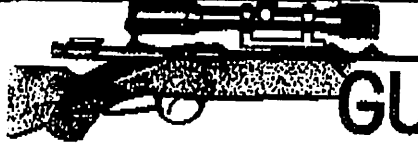


Date 1991 8. 16.

FARMERS WEEKLY



GUN TALK

by CHRIS NEL

LEGAL RHINO HUNTING?

WRITING in the June 1991 issue of *The Rhino and Elephant Journal*, the internationally renowned conservationist, author and artist Clive Walker asks whether the trade of rhino horn in Africa should be legalised.

This is an interesting and thought-provoking question.

Banning its trade has failed to prevent the decimation of rhino populations, he contends. Perhaps it is time to consider what legalising the trade might achieve?

In terms of the CITES convention, international trade in rhino horn and other products has been banned for the past 15 years.

The black market trade is flourishing, driven by a seemingly insatiable demand for rhino horn (for ceremonial Yemeni daggers and aphrodisiacs for Eastern potentates).

And this while the battle to save the rhino rages on, even in the form of para-military operations in certain countries north of us, where armed poachers are shot on sight.

In the Transvaal and Orange Free State, heavy new penalties for illegal trade in or possession of unworked ivory or rhino horn have recently been announced.

A maximum fine of R100 000 or imprisonment of up to 10 years or both now face rhino and elephant poachers or smugglers.

In Namibia, penalties are even heavier, with fines of up to R200 000 or 20 years' imprisonment.

Laudable as these measures may be, by themselves they will have little effect on reducing the long term rot.

But what they certainly do is to increase the risks and dangers, the black market price of

the goods, the chances people will be prepared to take and the eventual rewards of success.

It will also make the poachers and smugglers more desperate not to be brought to book, with greatly increased danger to the already hazardous work of conservation and law enforcement personnel.

Unfortunately, too, the potential for corruption lies simmering just below the surface in any human venture where big money and big risk is involved.

Ban an activity or a commodity, and you automatically stimulate demand. Something can't be controlled by banning it; only by creating a framework within which it can be legalised.

It is equally unrealistic to believe that because Western conservationists correctly perceive the rhino to be endangered, the Orient should automatically follow suit. Because we are perhaps barking up the wrong tree, says Clive Walker.

Were the possession of, and trade in, rhino horn to be made legal, a whole new situation would come into being in which the rhino would gain its rightful place in the modern world.

The conservation and sustained economic utilisation of viable rhino populations would become as acceptable as other more established forms of game ranching.

Excessive numbers could be culled by trophy hunting; non-trophy and non-tourism animals could be darted every few years and their horns harvested.

As these consist of nothing more than a mass of compacted hair, this operation would be painless and the horn will in time grow out

again.

In an article in *Endangered Wildlife*, economist Mike 'I Sas-Rolles suggests that a legal market for rhino horn would solve most other problems.

Supplies accumulated by conservation authorities in past years could be auctioned off slowly, to keep the market partially satisfied, while gaining top prices, making the gradual phasing in of rhino horn production possible.

But it would be foolish, he points out, to try and flood a large market about which very little is known.

"An unrestricted market in rhino goods and services would provide society with an optimum number of live rhino in game reserves, rhino horns and rhino trophies.

"All that is required is a legalised market and the recognition and protection of private property rights on rhinos by government."

Recently, the Natal Parks Board approached CITES to sound out world opinion on the matter.

In June 1989, a workshop convened by the KwaZulu Bureau of Natural Resources and attended by senior members of various government conservation bodies had adopted a resolution.

This requests the Rhino and Elephant Foundation to take the initiative in investigating the viability of legal trade in rhino horn, to reverse the present unacceptable situation where rhino are heavily poached for exorbitant profits.

South Africa currently protects 20 percent of all black rhino and 90 percent of all white rhino in Africa.

Populations are arguably in sufficiently good shape to allow limited sustainable economic utilisation.

With black rhino having been for the first time recently acquired by dedicated conservationists in the private sector, the scene is set for a new deal which eliminates middlemen and poachers while the proceeds go to conservation.

"It is surely not in the best interest of rhino horn traders to see the rhino becoming extinct," Mr Walker concludes. "I believe that they too, given the option, would become involved in finding a lasting solution."

1991 5. - 7.

NATAL WITNESS

Saving the elephant

tics in Zambia of the ban on ivory trade appear have won the day, as the country moves to join her southern African nations in co-operative marketing of elephant products. The example of mababwe, where elephant numbers are increasing and culling for ivory is controlled by the state, may be the best way to beat the poachers after all.

