AT

AMENDMENTS TO APPENDICES I AND II OF THE CONVENTION

Other Proposals

A. PROPOSAL

Transfer of Loxodonta africana from Appendix II to Appendix I

B. PROPONENTS

The Republic of Austria.

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxonomy

11. Class: Mammalia

12. Order: Proboscidae

13. Family: Elephantidae

14. Species: Loxodonta africana (Blumenbach, 1797) includes subspecies L. a. africana, the savanna elephant, and L. a. cyclotis, the forest elephant. The pygmy elephant (L. a. pumilio) is generally not accepted as a valid subspecies

15. Common Names:
English: African elephant
French: éléphant d'Afrique
Spanish: Elefante africano
Kiswahili: Tembo, Ndovu
German: afrikanischer Elefant
Afrikaans: Olifant

16. Code Numbers: ISIS 5301415001002001001

2. Biological Data

21. Distribution: Elephants were once distributed across all of Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope to the Mediterranean. About 5000 years ago, desertification of the central Sahara separated the North African populations from the rest of the continent. The North African population was exterminated by humans during the third century of the Common Era.

European exploration and colonization revealed an extremely broad distribution of elephants throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. These were subject to severe exploitation and, as a general rule, elephant populations located most closely to communities inhabited by white settlers were rapidly exterminated.

Subsequent introduction and development of western agricultural techniques, exacerbated by various environmental abuses as over-grazing and deforestation, along with a general increase in the human population has deprived the species of much habitat.

This habitat loss, however, is not uniform across the entire continent. Rather, some regions have become entirely unavailable to elephants, while other regions still constitute prime habitat.

The consequence of the uneven availability of habitat is an increasingly uneven distribution of the species across its former range. Nevertheless, enormous tracts of habitat are still available to the African elephant.

Loxodonta africana divides its distribution range between its two subspecies. The forest elephant (L. a. cyclotis) is distributed through Africa's equatorial forests from western Uganda to Sierra Leone, and the nominate savanna elephant (L. a. africana) is distributed through the savannas and bushlands characteristic of most of Africa and located to the North, East and South of the forest elephant's distribution range.

22. Population: Historically, there are estimates that a pristine African habitat could support in excess of five million elephants without difficulty. Current carrying capacity is likely in excess of two million.

Estimates of the present population range between 1,000,000 and 350,000.

There is considerable divergence in estimates of current populations because of inadequacies in censusing. Some populations are very well known, and there is little dispute about these, particularly those populations found in the open habitats of eastern and southern Africa where intensive conservation work, the presence of substantial tourism and the applicability of relatively precise censusing techniques such as aerial transect surveys, can produce reliable data. In western and central Africa, elephants populations are not so well known because of less research conducted there, and because dense forest vegetation makes census efforts more difficult and less precise.

Notwithstanding the difficulties involved, there is growing accord that former population estimates for central Africa had been overly optimistic. Recent field work suggests that former extrapolations of eastern Africa techniques are inappropriate and yield unjustifiable high population estimates.

Furthermore, earlier reports which merely estimated elephant populations in inaccessible areas often did not account for intense poaching.

Estimates of population trends suggest that the African elephant may have lost between 42.3% and 73.1% of its population during the past decade. In some regions, loss rates in excess of 90% have been recorded.

Estimates predicting extinction if present trends are not reversed soon are varied. The most optimistic predictions calculate elephants may survive in nature for another 10 or 12 years. More pessimistic projections predict the loss of viable populations within three or four years.

Although populations of Loxodonta africana are apparently stable through much of southern Africa, the broader perspective for the continent is one very serious population decline which, in many areas can be described as catastrophic. Indeed, it was five years ago that the Chairman of the Species Survival Commission's African Elephant and Rhinoceros Specialist Group reported "There can no longer be any reasonable doubt that commercial hunting is making heavy inroads into elephant populations". If anything, the situation has been exacerbated through the past half-decade.

Many experts involved with study and conservation of Loxodonta africana agree that the species is currently threatened with extinction throughout most of its range and consequently fulfills the biological requirements of Conf. 1.1 (the Berne Criteria) for listing a species in Appendix I.

Biologists expert in the demographic structure and equilibrium of this species are in general accord that biological and social stability of most populations have been very seriously disrupted because of hunting to supply the ivory trade. As a consequence, there is evidence that the overall level of trade through the past decade has been such that it involves numbers of specimens constituting a significant portion of the total population size necessary for the continued survival of the species. This, then provides double justification under the Berne Criteria for transfer of the species to CITES Appendix I.

The Berne Criteria provides a flexible approach for listing species in Appendix I. When a species is demonstrated to be experiencing serious decline, there need be only the probability of trade. When significant trade is known to occur, there need be only indicative evidence of population decline. It is postulated that in the present case, there is ample documentation demonstrating Loxodonta africana is indeed experiencing serious decline, and that this decline is a direct consequence of significant trade.

Further, from a biological point of view, it needs be recalled that the subject species is the only one extant in its genus. The extinction of this species would thus have particularly grave biological implications.

