

Rhino breeder John Hume in urgent call to save lives of over 1,900 white rhinos that he protects for future generations.

In the past 26 years, South African John Hume, aged 76, has bred 1,279 white rhinos on his private property, and is currently protecting 1,626 rhinos of which 300 are pregnant therefore making it 1,926 lives of rhino in total. He has been remarkably successful and has lost just 32 rhinos to poachers, compared with 7,048 rhinos poached in the whole of South Africa since the Moratorium on Domestic Trade in Rhino Horn, up to and including 2017. In the 4 years before the imposition of the Moratorium on the 13th of February 2009, there was virtually no poaching. This is an outstanding contribution to the long-term security of the species, for which he deserves an enormous vote of thanks and appreciation from the international conservation community.

This remarkable success could not have been achieved without an unprecedented level of financial support, *all of which has come from John's life savings*. Protecting rhinos in today's world from the increasing attacks by poaching gangs is an extremely expensive operation, as all the government conservation agencies in Africa know only too well. In addition, the recent severe periods of drought in South Africa have necessitated supplementary feeding, which John has also had to do at a total cost for field protection, feeding, veterinary expenses, etc., of at least R5 million per month (US\$ 400,000 @ R12.50 = \$1), amounting to an annual expenditure of R60 million (US\$4,8 million).

He has now reached the point where he can no longer continue as his life-savings will be completely exhausted in August of this year. He is in urgent need of substantial financial support, as are other private land-owners, who together are responsible for approximately 7,000 rhinos (according to Pelham Jones, the Chairman of the Private Rhino Owners Association) *more than the rest of Africa combined*. An increasing number of these land-owners no longer want rhinos on their properties, because of these exorbitant costs and escalating security threats to their staff and families, and already the number of private rhino custodians has dropped from 400 in 2009 to only 320 today.

There is an option open to John Hume and others who have rhino on their properties, including government agencies, which should be discussed openly and objectively by conservations NGOs and all other organisations involved in rhino conservation, namely the advantages of a regular, sustainable and strictly controlled trade in rhino horn – horn that is sourced from healthy, live rhinos, with the income generated going back to those who have the responsibility of ensuring the long-term security of the species.

As background, the international trade in rhino horn was banned in 1977 by the UN Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). It has been an unmitigated failure, and it has not saved the life of a single rhino, *with no less than 23 out of 33 range states having lost all their rhino due to poaching*. The ban has however spawned the growth of close to 400 NGOs raising and spending millions on campaigns and demonstrations to “save the rhino”, with yet more research and grants for projects that have made little or no difference to the security of the species.

There is a very strong case to be made for rejecting the ban and moving to a legal international trade. Since there has always been a demand for horn in South East Asian culture, why not accept this and endeavour to meet the demand rather than block it? Its only since trade was outlawed that rhino horn became globally recognized as the most valuable commodity, worth more than gold and cocaine, reaching up to \$100,000 per kg on the black market.

A legal trade in rhino horn can help create a conservation incentive and generate substantial income for people like John Hume who desperately need financial support. At present, money from rhino horns collected in Africa go to the criminals and not the conservationists. South Africa can easily, and sustainably, satisfy current levels of demand (from stocks, natural deaths and private land-owners) without the need to kill one rhino. So few people know that horns removed from an immobilised and tranquilized rhino is painless, and there is no evidence that removal impacts on its social life and ability to survive. Horns then regrow, up to 1 kg / year, and this regular harvesting could be done up to eight times in the animal's life.

In summary, these are the advantages of a strictly controlled legal trade.

- ✓ Rhino horn supplied without killing a single animal.
- ✓ By becoming active market participants, state reserves and private landowners with rhinos would be able to generate a substantial income from these animals, which are at present regarded as a massive financial burden.
- ✓ Rhino horn stockpiles held by conservation agencies and private landowners could be fed into the market, removing the high costs and security risks associated with maintaining them.
- ✓ A controlled legal trade should encourage other private landowners and local communities to obtain and maintain their own rhino populations, and to start breeding from them, thus increasing rhino numbers.

- ✓ If Far Eastern governments are invested in the legal trade, which they could be, they will close down the illegal trade.
- ✓ The simple message must be that with the sustainable use approach we will end up with many more rhinos AND economic opportunities for local communities.
- ✓ By imposing Western standards of strict preservation, *we will end up with far fewer rhinos, crippling costs, aid dependence and significant habitat loss too.*
- ✓ We need to ensure that every option possible is available to unlock the value of wildlife in rural areas.

Due to the moratorium on legal trade in rhino horn, John Hume has been deprived of an income since the ban was introduced, while bearing all the costs and expenses to keep rhinos safe from poachers, having no assistance or aid from government or numerous wildlife NGOs.

After failing to persuade the government to drop the moratorium which has only outlawed a regulated trade and created the monopoly for illegal traders, John Hume took the government to court to drop the moratorium. The battle took over four years until the case for rhinos was won in November 2015. The court ordered the government to lift the moratorium, automatically bringing back a strictly regulated domestic legal trade in harvested rhino horn, where a rhino stays alive and its horns grow back. However, the South African government went on appealing for 18 months and lost all three appeals. On 5 April 2017 the Constitutional Court restored a regulated domestic trade in rhino horn in South Africa, but since then the government has effectively blocked any local sales, with a plethora of new rules and regulations which makes it virtually impossible for those who want to sell rhino horns to generate any income.

In 1997, South Africa put the proposal to CITES for dropping the international prohibition on trade in rhino horn and regulate global trade by legal sales. South Africa lost this proposal by just one vote. In 2016, Swaziland also put the proposal to CITES for dropping the international prohibition on trade in rhino horn and allowing legal trade. When the vote on this took place, 100 countries voted against the legalization, 26 supported the proposal, and 17 abstained. The fact that amongst countries that supported Swaziland's proposal were the majority of global rhino population custodians, namely South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe with 23,876 rhinos out of 28,066 total world's rhino population, was outlooked by CITES Secretariat.

As Thomas Sowell, an American economist and political commentator said: "It is hard to imagine a more stupid or more dangerous way of making decisions than by putting those decisions in the hands of people who pay no price for being wrong." Also, by paraphrasing Thomas Sowell, we cannot

ignore the fact that while prohibition sounds great and it has always sounded great, it is only when we go beyond rhetoric, and start looking at hard facts, that prohibition turns out to be a big disappointment, if not a disaster.

John Hume believes that captive breeding projects are vital to help save rhinos from extinction and that rhinos could pay their own survival with a legal trade in rhino horn. However, until we change the law that currently benefits criminals we need your help to keep John Hume's project alive and help his mission to save rhinos for future generations.

Credit for use of content in this document should go to Dr John Hanks.

John Hanks is a zoologist with a PhD from Cambridge on elephant population dynamics. He has 45 years' experience in a wide variety of applied conservation management and research projects, working in several African countries. He was previously director of the Africa Program for WWF International (based in Switzerland).