It is estimated that elephant poaching loses mababwe up to \$100 million each year. A similar amount is thought to be lost through the slaughter of other species. The killing continues despite a ban on the trading of ivory, and the prices of those who are critics of the ban appear to be gaining ground. Zambia has now joined with four other members of the Southern Africa Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) — Zimbabwe, Malawi, Namibia and Botswana — to form a marketing authority for elephant products.

The critics have been asking whether, in the absence of an effective anti-poaching campaign, it is right to pretend that the ban might be saving targeted and dwindling species like elephant and rhinoceros. Prominent among these critics are those who believe that a programme of selective culling, as in Zimbabwe, is a correct course, and one that will help ensure elephant survival through motivated self-interest.

Dr Richard Bell, co-ordinator of the International Resource Department Project (IRDP) in the Angwa Valley wildlife area, says Zambia would have earned \$1 billion "to help pay for its billion foreign debt" over the last 10 years if elephant culling alone. Instead, the money has gone to poachers.

Said one supporter of culling: "It is bad enough that we have saved neither that money nor the elephant, but it's worse to continue thinking that our actions are correct when in actual fact the poachers continue to deplete endangered species."

Richard Bell's research indicates that mababwe's elephant population is down to 100-200,000 animals, and facing a poaching onslaught becoming steadily more sophisticated and desperate. Automatic and semi-automatic weapons are being used against animals

The dying giant



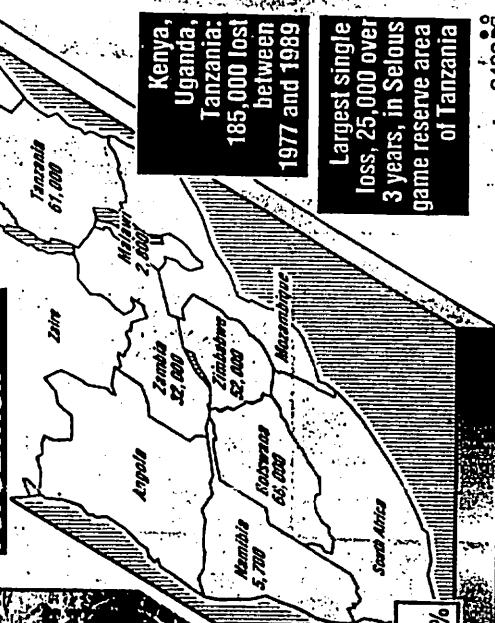
Victim of poaching

1977-87 elephant population declined by 8.3% per year

Since worsened to 21% per year

Botswana and Zimbabwe saw annual increases in elephant population of 9.7-15%

KNOWN ELEPHANT POPULATION



and game rangers alike. In the 10 years to 1985, Bell estimates, an astounding 100,000 elephants were slaughtered. The rhino population is down from around 1,500 in 1981 to an estimated 100. This may not be enough to regenerate the population.

Countries in Africa with the remnants of the once-great elephant herds are fundamentally split on which is the best method of conservation. One group, led by Kenya, supports a total ban on the trade in ivory through the 1989 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and has been prepared to back that up with action against poachers that has at times resembled civil war.

Kenya's director of wildlife, Dr Richard Leakey, reported recently a record of success against poaching and the beginnings of a regeneration of the elephant population. The Zim-

sions between Zimbabwe and Zambia. In the past few years 30 Zambians have been killed as poachers by game rangers in Zimbabwe, particularly in the Zambezi Valley. There was even a slogan in Zimbabwe, coined as a bitter joke: "Save an elephant, shoot a Zambian."

At one stage, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia demanded an explanation from President Robert Mugabe over allegations from Harare that some Zambian leaders were involved in sending poachers across the Zambezi into Zimbabwe. Poaching is still a problem of plague proportions in Zambia itself. Recent reports told of running gun battles between poachers and police in North Western Province, resulting in several deaths. The police claim they are outgunned by the poachers' superior weaponry.

It was also disclosed recently that some security officers had been supplying poachers with Soviet AK47 weapons. Said Dr Patrick Chipungu, Director of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS): "Some senior security officers are involved. They must stop to save our wildlife."

More than \$5 million of local and international donor funds have been poured into Zambia's wildlife conservation programmes in the past few years. Organisations including the World Wildlife Fund and NORAD, the Norwegian aid agency, have pledged about the same amount over the next four years.

The government, meanwhile, trained an extra 250 game scouts last year. It is also overhauling its moribund National Resources Conservation Act, transforming it into the Environmental Protection and Pollution Control Act and allocating \$190,000 for ground work and setting up nine inspectorates to deal with specific issues of conservation development. A major purpose is to give state agencies more teeth to cope with the poaching scourge, which until now has been almost beyond reach.

• Elias Nyakutemba has worked with the Zambian Information Service since 1974. He contributes to regional newspapers, magazines and national radio.

© Gemini News.