

## GREEN PAGES/ GROEN BLADSYE

### PRIVATIZATION FOR PRESERVATION: OBVIOUS WAYS TO SAVE RHINOS, ELEPHANTS AND OZONE

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No new or ingenious mechanisms are necessary to save rhinos and elephants - or any other endangered species for that matter - from extinction. One already exists. And it requires no ambitious fund-raising campaigns, no draconian conservation laws, no trade prohibitions, no costly tax-funded conservation measures, no policing or central planning. At the stroke of the legislative pen any government can implement it. No cost, no bother.

If this simple mechanism is used all those greedy profit seekers wanting to kill rhinos and elephants for the sake of their horns and tusks will suddenly, as if driven by some magic spell, start protecting and breeding them. What is more, they will do so eagerly and willingly . . . entirely at their own cost.

Utopian? Yes. Unrealistic? No.

The mechanism is as old as trade itself. It is the market mechanism. It has many advantages over other proposals. We know it will not fail us because it has been thoroughly tried and tested. It has an impeccable track record, spanning many centuries. All the alternatives suggested so far have either never been tried or have already proved to be miserable, costly failures.

Parallel to the headline grabbing hysteria regarding the black rhino and African elephant is a more reasoned debate as to whether they are endangered in any real sense. In the African countries with the most draconian laws against private ownership, slaughter, and trade of wild animals, their numbers are indeed diminishing rapidly. But research shows that although their aggregate numbers may be decreasing, the numbers of rhino,

elephant and other "endangered" species are increasing in countries that allow private ownership of game, and trade in skin, ivory and rhino horn, such as Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Moreover some animals are being slaughtered on a much vaster scale than any endangered species, and yet their numbers keep multiplying, (even to the extent that many governments have adopted expensive schemes to *reduce* their numbers). Ingenious technologies have been invented for slaughtering thousands of crocodiles and minks and millions of cattle, sheep, goats, chickens, pigs, rabbits, horses and turkeys. And the faster they are slaughtered, the more feverishly and plentifully they are bred - that is, in countries using the market mechanism.

The simple solution then is to decriminalize rhino and elephant farming; decriminalize trade in existing and potential rhino and elephant products, and, presto, there will be rhino and elephant ranches in Texas, Argentina and Australia, not to mention South Africa, Zimbabwe, Taiwan, and the Ivory Coast, the latter having derived its very name from its natural suitability for such purposes.

Now this may not sound very romantic. After all, don't we all want the thrill of seeing (or thinking about) a rare, preferably "endangered" animal in the African bush? Wouldn't it spoil our fun to have rhino horn and elephant tusk prices quoted daily on the Chicago Commodities Exchange, or to have such spectacular creatures herded into the City Deep abattoir off a SATS railway truck?

If so we must recognize that it is for the selfish interests of a few wildlife lovers that the "romantic" animals are deliberately endangered by not being privatized and deregulated. Presumably a humble lamb going to the slaughter feels much the same way about the matter as a majestic elephant. Unless, we accept the justification once offered for the ghastly killing of crayfish by tossing them in boiling water: "Oh, they're used to dying that way."

The tragedy is that at present, in most countries, the absence of a free or near-free market means that it is in the self interest of virtually all interested people to slaughter rather than to protect or breed elephant and rhino. Commercial farming is allowed, so the self-interest of a farmer is to shoot wild animals that roam on his farm because they will damage his crops, or graze his pasturage. Furthermore, thanks to the ever-growing artificial shortage that has been created by the misguided "conservation" measures in most countries, he can get outrageous prices for the horns, tusks and hides.

Poachers have no effective competition in a market where "conservationists" drive prices up, and because most governments are so hopeless at wildlife management, it is in the ever-increasing self-interest of poachers to poach. As the artificial shortage of finished products in the market place gets worse and prices get driven ever higher, it will be in the interests of more and more hardened criminals to enter the market. The devil himself could not have invented a more diabolical plot against an endangered species.

There are many ways to harness the unique magic of the market mechanism. If you are half-normal you will at first be shocked by some of them. First prize is to free the market completely. Rhinos and elephants could then be farmed the world over in much the same way that any other animals are farmed. Animal husbandry will produce super tuskers and docile rhinos, with fast-growing horns, and that eat less. After all, rhino horns are just hair which could be harvested, like sheep are sheared. It is necessary to kill the poor things only when they have to be poached. Live tuskless elephants and hornless rhinos could be sold to game parks, private game reserves and zoos at historically low prices.

For those, like me, who like to see big horns and tusks, there are a number of possibilities. Imitation horns or tusks made of resin, fiberglass, or plastic, could be fitted. By now you might be prepared for anything, so consider the tongue-in-cheek possibility that these could even carry the logo of conservation-conscious advertisers who sponsor the artificial tusk/horn industry. You may be forgiven for thinking that "this is going too far", but it does serve to remind us that such objections arise when most people place their own selfish interests above those of the animals whose interests they purport to have at heart. Presumably our animal friends would sooner be alive than dead or unborn, and they would be indifferent to what their horns or tusks are made of, or whether they carry a Shell or a Sierra Club logo . . . as long as they can be used for whatever nature intended them.

If all this and the many other possibilities that markets provide is just too much for our delicate sensibilities - which the market would itself reveal - we could derive our joy from the knowledge that the animals are alive precisely because they have been dehorned and detusked. The best, if not the only way to establish where peoples' real priorities lie is by way of the preferences they reveal in a maximally free market. In particular the market has the unique ability to satisfy widely divergent needs simultaneously.

Either way, our hapless friends would be out of harm's way, in no further danger of being poached. The world's aesthetic and potency needs would have been met lawfully at low prices. New unforeseen by-products would come to the market. Who knows, one day there might be a Dairy Board promotion on rhino and elephant milk. Restaurants might offer tenderized rhino steaks or delicately spiced *olifantwors*. All this would have been achieved painlessly. There would have been no losers except of course those influential few who have a vested interest in the problem as opposed to the solution.

The most counterproductive acts of ignorance, malice and/or stupidity are when "the authorities" in various countries burn millions of dollars worth of horns and tusks. But for their tragic economic illiteracy, they would realize that the very worst thing they can do is to increase the shortage, thereby driving up the price. Were they to flood the market with the stuff, they would drive prices down. This would in turn reduce poaching. I sometimes wonder whether the explanation for all this obvious insanity amongst supposedly intelligent people might not be due to them having been bribed by rival poachers.

Some readers will have remembered the reference to ozone in this article's title and will be wondering where it comes in. Well, we might not yet know how best to privatize the ozone layer, but we do know that there can be no bona-fide excuse for continuing to endanger rhinos, elephants and other species by excluding the very people who would be the most willing and able to breed and protect them. As long as elephant markets are outlawed, elephants will be the victims of outlaws.

As far as ozone and other environmental problems are concerned, there is a growing body of sophisticated opinion and literature showing that interventionist "solutions" do not only tend to be worse than the problems, but that government interventions cause most of the problems in the first place. There are compelling arguments for market or market-related solutions to virtually all environmental problems. Usually they are as simple as the solutions to most problems, that is, to eliminate the causes.

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