

# Rhino Poaching, Zimbabwe

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Zimbabwe's black rhino population, as readers of PACHYDERM may have noted, is now the second largest in Africa. The country is also conspicuous as the only one in which rhino numbers have actually increased over recent years—a happy situation that may not last very much longer in the light of recent developments...

The majority of this population is concentrated in a relatively small area: the Middle Zambezi Valley, a protected wildlife complex consisting of one national park and several safari areas that lies downstream of the Kariba dam and extends east almost to the Mocimboa border.

Until this year it had escaped the kind of commercial rhino-horn poaching that has plagued the Luangwa Valley, a few hundred kilometres to the north, and that has virtually annihilated the species elsewhere on the continent.

However, reports indicate that rhino have become shy and difficult to hunt in these other areas because of heavy poaching. Meanwhile, the Middle Zambezi Valley has a 200km river frontage that also forms the Zimbabwe-Zambian border. It has a dense black rhino population that has not been hunted for several decades: in many parts of the region, such as the Mana Pools National Park, the rhino have become well accustomed to the presence of humans, both on foot and in vehicles. As a result, both the Valley and its animals are highly vulnerable and difficult to police effectively with the limited finance and manpower available to the Zimbabwean Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management.

It therefore came as no surprise to local conservationists to learn, in January this year, that an armed gang had crossed into Zimbabwe from Zambia and killed three female black rhinos. This marked the beginning of a series of incursions that has so far accounted for 25 animals; in every case the horns have been removed and the rest of the carcass left to rot. Though possibly minimal by the standards of the slaughter elsewhere, the incursions have been deeply worrying to both professional and amateur conservationists: they may well presage a concerted and extremely damaging attack on one of the few viable black rhino populations still left in Africa.

The poachers—who have been armed with hunting rifles—chose the first good rains in several years to make their move. Many tracks had become impassable; tall grass and dense vegetation offered easy concealment; spoor was quickly washed out by heavy rain, making follow-ups difficult or impossible.

Government agencies reacted with commendable speed. All available National Parks staff were immediately drafted into the Valley and deployed on patrols. They were later reinforced by elements of the police and other armed forces. This had the effect of slowing the rate of the incursions—but not of halting them altogether. Early in June, well after the rains had ended, two rhino were killed in one morning by a gang that entered and left Zimbabwe within hours. At the same time another gang was thought to be hiding somewhere within the wildlife area.

So far several Zambian nationals have been arrested, together with five heavy-calibre sporting rifles, ammunition, and a quantity of rhino horn. A few weeks ago another poacher was shot and killed in a contact with Parks staff. However, they are mostly small fry: during their trial in Zimbabwe, the Zambians often maintained that they were merely “porters” and even that they did not know they were in Zimbabwe. Meanwhile several more poachers escaped across the Zambezi: at the time of writing, efforts to persuade the Zambian government to return them for trial, and to move against people believed to be behind the poaching outbreak, have failed to produce visible results.

The ultimate answer?—an end to the international rhino horn trade

and a halt to its use in the Yemen and the Far East—seems to lie a long way off. It is at least likely that the Zimbabwean horn is travelling northwards through Africa and ending up as djambia-handles in the Yemen: but a Far Eastern connection cannot be ruled out. Members of at least one foreign embassy have approached Zimbabwean parks staff for rhino horn, which indicates that the potential for illicit trade already exists within the country.

Thus the Department of National Parks is thrown back on the admittedly unsatisfactory need to combat poaching on the ground. Historically the Valley has been lightly manned and the Department has, to some extent, relied on the presence of safari hunters and tourists in many areas to deter poaching incursions. But the hunting season lasts only from April to September; and it is unrealistic to expect that the police and armed forces now deployed will be able to remain in the Valley for an indefinite period.

