

Sustainable eNews

IWMC World Conservation Trust

Sharkfin Indigestion

Editorial by Eugene Lapointe, IWMC President



When it comes to conservation, there is no limit to what campaigners are willing to claim. Worse, there seems to be no limit to what some people are willing to believe. Let's consider sharks.

NGOs claim that we have been killing 100 million sharks for each of the last twenty years or so, most of it supposedly to supply the taste for shark fin soup in Asia, mainly China. But you really don't need to be a marine biologist

to realize that this is nonsense. If it were true, we would have killed at least 2 billion sharks over this period. This equates to 190 sharks per minute or 3 sharks for each second of the year. This purported rate of killing is inconsistent what we know about the relatively low level of reproduction of sharks.

Nevertheless, I remember attending a meeting in the late nineties, in the Tampa Bay area, convened by the International (sic) Shark Attacks Files. I asked one of their scientists how they came out with this figure of 100 million sharks a year. "Easy", he said, "a few calculations of landings and you can extrapolate. For some 10 years now, we have monitored the situation. And you know what: 100 million is most likely on the low side." He talked to me with a certain haughtiness, as if he was addressing an heretic who was simply too dumb to see the light.

Playing our own extrapolation game can produce some interesting statistics. If the average shark produces 20 kilos of shark fins (the figure is most likely closer to 30 kilos but let's be conservative), annual production is 2 billion kilos per year. A kilo produces between 60 and 100 bowls of soup depending on the quality. Let's

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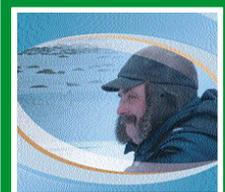
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use 70 as a conservative figure. This translates to 140 billion bowls of soup every year. If 500 million Chinese have access to such an expensive delicacy (surely the figure is much lower), they are each consuming on average 280 bowls of soup a year, for which privilege they will pay some US\$28,000, at the lowest possible quoted price.

Projecting these figures over the period of twenty years, the total cost of all this soup would be a modest \$280,000,000,000,000 - \$280 trillion US dollars. Anyone can see that this is not a realistic claim. As good as shark fin soup may be, the market for it is simply not this big. Unfortunately, I have to terminate my projection here because my electronic calculator does not provide for calculations in the quadrillions.

So here are the real conclusions that can be drawn:

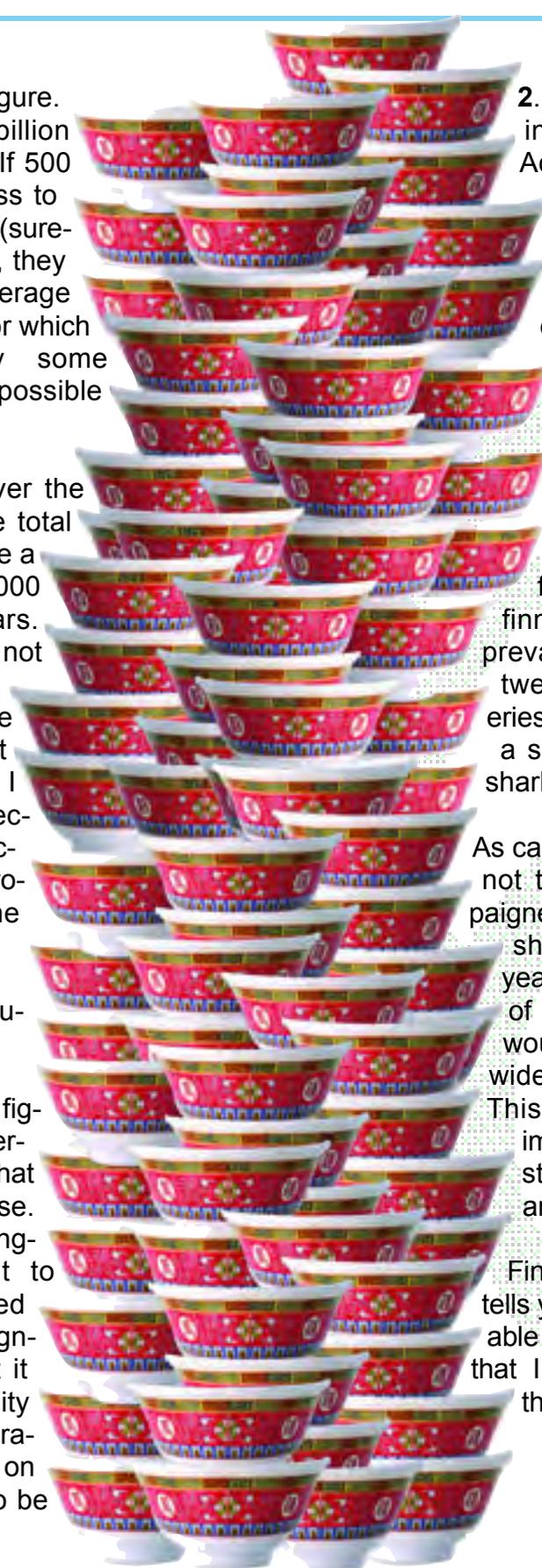
1. The 100 million per year figure is wrong and exaggerated. It is so unreliable that it has no conservation use. The fact that it is meaningless might be thought to undermine the supposed authority of the campaigners with the media, but it seems that their credibility is not a topic for consideration. NGO omniscience on fish populations is not to be questioned.

