

seized from smugglers and dealers. Has one less drug deal taken place or one fewer narcotic mule been dissuaded from boarding an aircraft with substances in his suitcase? Of course not. And I think it is ludicrous to suggest that they might have. History shows us that criminals who have their contraband seized go and replace it with more and start the smuggling and illicit trading all over again. And if they see other criminals' smuggled goods going up in smoke, they rub their hands in glee because it leaves all the more profit for them.

There's been lots of talk recently about why there has been a massive upsurge in the poaching of elephants in Africa over the past few years. The reasons are probably many and varied. But there's one obvious explanation, for part of the increase, that I have not heard expressed. In 2011, Customs agencies in Asia seized over 26 tonnes of ivory as it was being smuggled from Africa. Similarly large seizures continued through 2012 and 2013. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out that organized crime will be hell-bent to replace their losses and will be encouraging poachers to get out into the savannahs and forests to slaughter more elephants.

The US isn't alone in destroying ivory. The Philippines has destroyed ivory stocks. That is one move I would not question. But only because its border control agencies appear to suffer from major corruption issues and there is a history of confiscated ivory disappearing from government stores there. If you cannot guarantee to keep safe contraband that you seize then, yes, please destroy it as quickly as possible – the following day if need be. Presumably this was not an issue facing the United States, since the store in Colorado appeared to have been leak-proof over the past 25 years?

I also read about Kenya destroying ivory stockpiles. This is a more interesting scenario. Yes, the Kenyans have destroyed ivory but, on the last occasion they did so, it apparently wasn't actually 'their' ivory. It was ivory that had been confiscated in Asia and which had been sent to Kenya as it is the base of an African multi-national wildlife law enforcement task force. Kenya happily destroyed other countries' elephant tusks but it has been many years since it set fire to its own stockpiles. I'm not suggesting that anything improper has occurred but it does make one wonder what is going on and why Kenya's own stocks have not been placed on a bonfire recently.

One shouldn't laugh when discussing such serious issues as poaching and illegal trade but I really could not help but smile when I saw one media report that appeared to have been generated by the company who manufacture or sell the crushing gear used to grind down the US stockpiles. One almost had to admire them for exploiting the coverage to promote and publicise the efficacy of their machinery.

I acknowledge that securely storing high-value confiscated contraband, be that drugs or ivory, is costly and that, in and of itself, may be sufficient justification for destruction. But if that is your real reason, say so; do not make silly claims about other benefits. And just go ahead and get rid of the stuff, without engaging in expensive stunts.

In the mid-2000s, China promised the world it would implement a comprehensive and rigidly-enforced internal ivory trade control system. There seem reasonable grounds to question whether China, if not exactly having broken that promise, has done sufficient to fulfil it. Perhaps China could find better ways to demonstrate its commitment to combating wildlife crime than following other nations down a publicity trail that actually may not lead anywhere?

My previous postings ought to have made clear my thinking that actions speak louder than words and that the time for words is long gone. But elephants, tigers, and rhinos, among other endangered species, need our actions to be urgent, decisive and meaningful. Tokens and gestures, however well-intentioned, probably don't contribute a great deal. What is worse, they probably use up time and money that could be better-spent.

Can Rhinos Profit From Trophy Hunting?

Ann and Steve Toon (<http://africanrhino.org/author/africanrhino/>)

Recent reports that a group called the Dallas Safari Club is to auction off the chance for a trophy hunter to shoot a black rhino in Namibia, with proceeds going to support conservation of the endangered species, has sparked furious condemnation from some quarters, and equally forthright support from others.

Despite the furore, the recycling of profits from big game hunting back into conservation is not a new practice in Africa. It's viewed by its supporters, many of them leading conservationists, as a sustainable use, just like conventional safari tourism, of the local wildlife resource on a continent where conservation budgets are seriously squeezed. But how does a highly controversial approach to conserving endangered wildlife like this work in practice?

Namibia has had a policy of allowing limited trophy hunting for black rhino for some years and it's certainly not been universally popular. On our recent visit to the country earlier this year we were able to ask Pierre du Preez, national rhino co-ordinator for the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), just where the money from trophy hunting goes. What's the justification for his country's approach to the 'consumptive utilisation' of rhinos?