The Zimbabwean government has announced its intention of reinforcing the Parks presence in the Zambezi Valley and of creating specialised anti-poaching units to cover the region. However, as the country is still recovering from three years of drought and a global recession, and still has to devote a lot of time and effort to combatting dissident activities in the troubled Matabeleland province, it may be unrealistic to expect overnight results.

One part-answer, which may ease the financial strain, may lie in the provision of equipment such as four-wheel-drive vehicles, radios, weapons and camping gear by outside agencies. SAVE, of New York, has already made moves to help in this regard; and the local Zambezi Society has offered to initiate a co-ordinated fund and equipment-raising campaign in tandem with the Zimbabwean Wildlife Society and the National Conservation Trust.

## Zimbabwe Hits Back

Two poachers have been shot and killed in the Zambezi Valley so far this year. Another two have been wounded and six arrested during a series of contacts—some involving exchanges of fire—during the period from January to June.

National Parks patrols, aided by the police, have impounded five hunting rifles, all Winchester and Brno .375's and have also confiscated fourteen rhino horns in addition to those recovered by SRT in Zambia.

Several men have already appeared in court. Three have so far been convicted of offences including illegal hunting and the carrying of unlicensed weapons. One has been ordered to pay \$5 000 in compensation—the current “book value” of a rhinoceros—to the Zimbabwe government.

Their defences often included an avowed ignorance of the location of the Zimbabwe-Zambian border, and of the aim of the incursions. Others insisted that they “had only come across for the day” to act as porters.

Such explanations got short shrift because the kilometre-wide Zambezi forms the international border at this point—and because the parties carried sacks of bread, maize meal, cooking pots, torches and skinning knives as well as the Brnos and Winchesters used to kill the rhinos.

Thus far, sentences have averaged two years per man—criticised as “derisory” in some quarters. However, Parks officials have expressed reasonable satisfaction: those so far convicted are relatively minor offenders. Three others, accused of killing three rhinos each, have been remanded for what are likely to be much heavier sentences.

Another part-answer lies in a continuing scheme to translocate a number of black rhino from the Zambezi Valley into less vulnerable areas such as the Hwange National Park, where they were shot out by hunters early in the present century and are now slowly rebuilding their former strength.

Whatever the solution may be, local opinion is adamant that concerted action should not be delayed until matters reach crisis proportions. Hopefully, government will be able to provide the necessary manpower and financial muscle. Otherwise, the creation of a non-governmental agency along the lines of Zambia's Save the Rhino Trust may have to be considered. In either case, there is no time for lengthy debates: a renewed onslaught during the 1985-86 rains seems virtually certain.

Another vital matter concerns international co-operation. Although some Zimbabwean rhino horn was recovered by Zambia's SRT road-blocks on the Chirundu-Lusaka road—which crosses the heart of the

Zambezi Valley – there has been no concerted effort to help Zimbabwean investigators in tracking down and arresting the Zimbabwean links in the chain, in spite of some very high-level diplomatic and other approaches. Once again, without this co-operation Zimbabwe is forced to rely exclusively on heavy ground patrols and cannot capitalise on the information it gleans from the sacrificial pawns it arrests in the Zambezi Valley.

With prices for rhino horn soaring over the \$10 000 per kilogram mark in its ultimate markets, high risks can bring high rewards. Increasing sophistication and indeed aggression, both by poachers on the ground and by middle-men further up the chain, needs both dedication and resources to fight effectively. In spite of all the thousands of words devoted to rhino poaching—including this current addition – the key lies in money, manpower, and international pressure on end users. Otherwise the Zambezi Valley rhino may follow those of the rest of Africa into oblivion.

## Recent Developments in the Japanese Ivory Trade and the Implementation of Cites in Japan

The importation of ivory into Japan has never effectively lent itself to control. Previously, the importing companies were either affiliated with the Tokyo Ivory Association, the Osaka Ivory Association, or were totally independent with no affiliation whatsoever. The two regionally based associations are composed not only of importers, but also carvers, craftsmen, retailers, and other related concerns not directly involved in ivory importation. Occasionally in the past, importing members of a particular association have agreed to act in unison regarding specific trade policy and this has provided a small degree of control in the trade. However, as associations the Tokyo and Osaka groups function independently of each other and consequently do not always agree to pursue uniform policies. At the other extreme, the ivory trade activities of the independent importers have remained totally unaccountable to any outside interests.

