

Sustainable eNews

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Promoting Sustainable Use

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IWMC
World Conservation Trust

Editorial: After Baghdad - Reykjavik

By Eugene Lapointe

The government of Iceland has commenced a scientific research-whaling program in its coastal waters. The purpose of the undertaking is to determine the size and health of the area's different cetacean populations with a view to determining whether Iceland can legitimately recommence the regulated commercial harvest of plentiful species, as it is legally entitled to do under the terms of its membership in the International Whaling Commission (IWC). Judging by the reaction of the US State Department's office of public affairs, Washington views this initiative as on a par with Reykjavik's formal enrollment in the axis of evil. Iceland has been roundly condemned and we are now informed that the Bush Administration is formally considering the imposition of economic sanctions on Iceland. Just where, exactly, does the US get off?



Push aside, for the moment, the question of the size of Iceland's whale stocks and their impact upon the nation's vital fisheries industry – we will return to

these questions later. First, we must ask who appointed the US State Department the guardian of the world's whales? Where does the US discover the nerve to threaten economic reprisals against a democratic nation (and a much older democracy) for a decision taken with 75% popular support? Are Icelanders supposed to cease their popular consumption of whale meat on the US say so and, if so, is the US going to show similar rigor against those Alaskan citizens who each year harvest bowhead whales in the Beaufort Sea? The question is, of course, purely rhetorical.

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Moreover, is this how the US should treat a nation that has been formally its ally since the very inception of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization? After all, only a few weeks have passed since the US humiliated the Icelanders with the Pentagon's unilateral announcement of US withdrawal from Keflavik Air Force Base, a piece of buffoonery that obliged its National Security Adviser to place several apologetic calls to Iceland's Prime Minister. Did the US enjoy that particular confrontation with the Norsemen that it needs to sally forth again so quickly to repeat the experience?

Before we all reach for our ecological smelling salts, let us also give some credit to the Icelanders for quite possibly having science on their side. The moratorium on commercial whaling has now been in place for over 20 years and the evidence of various research programs, including the IWC's own Scientific Committee strongly suggests that while some species such as right, blue and bowhead whales (the latter of which the US harvests) remain parlous. Many others such as the humpback, sperm and minke (the chief target of Japanese, Norwegian and Icelandic whaling) are resurgent to the point both where these species can easily be harvested in a regulated fashion and where they may be having a serious negative impact on regional fish foodstocks – cetaceans are healthy eaters and resolutely refuse to dine on turnips.

But, of course, Iceland is not asking that the world simply accept this science as given. Rather, it is engaging in a scientific research program to determine the validity or spuriousness of these concerns. But, so far as Washington is concerned, some questions

simply are not supposed to be asked and certain lines of inquiry are never to be pursued. This makes for a somewhat hilarious contrast with the US position on genetically modified organisms (GMO's), where European and other potential customers are assured that US scientific investigation of GMO's has been so extensive that further scientific examination on their part, or even the most cursory labeling of GMO products, is quite unnecessary. Apparently, the questing scientific mind is to be praised when it serves US policy and condemned when it does not.

With the exception of Norway, which has and will maintain its own minke-whaling program, the nations of Western Europe will echo the US line. Synthetics have almost entirely replaced whale oil – the main purpose of the former US and European whaling programs – while Iceland, Japan and Norway alone have a domestic tradition of consuming whale meat. But do not expect to hear similar European threats of economic sanctions against Reykjavik or, for that matter, Tokyo or Oslo. Europeans just do not accept that global bullying is always the optimal path to a desired end.

Iceland intends to conduct research whaling and the US does not want it to. Well, it is an imperfect world and none of us get our own way on everything, particularly when we are dealing with elected democracies who enjoy the strong support of their electorate. The more the US insists upon behaving like the spoiled brat of global politics and threatening dire actions against any nations that frustrate it on even the most minor matter, the more it will undermine its standing with its friends and allies – even when they smile in its face.

CITES COP13 - Reminder

(Source: Notification to the Parties No. 2003/046)

If a Party intends to submit a proposal to amend Appendix I or II that concerns a species or populations of a species that occur partly or totally outside of the territory under its jurisdictions, and if it does not intend to consult the other range States before the submission of its proposal, the Party, in accordance with Resolution Conf. 8.21 on the Consultation with range States on proposals to amend Appendices I and II, should submit its proposal to the CITES Secretariat by 7 November 2003.

Additionally, in accordance with the provisions of Resolution Conf. 11.16 on the Ranching and trade in ranched specimens of species transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II, any Party may propose an amendment to Appendices I and II pursuant to this Resolution for consideration at the 13th meeting of the Conference of the Parties. The text of the proposed amendment should be received by the Secretariat no later than 7 November 2003.