2. The exact numbers of sharks in the world are not known. Accurate figures are difficult to produce. Catch data suggests that in general shark populations are abundant. Of course, this is the exact opposite of the conclusion that the campaigners wish people - and gullible journalists - to draw.

3. Shark fishing is sustainable. Whatever moral conclusions may be drawn from the practice of shark finning (which is much less prevalent today than it was, say, twenty years ago), shark fisheries does not appear to be having a significant negative impact on shark populations.

As can be seen, we have no reason not to believe scientists or campaigners who assert that 100 million sharks are being caught each year. At the very least, 280 bowls of shark fin soup every year would have the capacity to cause widespread indigestion in Asia. This is perhaps the most apt impression, given the verbal (or statistical) diarrhoea that we are asked to believe.

Finally, if ever a shark "scientist" tells you that my figures are not reliable and/or credible, just answer that I have just extrapolated from their own ****



Evaluating Reports of Illegal Trade in Elephant Products A Precautionary Tale

Conservationist organizations and responsible governments are well aware that some human use of wildlife is unmonitored, illegal, and self-serving to the extent that some wild populations and their habitats are adversely affected. The traditional response to this has included government-organized law enforcement bodies in the field, customs regimes at ports of exit and entry, and court procedures that penalize those who are apprehended for attempts to take and trade in wildlife outside the structure of conservation laws.

When illegal shipments of wild products are found and seized, the perpetrators may or may not be found and brought to court, but at least, they fail to profit from their crimes. This is a form of “good news”, regardless of the size of the seizure, as it has implications for the future of criminal decisions on continuation of the illegal trade. If illegal trade in the products is thus discouraged, the ultimate impact on conservation of the resource is positive.

The organization TRAFFIC is an NGO that monitors reports of illicit trade in wildlife species, and reports comparative statistics on its website about varying amounts of seizures of such products. The December 2011 TRAFFIC report labeled the year as “Annus Horribilis” for African elephants, as its published statistics indicated an apparent increase in the “number of large ivory seizures globally, reflecting the sharp rise in illegal ivory trade underway since 2007.” TRAFFIC’s definition of large-scale seizures includes any that are over 800 kg in weight. The claim is that in 2011 there were 13 such seizures, compared to 6 in 2010. The report included photographs of tusks being examined. According to people knowledgeable in ivory, several of these tusks do not appear to come from freshly-killed elephants.

Therefore, although the TRAFFIC website report claims that the increase in confiscations of illegal ivory indicate that 2011 was a horrible year for elephants, that may not actually be a warranted conclusion. The report is highlighted on a website page that also solicits public donations to support further TRAFFIC activity; given the above possible variety of scenarios, IWMC advises that TRAFFIC’s pronouncement of an increasingly dangerous incidence of poaching may not be a correct conclusion.

The year 2011 seizure statistics may be an indication of increased efficiency in the investigative skills of customs services reporting their finds, increased attempts by illicit traffickers to sell their goods, or decisions by those traffickers to send long-held stockpiles of ivory to transporters, in anticipation that next year, decisions made at CITES may be to increase legal sales.

Statistics and photographs are visual encouragements to website visitors that the information sets and conclusions drawn from them are reliable and to be trusted. IWMC believes that all concerned visitors to any conservation oriented website should give serious thought to the realities of wildlife conservation programs, policies, and enforcement, and make their decisions regarding financial support of the sponsoring organization based on the best possible knowledge. IWMC supports all professional and sincere wildlife conservation efforts, whether they are those of nations, international organizations, or non-governmental organizations. We congratulate all those whose efforts result in genuine and efficient wildlife conservation, through legal sustainable use and concurrent, reliable monitoring of human use of wild resource.



