



LETTERS

edited by Jennifer Sills

Rhino Poaching: Supply and Demand Uncertain

IN THEIR POLICY FORUM “LEGAL TRADE OF AFRICA’S RHINO HORNS” (1 MARCH, P. 1038), D. Biggs *et al.* point out that the trade ban on rhino horn has not been successful in reducing rhino poaching, which reached a record high of 668 in 2012. They argue that trade bans support illegal organizations, whereas a regulated legal market could reduce poaching effort and provide much-needed income for conservation. In making their case, Biggs *et al.* overlook a few important points.

Biggs *et al.* write that legal trade can only work if, among other things, “the demand does not escalate to dangerous levels as the stigma associated with the illegality of the product is removed.” It is unclear whether any stigma is associated with rhino horn usage in eastern countries, but the phenomenally high price for the horn, along with rising real income and population growth in the major consumer markets, is likely to indicate rising demand.

Biggs *et al.* point out that the technology to profile rhino DNA is now affordable. In the past, illegal buyers have been unable to determine easily whether they are using real or fake products. With affordable DNA profiling, however, the supply of fake rhino horns [which is, by some accounts, extensive (1)] will diminish, thus further increasing demand pressure for the genuine horn.

On the supply side, there is currently insufficient evidence as to whether farmed rhinos would breed at the same rate as in the wild. An additional concern is that South Africa’s white rhino population is based on a very small gene pool. After nearly being hunted to extinction in the 19th century, with only a small number of white rhinos surviving in one South African park (Hluhluwe-Umfolozi), the population grew to 840 in 1960 (2). These white rhinos were used to populate national and private game reserves. Intensive breeding programs would thus have to consider this potential genetic weakness.

According to the Africa Guide (3), the gestation period of a rhino is 15 to 16 months and the calf stays with the cow for 2 to 3 years in the case of the white rhino and 2.5 to 4 years for the black rhino. It thus would take up to 5 years for an adult rhino population to produce a generation sufficiently mature for regular harvesting of horn.

Biggs *et al.* acknowledge that there are well-resourced criminal syndicates currently engaged in illegal horn trade. However, they fail to take into account the reaction of illegal



traders to the establishment of legal suppliers. The extent to which illegal organizations will retaliate is contingent on the effectiveness of auction releases in reducing horn price. If prices remain high, illegal suppliers will remain in business and vigorous turf wars are likely to emerge (4). It is unlikely that such criminal syndicates will respond passively; rather, they would seek to interrupt the regulated supply chain through acts of sabotage and even stronger poaching effort.

The characterization of the supply chain as a single body—the Central Selling Organization (CSO)—is oversimplified. In practice, the supply side consists of a disparate mix of public and private “providers” with different objectives and motives. Regulation and management are unlikely to be simple, as a CSO represents only one stage of the supply chain. More research is needed in terms of what such a CSO would do. For example, would it be able to provide adequate enforcement and incentives to prevent private suppliers from selling outside the legal market?

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Rhino Poaching:
Unique Challenges

IN THEIR POLICY FORUM “LEGAL TRADE OF Africa’s rhino horns” (1 March, p. 1038), D. Biggs *et al.* advocate legalizing trade in rhino horn through harvesting horns of 5000 white rhinos in South Africa as the panacea to the current rhino poaching crisis. Their arguments were based on the law of supply and demand and supported by the example of crocodile farming.

The law of supply and demand only applies to commodities for which supply is independent of demand. It does not apply specifically to white rhino horn because the mar-

Letters to the Editor

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ket does not differentiate between horns of the five extant rhinoceros species, and therefore the supply exceeds the quantity of horns of the white rhino alone. Because the rhino horn has no medicinal properties (1, 2), drug producers can dilute it at will, making the price formation normally dictated by the law of supply and demand unpredictable. Furthermore, legal access to rhino horn risks reawakening demand in older markets, such as Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, and Yemen, where demand for rhino horn was prevalent in the 1970s and 1980s and has since decreased (3). If demand grows again in these markets, indiscriminate poaching may increase accordingly, putting look-alike black, Indian, Javan, northern white, and Sumatran rhinoceros species at even higher risk. The costs of securing horns for the proposed Central Selling Organization for legal trade might make poaching even more lucrative.

The comparison with the crocodile skin market is unjustified. Farmed crocodiles occur in millions, whereas the five rhino species number about 30,000 animals and reproduce much more slowly. Crocodile-skin trade involves processing and was established in well-regulated industries; rhino horn is used unprocessed in China and Vietnam (3, 4), known for weak control of their drugs industries. Unlike rhino horn, crocodile skin has substitutes, is not consumed, and is not believed to have medicinal or religious applications.

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) upheld the ban on trade in rhino horn by enacting tighter controls in March 2013 (5). We propose education, awareness, and diplomacy (5, 6) for squashing horn demands in China and Vietnam that continue to destabilize rhino conservation globally and undermine national security (7) in source countries.

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Rhino Poaching: Apply Conservation Psychology

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE ILLEGAL TRADE in rhino horns is a lucrative industry and is contributing to their extinction in the wild ("Legal trade of Africa's rhino horns," D. Biggs *et al.*, Policy Forum, 1 March, p. 1038). Conservation psychology can play a role in preventing people from consuming rhino horn (1). Psychological principles of persuasion, attitude, and behavior change have been used effectively for many decades, but they have been largely ignored or underutilized within biodiversity conservation (2).