Time for Reflection

by James M. Beers
Retired US Fish & Wildlife Service

Think forests and grasslands. Think public lands that make up a majority of our nation. Think environmental groups, pandering politicians and books full of goofy laws. Think government agencies chock full of ideologues out to change the nation and how we live and raise our families. Think forest fires and no logging or forest management. Think decimated rural communities and rural families seeking work in cities where environmental danger takes on a whole new meaning. All of this is based on the same sort of lies. Wilderness doesn't save things; it merely lets it destroy itself while denying those who own it (you and I) access. Roads give us freedom and unlimited possibilities but they are being destroyed. Why is it desirable to "sprinkle" desert plants for



unused antelope but verboten to maintain guzzlers for other animals? Why do we accept the notion that we must turn our society upside down for plants and animals that no one uses and that have a harder and harder time surviving in our constantly changing world while simultaneously eliminating the animals and plants given high value by society because they allow us to live wonderful lives while pursuing the American dream and surviving in a hostile world? The time for moving beyond clichés about Mother Nature and some mythical balance and renewing a philosophy and policies based on the proactive management of natural resources for the sustainable uses of all citizens is now.

Hunting Decisions in the United States

IWMC is closely watching the behavior of American Federal Courts as matters of wildlife conservation are brought before them. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed that seven additional National Wildlife Refuges shall be opened to hunting and fishing opportunities, and that these activities shall be allowed to be increased at three other such national properties. This proposal is intended to accomplish more than additional recreational opportunities on national wildlife refuges. The original concept of creating wildlife refuges so that their ecosystems should be continued in a healthy manner without encroaching construction development, was also thought to be enhanced by bans on hunting and fishing.

The latter idea has been revised since those days, and it is now recognized that multiple hunting and fishing use of these lands and waters is compatible with increased conservation benefit. Ecosystems left alone without sustainable harvest of their surpluses, often decline in diversity and in overall environmental vigor. Hunting and fishing access are good ways to keep America's wildlife refuges in an on-going healthy condition and will help ensure their continued welfare for future generations.

In view of all this, it is interesting to note that in the state of Maryland, a federal judge is once again being used by an animal rights organization as a familiar controversy is being played out in the usual way; the Fund for Animals has sued to prevent the hunting of mute swans in Maryland, on grounds that the activity is "cruel" and "unnecessary". In response, the regional federal judge has ordered a temporary ban on the hunting of mute swans until such time as he rules

whether or not a permanent ban on hunting them shall be established. Wildlife scientists have testified that the swans, five pairs of which were imported some thirty years ago, have now grown to a flock of many thousands, and are consuming hundreds of tons of vegetation in the bays annually. Their wastes accumulate by a similar magnitude in the waters, causing an algae bloom that is harmful to the environment. The swans are also hostile to native waterfowl, driving them out of nesting and feeding areas, and killing the young of Canada geese and many species of ducks that try to nest there.

If a permanent ban on hunting mute swans in Maryland should be put into place, it would set a terrible precedent for wildlife management through sport hunting anywhere. There is simply no way to efficiently capture and remove these birds to other locations, which would also suffer from their unnatural presence. The FFA is using its traditional practice of claiming public support for interference with hunting, and is relying on its traditional legal standing before the court to gain yet another audience for yet another harmful demand. This is not about swans, nor is it about "cruelty" to them. It is about a demonstration of power by a lobby force that appears primarily concerned with its reputation with its own donor base, not with the overall conservation of any environment.

IWMC reminds everyone concerned with wildlife conservation that public opinion does have an impact on these issues. Local media in Maryland should be urged to spell out the consequences of whatever decision is made in this case, and to do it loudly. Not only sportsmen, but many other people in Maryland shall be affected by this decision.

Tribute to Ingmar

On 9 August 2003, the United Nations' Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, the world lost a very strong supporter for the promotion of human rights of indigenous peoples. Ingmar, our dearest friend Ingmar Egede, left us behind to continue his battle. And we shall do so, knowing that he is watching over us.



Not only will his family and friends from all over the world miss him but his colleagues of the IWMC Board of Directors will also keep on remembering and honoring him for his devotion, knowledge and wisdom.

We invite you to visit the World Council of Whalers' website:

<http://www.worldcouncilofwhalers.com/ingmar-fmst.htm>

where a tribute to Ingmar, along with some wonderful photos, are posted.

The Trouble with Top-Down Decisions

by Janice Henke, Anthropologist

A Globalization Phenomenon ... More about Iceland

Once again, Iceland finds itself beset with the familiar problems that have resulted from being a part of an international organizational structure intent on denying others their sovereign rights. Although Iceland has begun the process to resume lethal scientific research whaling on minke whales in its own waters, (an ICRW-normal activity), 23 members of the Like Minded Group are demonstrating another tiresome threat. A "group demarche" has been issued that demands Iceland desist from all research whaling, hinting that Iceland's tourist industry could be badly affected. In other words, comply with these powerful nations' demands, or they may adversely affect your tourism through giving their citizens information that shall discourage them from visiting Iceland.