Rhino Values

by Michael Eustace

There were 65,000 rhino in Africa in 1970. That number should have grown to 700,000 by today but Africa only has 26,000, or 4% of what they should have had.

Over the past 40 years, tens of thousands of rhino have been poached. Although well intentioned, the ban on horn trade by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in 1977, has been a miserable failure. The ban has done nothing to stop the illegal trade, has made criminals rich, and left the parks impoverished.

South Africa has done a wonderful job at growing their rhino populations from about 100 in 1910 to 21,000 today. With most of the rhino having been poached in the rest of Africa, criminals are now focussing on South Africa and at least 600 animals will die this year to feed the criminal trade. Horn is sold, mainly to China, at a wholesale price of \$20,000 per Kg. It is used and has been used for centuries as a traditional medicine to treat a number of ailments. (The Chinese deny that it is used as an aphrodisiac.)

Conservation donor agencies place their hopes on changing the Chinese mindset, and increased law enforcement, as the solution. The first is futile, and effective law enforcement in Africa is unaffordable and unworkable; unworkable because there is widespread corruption amongst the law enforcers.

The wholesale value of the horns from 600 animals at US\$20,000 per Kg., at an average weight of 4 Kg per horn, amounts to \$48 million. If there was a regulated legal trade, through a single channel to Chinese state pharmaceutical companies, Southern Africa could make \$48 million p.a. for parks and conservation, where the value rightfully belongs. The retail price of horn is \$40,000 per Kg and if the Chinese state had a profitable investment in the legal trade, they would close down the illegal trade.

South Africa could easily supply 400 horns p.a. from natural deaths, 300 from stockpiles and 500 from private farmers cropping half of their rhino. (The horn re-grows.) 1200 horns would satisfy the demand, raise \$96 million for conservation and, importantly, there would be no need for the killing of even one rhino.

But there is a much bigger picture: If poaching is reduced to about 200 rhino p.a., South Africa will have an additional 21,000 rhino over the course of the next 12 years. Those animals could be placed in other parks in Africa and used as a source of revenue to finance those parks. If half the horn was cropped, it would provide \$168 million p.a. Typically that is enough to finance the anti-poaching and operational costs of 168 parks. The rhino loaned to other parks and their increment (6% p.a.) could be owned by the World Bank or some other financier. The rhino would need to be protected and there would need to be the management to do that but there are efficient organisations such as African Parks and Frankfurt Zoo that can do that. While protecting the rhino, other animals would also be protected. For a park to thrive all that is needed is for poaching to be controlled and one good man with a reasonable budget can do that, using existing park rangers.

Currently most parks in Africa are in decline because of poaching. The whole of Africa has fewer tourists than Spain; about 46 million p.a. Parks and wildlife are Africa's competitive advantage and if we could attract an additional one million tourists p.a. and they stayed for an average of ten days at \$200 per day, then that would generate income of \$2 billion p.a.

With rhino as the catalyst, there is the opportunity for turning around a conservation tragedy into the biggest contribution to conservation in Africa imaginable.

It is hard to believe that the world can choose to continue with a failed strategy (the ban on trade), sacrifice hundreds of rhino every year and fund criminals, when there is the potential from a regulated trade to produce hundreds of millions for African conservation and secure 168 parks, and all without the need to kill one rhino.

Michael Eustace. (Investment analyst.)
28th January, 2012.

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The full paper can be found at iwmc@iwmc.org under IWMC Forum, Michael Eustace.

Green activists must stop misusing international conservation agreements -- NGO

Pro-trade group calls on environmental campaigners and the European Union to improve conservation, not stymie trade with developing countries in lead up to UN conservation meeting

Washington - In the lead up to a meeting of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) pro-free market NGO World Growth has called upon environmental campaigners and European Union bureaucrats to cease politicizing the CITES agreement and focus on environmental strategies that will foster economic growth in developing countries.

World Growth Chairman and former Ambassador to the GATT (the predecessor to the World Trade Organization) stated, "Every year Greenpeace and other campaigners propose tougher restrictions on trade in timber species such as rosewood, teak and ramin. This is part of a strategy to turn CITES into a tool to halt commercial forestry in tropical countries."

"Unfortunately, Greenpeace and other groups have a long-standing record of making claims about species losses that are exaggerated and cannot be substantiated," he said.

"If campaigners are serious about protecting the environment, it should direct efforts towards developing effective conservation strategies. This is something they never do."

Ambassador Oxley said that toughening trade controls is not an effective primary strategy for conservation.

