesies.
"Please make sure that your approval/exemption//Tops-permit and WR certificate is in order for the purchase of all protected/endangered species."
Skakel asseblief vooraf om te bevestig of die wild waarin u belangstel wel op hok is

Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) warders stand in front of tusks recovered from poachers on January 16, 2013 at their headquarters in Nairobi. With increases in price and demand of ivory in South-East Asian countries, poaching activities have increased with KWS reporting the highest ever recorded loss in a single year of 384 elephants. **(Photo by STRINGER/AFP/Getty Images)**

The CITES approach continues to work against us and in favour of those who are unwilling to invest enough directly in managing and protecting valuable species (often treating them like open-access fisheries). This includes both ineffectual government institutions in other countries and NGOs who mostly do not carry the direct burden of conservation costs, but are able to benefit from fundraising activities while conservation crises persist.

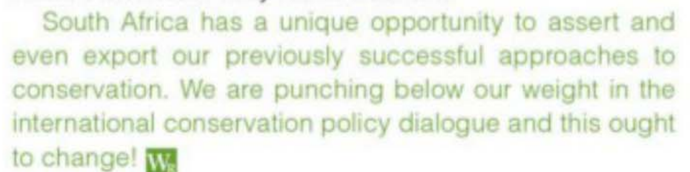
The South African wildlife industry faces a few major challenges going forward. One is reconciling the idea of biodiversity conservation management with "farming". In the minds of many outsiders there is a distinct difference between species that are "wild" and those that are "farmed", the latter being reserved for domestic cattle and sheep and seen as abhorrent for rhinos or big cats.

Few are aware of the middle ground provided by free-range game ranching and private conservation. And CITES is not geared up for this – the best it can offer is an exception for "ranching" situations, but this model is better suited to crocodiles than rhinos.

Another challenge is the image of consumptive sustainable use: the consumption of wild-caught meat (actually healthier and more humane than factory farming), the practice of trophy hunting and various other related practices. Many donors to Western NGOs are urbanites, far removed from the reality of rural life in Africa and are susceptible to arguments that nature is sacrosanct and animals must not be harmed in any way.

Other challenges include meta-genetic management concerns and an industry image tarnished by the activity of illegal operators. However, none of these challenges warrant excessive regulation or outright bans of commercial activity. South Africa needs to ensure that we don't throw out the baby with the bath water.

With steadily growing – and seemingly insatiable – markets for a range of wildlife products that include elephant ivory, rhino horn, tiger and lion bones, pangolin scales and many others in East Asia, global conservation efforts face a serious challenge that existing CITES-related measures may fail to address.



South Africa has a unique opportunity to assert and even export our previously successful approaches to conservation. We are punching below our weight in the international conservation policy dialogue and this ought to change!

Participants watch projected images including of smuggled rhino horns seized during a press conference on the launching of a rhino population survey report in Vietnam, in Hanoi on October 25, 2011. A critically endangered species of rhino has been poached to extinction in Vietnam, wildlife groups said after the country's last Javan rhino was found dead with its horn hacked off. **(Photo by HOANG DINH NAM/AFP/Getty Images)**

Michael 't Sas-Rolfes is an independent conservation economist, based in Cape Town, South Africa. He has worked on business and economic aspects of biodiversity conservation issues for more than two decades and has specialist knowledge on the issue of wildlife trade policy, especially relating to high-profile endangered species such as rhinos, elephants and large carnivores. He can be contacted on tsas.rolfes@gmail.com. Website: **www.rhino-economics.com.**

WILDLIFE RANCHING

WRSA-publikasie vir die wildbedryf van Suid-Afrika

R25.00 (VAT incl)
Vol 6, No 1
AUTUMN 2013

BIODIVERSITY threatened

Commercial value of the Big 5

Rise of environmental education

VELD-transformasie

CRIME & JUSTICE

Livingston eland DNA debate | WRSA-wildveiling | Ethical hunting

SPECIES under siege