Flashback: In 1986, and in years prior to that time, Iceland was conducting scientific research whaling in its own waters, taking fin whales. The animals were processed in stages

that allowed scientific investigation of their diet, parasite load, blubber thickness, overall health, size, approximate age, state of fertility, and degree of contaminant load. This thorough examination was conducted on an open landing at the research station, in full view of an upper deck area especially prepared for tourists. Visitors to Iceland were delighted to stand by a railing where they could see the entire process. There were no protests, organized or otherwise. IWMC predicts that a large number of people will continue to be intensely interested in this process, and with the proper security, the Icelanders could use the opportunity to conduct valuable public education once again, at their whaling stations anywhere on the coast. This would be a good thing, and a very empowering one for Iceland. At the same time, Iceland's whale watch tours and whale cuisine restaurants shall continue to do a flourishing business, despite dire green predictions to the contrary.

The International Whaling Commission has become an organization whose increasingly slim majority has decided that top-down decisions on member activities are the only way with which to retain power. Retention of the power to deny Parties their right to conduct their legal activities under the Convention is now a major goal, in contrast to the original goals of the Convention, which are the pursuit of conservation of whales through science, and the resultant benefits to the whaling industry from that research.

The power-to-deny-use movement is a historically new pattern that has intensified in the last twenty years, until now the IWC (and increasingly, CITES) are international bodies whose members appear more interested in denying user nations their rights than in conducting scientific research that would answer questions of degree or fact of use on an on-going basis. The structure of the IWC differs from that of NAMMCO, which in contrast, consists only of nations in the North Atlantic region, concentrates heavily on

scientific research on marine mammals, while its members are not threatened politically at home by the domestic politics of environmentalist NGOs.

IWMC applauds Iceland, and encourages its leaders to stand firm on Iceland's right to conduct scientific research whaling, and to take the next steps only when this is appropriate from a perspective of sustainable use and ecological balance in their own marine ecosystem. Each nation has this inalienable right to conduct its business for the good of its people and their environment. The top-down-rule pattern of global organizations has evolved from a culture of reasonable and respectful Parties to one concerned with matters other than international conservation issues. Life, scientific research and eventually, business, must return to the original goals and ideals set out by the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling.

Two Conservation Notes Rhino Protection and Sea Turtle Status

Rhinoceros poachers are being relentlessly pursued through analysis of the products they have stolen from areas of the world where these Pleistocene-era animals are still holding on to life. The New Scientist Print Edition (September 6, 03) reports that Crawford Allen, enforcement support coordinator for Traffic, has announced that new genetic and chemical tests on Asian medicines and on Yemeni ornamental daggers are now so sensitive that they can be used to determine not only the species of animal (white black or Javan rhino) whose horn material is being tested, but also the actual game reserve on which the animal lived

before it was illegally killed. Thus, both the poaching sites and the ultimate commercial destinations can now be identified, and trade routes between them can be determined and interrupted in a more efficient manner than before. These steps are crucial to ending a trade in the products of animals so endangered that their continued existence is in doubt unless such trade can be stopped altogether.

IWMC congratulates all those engaged in this effort to protect black, white and Javan rhinos, and to aid law enforcement advances in forensic science towards this end.

Nearly two years ago, a handful of “sea turtle protection organizations” petitioned the US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA to find the Loggerhead turtles of Florida eligible for classification as distinct population segments under the Endangered Species Act, and further, to designate their habitat as “critical” under the ESA. Neither of these requests has been granted. The latter was indeed a “critical” decision, because had federal agencies agreed, fishing and shrimping activities in the Gulf of Mexico would have been severely impacted, if not shut down. Dr. Bill Hogarth, NOAA assistant administrator, duly noted that the Loggerhead is a threatened species that deserves and is already receiving,

protection of all its subpopulations. He repeated the opinions and resolve of both agencies and their scientists, that the subpopulations and their nesting habitats are important to the overall survival of the species, and that they are all being protected in the overall plan for species welfare. Both NOAA and the US Fish and Wildlife Service are to be congratulated for making their decisions on Loggerhead turtle survival programs in a manner consistent with the best science, and with respect for the other components of turtle habitat.

