

CITES Conference of Parties: Good News for threatened species

Some 183 countries belong to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) which met in Geneva in August. Growing demand for exotic pets, particularly fish and reptiles, inspired some 20 proposals.

There were several proposals of interest to East African countries, particularly concerning elephants, rhinos, and giraffes.

Kenya, acting on behalf of the 32 member states of the African Elephant Coalition, which includes all the EAC countries except Tanzania, opposed all the southern African-led elephant proposals.

A proposal to trade raw ivory stocks of Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, was rejected. Some countries argued that “maintaining a domestic ivory market creates opportunities for laundering illegally obtained ivory, presents monitoring and enforcement challenges, in particular, due to the difficulty of policing online trade, and undermines ivory bans in other countries by providing an alternative outlet to which suppliers and traffickers can relocate.”

(Reference Swara articles by Esmond Bradley Martin and Lucy Vigne on trade.) *High Rhino*

ABOVE RIGHT: Every year, around 20,000 African elephants are killed by poachers for their tusks, which are then sold in the illegal ivory trade. That's an average of one every 25 minutes.

BELOW: Despite a ban on the international trade in ivory, African elephants are still being poached in large numbers. Tens of thousands of elephants are being killed every year for their ivory tusks. The ivory is often carved into ornaments and jewellery.



PHOTO BY: JONATHAN SCOTT & ANGIE SCOTT

Horn Prices Drive Poaching – Swara July-September 2016, (pg 44), Amid conflict, Yemen's Demand for Rhino Horn Daggers Continues – Swara January-March 2018, (pg 28), Sudan's Ivory Trade Continues to Flourish – Swara January-March 2018, (Pg 38).

Zimbabwe has been selling wild-caught baby elephants to China, and Eswatini, (formerly Swaziland), to zoos in the United States. Amendments to regulations were approved, preventing such trade in the future.

Similarly rejected was a proposal by Zambia to loosen the restrictions on sales of its elephants for hunting trophies, raw ivory, and other elephant products.

Kenya was one of the proponents for giraffe to be listed, for the first time, on Appendix II to help arrest the species' ongoing decline. Many states from West, Central and East Africa said international trade was impacting their giraffe populations.



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CONSERVATION



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Some of the giraffe products in trade: giraffe bone handled knife (Above), giraffe bones (Middle) and giraffe skin rug (Below).



PHOTO BY: TROPHYROOMCOLLECTION

BELOW: Giraffes are poached for their meat in many regions of Africa — as well as for their pelts, bones, hair and tails — by hunters and trappers wielding snares, guns and other weapons. Giraffe hair is used to make jewelry, and giraffe tails are highly valued by some cultures.

Giraffe are traded internationally, and used for jewellery, bracelets, skins, mounts, carved bone, tails, and purses. Giraffe bone is used as a substitute for ivory in knife and gun handles. They also suffer from bushmeat trade. One benefit of giraffe being listed on Appendix II is a requirement on all range states to collect and provide data, currently lacking, on the extent of trade in their countries. While trade may not be the main cause of the decline in wild giraffe populations, it might have an additive effect when combined with habitat loss, civil unrest, and poaching for bushmeat.

The proposal was approved, but with strong opposition from eight southern African countries who were unhappy that the new measures would require strict monitoring and control of permits for trade. The particular sub-species of giraffe found in Southern Africa has an increasing population of over 20,000 and its success was said to be the result of trophy hunting and the selling of giraffe parts.

Southern African countries united to argue for rhino trade. Namibia requested permission to trade live white rhinos to “appropriate and acceptable destinations” as well as rhino horns as hunting trophies. Namibia reported a growing population of over 1,000 White rhinos, the majority on private land, but escalating



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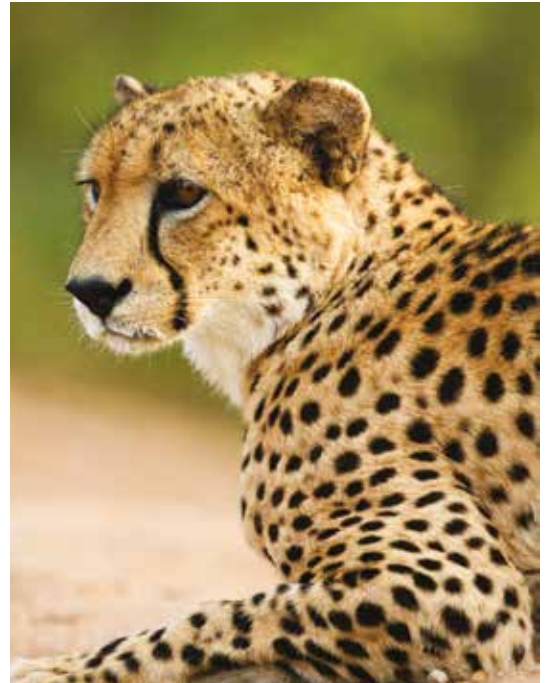


PHOTO BY: KEITH KINAMBUGA

protection costs were a liability. Additional income would come from trade.

A proposal from Eswatini went further, requesting the country's Appendix II restrictions be lifted to allow the sale of its 330kg existing stock of rhino horn to licenced retailers in the Far East along with the sale of a further 20kg of horn per year thereafter. Both proposals were rejected with opponents arguing that any legal trade could enable further illegal trade and stimulate demand for horn, which would lead to increased poaching.

However, South Africa won in its bid to increase the number of Black rhinos that can be killed as trophies (from 5 to 9 per year) arguing the money raised would support conservation of the critically endangered species.

A proposal to create the African Carnivore Initiative - a collaboration between 31 African range states with lions, cheetahs, leopards and wild dogs, was approved.

ABOVE LEFT:
Pangolin is the world's most trafficked and poached mammal.

BELOW LEFT:
Rhino populations have declined rapidly leaving some species critically endangered and facing extinction.

ABOVE RIGHT:
Cheetahs are usually killed for their skin.

It was agreed that urgent action was required to conserve the four species, subject to habitat degradation, prey depletion through poaching, livestock rearing, and human/carnivore conflict, including poisoning and illegal killing.

Kenya also fought to diminish the trade in two fish species, commonly referred to as white-spotted wedgefish, sold in the Hong Kong shark fin retail market, the global hub of the trade. The proposal was accepted. Sea cucumbers, or bêche-de-mer (the dried product), were given protection.

Some protection was won for Pancake tortoise, found in Kenya and Tanzania where they are also raised in captivity on a few breeding farms. Overexploitation for international live animal trade has resulted in declining populations.

Another species of interest to East Africa, the most heavily poached animal worldwide, is the Pangolin, already subject to Appendix I regulations. Pangolin range states which had not already done so were urged to "take urgent steps to develop and implement in-situ pangolin management and conservation programmes, which includes population assessments and report on the implementation of this Decision to the Secretariat."

The final session saw Tanzania, on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), state that CITES was not aligned to other international agreements and contradicted principles of national sovereignty and the rights of local communities to use their wildlife resources. ●