He explained that in 1997 the Namibian government established the Game Products Trust Fund, to channel revenue from wildlife utilisation into conservation. 'Money from state ivory sales, rhino trophy hunting, tourism and hunting

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concessions, and 25 per cent of gate fees at national parks goes straight into the Fund,' he told us. 'It's not something wishy washy, it's a proven system. The GPTF was enacted by government at the time of ivory sales, to prove to the world that this money will definitely go back into conservation, not into the black hole of Government. It's definitely worked.'

The Fund makes grants to a range of organisations, including conservancies, wildlife charities, and the MET, for use in wildlife conservation, with a particular emphasis on improving the relationship between people and wildlife.

Du Preez says the Fund is an important contributor to the Ministry's rhino-protection work. 'We get funding from individuals and organisations like Save the Rhino International and US Fish and Wildlife. But we do get a significant amount of money from government, for equipment, staff salaries, helicopter time. The Trust has a board, and we apply to it for funding. For example, we are developing an Unmanned Aerial Vehicle system for Etosha and other parks, with assistance from WWF/Google. The system we've now commissioned is bought through the GPTF.'

'On trophies, we are only allowed to shoot five rhino, all identified animals, all bulls that are past their prime,' he says. 'It's a significant income, income that flows back into rhino conservation, into organisations like Save The Rhino Trust. The GPTF is about 70-80 per cent money accrued out of utilisation, [so-called] 'blood money'.'

Du Preez argues that sustainable utilisation of wildlife has been key to building Namibia's reputation as a country of conservation. 'Just look at the changed attitudes over the last ten years, the poverty alleviation because of wildlife, and the increase of wildlife in all areas,' he says. 'Look at what utilisation has done for making areas available for wildlife. If we look at the rhino custodian programme, that programme has more rhino now than certain range states in Africa. 90 per cent of those animals are on hunting farms, not reserves. All those people are into utilisation of the wildlife. In a big sense that's where we can sit down with communities and talk to them.'

Namibia's black rhino are state-owned, but about 50 per cent are outside of national parks, many of these on private land, cared for under the country's custodianship programme. 'MET do the biological management, captures, immobilisations, but the day to day safety of animals, fencing, water, whatever the animals need on the farm, that's the full responsibility of the custodian. So a lot of the management is taken off us. They don't have any consumptive use of the animals, only non-consumptive,' explains du Preez.

It's proven a successful model: 'In 1966 we had about 60 or so animals left in the country. We had a dip in 1989 when we had serious poaching, but in the past 20 years, we've lost no more than ten or twelve animals to poaching. Now we're standing at over 1,700 animals. The population growth over the time period, about 5 per cent per annum, is quite realistic for Namibia – we're very arid.'

'Overall the population is doing very well. Our management plan says we must try for 5 per cent, and we do achieve it. Over the past couple of years it's been 7 per cent, but we've had very good rains. The north west population, the biggest outside of any protected area, is doing extremely well. We'll start getting problems as soon as we enter a drought again, but that's expected.'

For Pierre du Preez controlled trophy hunting of a small number of non-productive bulls is a worthwhile price to pay for conservation funding. With ever-increased spending on anti-poaching measures inevitable, it seems unlikely that the Namibian government will ban trophy hunting any time soon.

IUCN Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group Supports DSC Black Rhino Hunt Auction

Rosie Cooney, Chair of the Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group published a letter of SULi www.iucn.org/suli on the auction of Dallas Safari Club for the hunt of a black rhino bull in Namibia. The letter was published in December 2013, and the auction took place on January 11 2014. Here is the text:

This letter provides advice and input from IUCN's Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Specialist Group (SULi, www.iucn.org/suli) on the forthcoming auction by Dallas Safari Club (DSC) of a permit to hunt one black rhino in Namibia, as granted to them by the Government of Namibia. SULi is a cross-Commissional initiative of IUCN's Commission on Environmental, Economic and Social Policy (CEESP) and its Species Survival Commission (SSC), and includes around 300 specialists and experts from across the globe on various aspects of sustainable use of wild species and its contributions to local livelihoods.

From a conservation perspective, we believe there are sound and compelling reasons to support this auction, and do not see any valid basis for opposing it. We note that:

1. The auction is supported by the Government of Namibia, which has approved the permit to be auctioned by DSC. Namibia has an outstanding, globally recognised conservation track record. Over recent decades, wildlife

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