Investigation of consumer behavior must not be restricted to economic theory of market and individual demands, but rather should recognize human psychology in all its complexity. First, we must understand rhino horn consumption patterns in east and Southeast Asia, and possibly elsewhere, given that rhino horn is used for different purposes. Exploring the "dark side" of rhino horn consumption is necessary (consumption of illegal products may be considered "cool"). Global and country-specific public marketing campaigns can

raise awareness about the negative impacts of illegal (or perhaps one day, legal) trade in rhino horns and debunk the myth of their healing properties. The most effective communicators about rhino conservation may be children, naturalists, specialist tour guides, field assistants, trackers, religious leaders, or even ex-poachers or ex-hunters. Saving rhinos is the responsibility of everyone, and effective conservation is based on moral values as well as economic ones.

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Response

COLLINS *ET AL.* AGREE WITH OUR OBSERVATION that the trade ban has failed and that a legal trade in Africa's rhino horn will be an important contributor to tackling the current poaching crisis. A skillfully regulated legal trade, in which horn is harvested renewably from live animals, will offer financial incentives for the conservation of rhinos and deliver benefits to local communities. Moreover, we concur with Collins *et al.* that the institutional and market arrangements for the management for a legal trade require in-depth discussion and evaluation. This deliberation is particularly important as the South African government has indicated that it is seriously exploring this contentious issue in the build-up to the next CITES Conference of Parties in 2016 (1, 2).

We acknowledged the uncertainties inherent in estimating demand under a trade ban and in the functioning of a legal trade. We discussed how risks can be minimized and explained that the trade must be monitored closely and managed adaptively, with possible restructuring required over time. Under a well-enforced legal trade, the demand for horn more broadly will be met in a sustainable way. In addition, more resources should be available for stronger enforcement against illegal trade in horn of all rhino species. As we wrote in our Policy Forum, technology exists to track horns from the source through the market chain to the buyer (3). The presence of fake horn, which appears to originate in Asia (4), is unlikely to have an impact on a well-regulated and enforced legal trade, nor on the illegal killing of rhinos in Africa.

Collins *et al.* raise the critical issue of the structure of a legal trade. A Central

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

New Focus: "Hubs aim to reinvent DOE research culture" by A. Cho (24 May, p. 914). The caption for the photograph on page 918 incorrectly identifies the leaders of the five Department of Energy–funded hubs. They are, from left to right, Douglas Kothe of CASL, Nathan Lewis of JCAP, Henry Foley of EEB, George Crabtree of JCESR, and Alexander King of CMI. The HTML and PDF versions online have been corrected.

Reports: "A reconciled estimate of glacier contributions to sea level rise: 2003 to 2009" by A. S. Gardner (17 May, p. 857). In the last paragraph of the text, the first sentence should have included "(2.50 ± 0.54 mm year⁻¹)" after the phrase "the observed sea-level rise." The last sentence of the text should read as follows (total numbers have been changed): "To avoid double counting, we subtracted our estimates for peripheral glacier mass loss from this total to obtain a total ice-sheet mass budget of -290 ± 50 Gt year⁻¹ (11) and a total land ice (all glaciers + ice sheets) mass budget of -549 ± 57 Gt year⁻¹, amounting to a sea-level rise of 1.51 ± 0.16 mm of SLE year⁻¹ which is 61 ± 19% of the total global sea-level rise (11)." The HTML and PDF versions online have been corrected.

Editorial: "Improving education standards" by J. Coffey and B. Alberts (1 February, p. 489). The doi was incorrect. It is 10.1126/science.1235590. The HTML and PDF versions online have been corrected.

Selling Organization (CSO) is one option for institutionalizing a legal trade; the costs and benefits of alternative structures need to be evaluated. It is critical that the governments of the main demand countries, including Vietnam and China, support and actively police the legal trade. In particular, Vietnam has been criticized for its lack of enforcement of the current trade ban (5). The strong actions by China and Vietnam against the illegal drug trade (6) suggest that if these governments actively support a legal trade in horn, they may be capable of enforcing compliance. The inception of a legal trade would imply international acknowledgment and respect for the long history of use of rhino horn in their societies. This may be an important factor in gaining their active participation and cooperation in designing a workable market structure at the outset. Some of the potential risks can be informed by research and scientific input; others, such as managing possible turf wars with illegal horn traders, require input from security experts and the use of tools such as scenario analyses (7, 8).

Prins and Okita-Ouma question our application of the law of supply and demand.

Basic economics dictates that the price of a product continually changes and is determined by the interaction of supply and demand, in addition to factors such as regulation (9). Our comparison with the crocodile trade was to show how a legal trade can usurp an illegal trade by enabling a more profitable, safer, and easier way to supply the market (10). Prins and Okita-Ouma claim we should try to reduce demand and crush the illegal markets. Litchfield argues that it is possible to convince people to stop consuming horn. However, the current poaching crisis affirms the persistent failure of these strategies (11). Evidence and logical argument suggest that Africa's rhinos are more likely to be conserved through instituting a skillfully regulated and enforced legal trade.

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