Because the trade is characterised by such diverse commercial interests, recent attempts to establish controls have been frustrated. Although Dr. Esmond Martin was successful last August in obtaining promises for specific trade reforms from the importers affiliated with the Tokyo Ivory Association, the agreement was quickly abandoned because the Osaka association would not agree to adhere to the same import guidelines and the independent companies, who are heavily involved in the trade irregularities, were not approached at all.

Likewise, last Fall when Chris Huxley of the CITES Secretariat met with members of the two ivory associations in a meeting arranged by the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), frank discussions were not forthcoming because the importers present were reluctant to discuss their activities in front of other association members who are not involved in ivory importation. From the Secretariat's view it appeared that the ivory dealers were behaving in an uncooperative manner.

As a result of the kinds of problems these encounters produced and the mounting international criticism of Japanese ivory import practices, it was tacitly recognised by both the industry and the government that the ivory importers needed to be organised into a single cohesive body for control purposes. As a result of an Administrative Guidance request issued by MITI, the Zoogei Bukai (Ivory Importers' Group) was officially established within the Japan General Merchandise Importers' Association in December 1984.

This new group brings together for the first time the 25 ivory importing companies, including independents, plus representation of the two ivory associations into one body. Collectively the Zoogei Bukai members account for 98% of the total Japanese ivory import trade.

MITI quickly availed itself of the Zoogei Bukai and issued Administrative Guidance to the ivory importers to establish an interim import policy before the new trade regulations—which will prohibit the use of country of origin certificates—take effect in April. Included in the MITI directives were total prohibition on trade from Burundi and Singapore, and a more stringent policy regarding trade from Zaire, Sudan, Uganda and Chad, and all re-export trade.

Although the MITI guidelines are welcomed and hold promise for 1985, they are in fact too late to mitigate the widespread abuse that marked last year's trade. The total for 1984 reached 473 tonnes—second only in Japanese history to the 475 tonne record set in 1983—and included more than 185 tonnes attributed to the Congo, Sudan and Zaire, all countries with export bans, and 33 tonnes from Burundi, a major conduit for poached ivory in Africa. The 1984 Customs statistics reveal the emergence of other serious abuse in the Japanese trade including one possible new route. Large quantities of ivory attributed to Uganda were first imported into Japan in August. This trade was steadily maintained through December making the Uganda total just under 100 tonnes and only two tonnes behind the single largest exporting country, the Central African Republic. In previous years a "Uganda Connection" has not been evident in the Japanese Customs data.

The government's Administrative Guidance did, however, begin to have effect in January of this year. An 18 tonne shipment from Singapore with Burundian documents noting Uganda as the country of origin was confirmed by the Japanese Foreign Ministry not to have been sanctioned by the proper Ugandan authorities. As a result, it was refused entry into Japan, becoming the first case of its kind. Since then other smaller shipments transited through Dubai have been stopped at Customs where they presently remain pending the outcome of government investigations.

It should be pointed out that Administrative Guidance has no real legal authority of its own and depends largely upon the co-operation of the importers themselves for its effective use. If, for example, the government refuses importation solely on the basis of Administrative Guidance and the case goes to court, the importer will win the case hands down. In that respect, it is noteworthy that the ivory importers have fully co-operated with the government in cases to date.

Despite the myriad of problems that have marked the past, the future clearly offers promise. The establishment of the Zoogei Bukai seems to provide a forum for effective control. Both the Zoogei Bukai and the Japanese government have maintained close contact with TRAFFIC (Japan) since the first of the year, particularly regarding