Zimbabwe's Tragedy

by Johnny Rodrigues



We invite you to visit our the Forum Section of our website (www.iwmc.org) for an article entitled "Zimbabwe's Tragedy" by Johnny Rodrigues, Chairman, Zimbabwe Conservation Task Force

<http://www.iwmc.org/sustain/IWMC-Forum/index.htm>

Canada's Legislature debates Human vs Animal Rights

A very basic test of human rights, common sense, and conservation principles is being played out in Canada right now, both in the House of Commons and in the Senate. Bill C10B concerns the rights of people to kill animals for any reason. The proposed legislation has gone back and forth between the Senate (whose members are appointed for life) and the House of Commons. Discussions have ranged from the rights of aboriginal peoples to conduct their

traditional hunting and fishing activities, to other rural people and those who wish to enter the countryside and hunt for recreational purposes. The latter is a business of considerable economic and conservation importance in Canada, as elsewhere. The bill is about the rights of people to kill animals. It is part of an underlying agenda that has little or nothing to do with concern for animal welfare, human health, or conservation measures.

Senate amendments to the House bill have caused different versions of the legislation to pass between houses more than several times in recent months. At present, those who are concerned with the future of the rights of people to kill animals are convinced that a core of animal rights activists in the Justice Department and the House of Commons is determined to see this through as a test case for permanent prohibition, a victory for a power hungry minority. A wider concern is that this shall eventually not be confined to Canada, but may provide a model for similar legislation in the United States, whose animal rights leaders are alleged to be the economic force behind this Canadian initiative.

The disastrous potential consequences of such legislation include nutritional, social,

psychological, and economic upheaval, to say nothing of the environmental impacts of such a stupid national decision. Yet, Canada beware. Never say "It can't happen here", but rather, become personally involved in communicating public opinion to the Senators and MEPs who are toying incessantly with this concept.

The bill is not about cruelty to animals. It is about the freedom, health and welfare of the people and the environment of Canada, and their right to live life as usual without being forced to become vegetarians. IWMC urges all Canadians to watch the process very closely, and not to trust that the system is necessarily working in their best interests.

Whiffs of Hypocrisy taint an Alaskan Whale Beach

IWMC congratulates the New York Times and reporter Nicholas D. Kristof for his reporting skill and insights in the September 17th, "Whale on the Table" piece. Kristof described the scene in Kaktovik, Alaska, as villagers towed a 43-foot Bowhead onto the beach with a bulldozer. The entire town suspended other activities, including school and business in the US Post Office, while the animal was landed and butchering operations began. All 270 people gathered and celebrated by sharing initial cuts of muktuk, (skin with attached blubber), some plain, and some with modern condiments such as AI sauce or ketchup. Children danced on the whale carcass, while one man fired his gun in the air to discourage circling hungry polar bears. What a scene! The village had landed the first of its allotted three Bowheads for the season. The food is now, and has always been, a staple in the diet of Inupiat people.

Although Kristof jokes about how this could be an example of a new diet craze, and about

how such a diet would surely cause weight loss in "lower 48" Americans, his coverage of the event was anything but critically narrow. The main thrust of the piece, aside from the joyful description of a village celebrating its immense good fortune, was to contrast the scene with US foreign policy on other nations' whaling cultures, and those peoples' right to hunt and consume whales.

Nicholas Kristof astutely comments on US hypocrisy in this matter: American Natives such as the Inupiat and the Makah are granted their traditional rights to hunt whales. In the case of the Makah, their prey is the now unendangered gray whale, back to its original pre-exploitation strength on the US West Coast. In the case of the Inupiat, the Bowhead is still highly endangered, but its strength at an estimated 10,000 animals is not affected by the small yet vitally important aboriginal subsistence harvest.

Kristof contrasts this American whale harvest policy with the American insistence that Japanese, Norwegian, and Icelandic hunters must not even consider harvest of unendangered, highly prolific, one-million-strong minke whales. Where is the sense of international respect for social justice in this reality?

Kristof's piece, and the fact that the New York Times printed it, may be an indication that even the liberal media are finally realizing that there is something wrong with this inexplicable picture. The conservation of any wildlife resource depends on two things: One is continuing scientific research into the resource and its habitat, and the other is a program of on going law enforcement that oversees the harvest, and ensures that rules of the allowed take are honored.

Neither of these factors changes with the intent of the harvesters. Both aboriginal

subsistence and commercial harvest can potentially affect the stability and future of a hunted resource, and the safety of the resource in any case depends on both research and oversight. Norway, Japan and Iceland all agree to these principles. All insist that scientific research is a necessary part of any harvest plan, and all have indicated a willingness to openly reveal the details of whale research and official oversight of the hunt by their citizens. The fact that some people who wish to utilize whale products are aboriginal subsistence hunters, and some are commercial hunters making a living through this means, does not mean that one group should be allowed to celebrate their lifestyle, while the other should be harshly and forever prevented from doing so. Congratulations to Nicholas Kristof and the New York Times for a poignant description of this world-scale conservation issue.

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