"CITES is a secondary tool. It supports conservation policies - it doesn't create them on the ground. Focussing on trade restrictions diverts attention away from the real issue of improving existing conservation measures."

"The sole aim of campaign groups such as Greenpeace and WWF is to turn into a tool that will restrict forest exports from developing countries. Fortunately, most developing countries are aware of this and vote down these proposals.

Ambassador Oxley said it was shameful that the European Union has supported these campaign strategies.

"Most developing countries have already set aside around one-third of their land mass for conservation or protection. This exceeds the targets set by the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. The position of the environmental campaigners to halt commercial forestry has no sound rationale and will stymie economic growth."

(Source: World Growth, March 1 2012)

To speak with World Growth's experts or find out more about its work, please email

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On with the hunt! Or “TO HELL WITH THEM”

by Rex Murphy, National Post

Pity the poor Newfoundlander: His province is now under siege by land and by sea.

I've written here before about the lumbering peril on the roads down in Newfoundland. Driving around the island can be something like a UFC fight between man and moose. Between the small second-hand car - a favourite mode of travel back home on The Rock - and the hairy mastodon (that would be the moose), there is no competition really.

On land, the moose are rampant. It is not safe to go out to the clothesline anymore, for fear of running into a moose or, more likely, a pack of the them - all antlers and dumb stares. Won't be too long before they give up the woods and the boglands altogether as being too tangled or fetid for their delicate sensibilities, and start to put full roots down in the towns and villages.

It's worse off-shore, except of course there's none of us humans living in the ocean. But even if we wanted to - there's no damn room. By some estimates, there are now 12-or 13-million rapacious seals slithering underwater all around the island - sucking up every piece of protein the sea has to offer, including of course the king of all food fish, the cod.

What, after all, is a seal? It is a set of the sharpest teeth entirely surrounded by hydrodynamic blubber - an eating machine.

I don't think there has ever been this many seals off Newfoundland and Labrador, which ought to make some people ashamed of their eternal Save the Seals campaigns. These creatures

were never in danger.

And now to top it off, the seals have a new defender - and he is not only a Newfoundlander, he is a Member of Parliament.

Ryan Cleary, NDP, says it's time to give up on the historic hunt for seals, even the piddling little token effort we now carry on in these, the latter days of that great enterprise. He says, if I may distill his argument, the hunt is not worth the sweat it causes us - the potential loss of markets for other products, the hassle from sour-faced enviros, and our "bad reputation" among some purehearts abroad.

Let me state that I admire Mr. Cleary for taking the stand he has. Seriously. He knows his position is unpopular (and that's a mild description of the response in some quarters to it). For his forthrightness and political courage, he deserves praise.

I can't oblige him on the main point, though. We should not stop the seal hunt, even if we were only to take a token dozen per year. We should not stop something we have been doing because outsiders - those who have no connection to Newfoundland, or to the seal hunt, and who have been telling wildly overheated fables about it for decades - tell us to stop it. To hell with them.

The hunt is legitimate. It is no more cruel or messy than many other types of animal slaughter. It is honest work. It produces useful and in some cases beautiful products. And shutting it down because Mr. Cleary and others do not like the sound of busybodies tut-tutting in the salons of the European Union, or deploring our "barbarous"



ways, is the purest weakness and servility. As long as one Newfoundlander wants to harvest one seal, to make a flipper pie, or to use the pelt to make one of those splendid sealskin hats - on with the Hunt!

Doing otherwise would be a surrender of our character as Newfoundlanders, and an apology for the rigorous and demanding way of life we have known, and which has earned us tenure here for half a millennium.

Meantime, the increasingly beleaguered humankind out here on the edge of the world, overrun on land and sea, stare down at hard times ahead. Are we to become MooseLand or Seal-A-Topia? - a kind of Disneyland of the

Maritimes? Skirmishes over seals or moose earn a lot more thought than any consideration of the needed renovation and renewal of an entire province drifting away from its historic sense of itself.

Rex Murphy offers commentary weekly on CBC TV's The National, and is host of CBC Radio's Cross Country Checkup.

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Noteworthy

Tuna 2012 Bangkok

Bangkok has been chosen again to host the largest tuna industry gathering, the INFOFISH World Tuna Trade Conference and Exhibition. **TUNA 2012** will be held from 23-25 May at the Shangri-La Hotel.

The three-day conference will focus on the latest developments in the global and regional tuna industries. Issues on resources, fisheries management, markets and marketing, products and quality developments, new technology, trade and food safety as well as sustainability, eco-labelling and environment will be adequately covered.