23. Habitat: Loxodona africana is an eminently adaptable species and has thrived in a great variety of habitats. It is perhaps best known in the forested savanna, but also thrives in dense rain and montane forests, both virgin and secondary. It is found in acacia grasslands, dry bush country, low marshy areas and high moorlands. African elephants successfully inhabit relatively arid regions on the southern fringe of the Sahara and in Namibia. They are also known to ascend to high altitudes, with evidence of elephants climbing to at least 4,422 m on Mt. Kenya.

Although human activities have deprived the elephant of much habitat, some human industries apparently benefit the species. For example, studies have indicated that elephants may be found at double density in logged secondary woodlands as compared to nearby virgin forests.

Several surveys have identified large tracts of good quality elephants habitat presently devoid of elephants. Intense poaching pressure has exterminated elephants from these areas. Given appropriate protection, however, there is no apparent reason why these zones could not be reoccupied.

As noted above (section 22.), there is some debate over the population of elephants in thickly forested regions of central and West Africa because the vegetation density precludes effective application of traditional census techniques. A presumed corollary to this situation suggested that this habitat type sheltered elephants from poachers.

However, recent studies indicate that elephant densities in these habitat are less than previously presumed. This may be deduced from the supposition that increased vegetative biomass is not necessarily palatable or available. It may be assumed that much tropical rainforest vegetation is inedible for elephants. Furthermore, most of the vegetation in tropical rainforest exists five or more meters above the ground and therefore is inaccessible to elephants. Thus, correlations between habitat vegetative biomass and elephant populations are likely inappropriate.

3. Trade Data

31. National Utilization: Traditionnally, Loxodonta africana has been exploited throughout its range for meat, hides and ivory for local consumption. Intense hunting for the international ivory market (both legal and illegal), has caused a dramatic decline in elephant populations across most of Africa. This has caused most African governments to take legal protective measures that forbid the hunting of elephants for any reason. Consequently, the abuses of the ivory trade can be cited as having deprived African nationals of traditional use of their elephants.

A few ivory carving industries do exist in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Zambia, Botswana and Malawi, together consuming less than 30 tons of ivory annually (i.e., about 3% of the total ivory in trade).

A CITES Appendix I listing will likely have little immediate impact on present national utilization of Loxodonta africana other than perhaps stimulating domestic ivory carving industries. In the future, however, it is presumed that greater

protection of the species will result in the recovery of many populations, and thus provide opportunity for the resumption of traditional domestic utilization in regions where it is presently forbidden.

32. Legal International Trade: Although there is some marginal trade in elephant hides, feet, ears, trunk and tail, ivory constitutes the preponderant element of international trade, and the CITES Ivory Quota Control System provides the only vehicle recognized by CITES for legal international trade.

To maintain the current level of trade will require the destruction of ever greater numbers of elephants. The reason for this is that the great majority of Africa's larger elephants have already been killed and thus the trade is turning towards exploitation of smaller elephants with smaller tusks. Early in the 1970's, tusks of 10 to 12 kilograms were recorded as average for the trade.

By 1976, tusk size fell to about 9 kg each which required the slaughter of some 45,000 elephants to supply trade of about 800 tons. By 1984, average tusk size fell to 6 kg and it required the deaths of 70,000 elephants to constitute the same 800 tons.

Today, average tusk sizes are below 5 kg. The trade is exploiting adolescents and consequently causing tremendous a demographic catastrophy within the species, hindering its reproductive capacity for many years into the future and daily undermining any intention to conserve and restore the species.

33. Illegal Trade:

34. Potential Trade Threats:

341. Live specimens: There is some minor trade in live specimens of Loxodonta africana primarily for zoos. This trade should be considered essentially insignificant compared to that of parts and derivatives.

342. Parts and derivatives: Although, as noted above, there is some trade in hides, feet, ears, trunks and tails, this is very minor compared to trade in ivory.

4. Protection Status

41. National: Loxodonta africana is a protected species in nearly all African states. Most range states prohibit any hunting of the species or trade in its parts and derivatives.

42. International: Loxodonta africana is presently listed in CITES Appendix II. In the United States, it is considered "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. Presently, there is a petition before the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to reclassify the species to "endangered" status. Other U.S. legislation seeks to protect the species by restricting the importation of some ivory. European Community efforts have taken a similar direction.

43. Additional Protection Needs: An Appendix I listing of the species in CITES would close the markets which have been responsible for consuming unconscionable volumes of ivory. This would be salubrious for the species' future. Beyond this, however, the annihilation of the elephant in some regions, and its demographic destruction in others, suggests that legal protection should be coupled with active conservation measures designed to assist the species' recovery.

5. Information on Similar Species

The Asian elephant (Elephas maximus) is the only other proboscidean extant. It is totally protected in all habitat countries, and already listed in CITES Appendix I.

Elephas maximus is generally smaller than Loxodonta africana and is easily distinguishable. Loxodonta has larger ears, either triangular (in the nominate africana) or rounded (in cyclotis). The forehead of Loxodonta is flat and receding, and the trunk strongly ringed, with two finger-like processes at the tip. Elephas has a broader head which is highly domed, with a median depression dividing the crown into two prominent bosses.

Loxodonta has a sway-back body with a belly line sloping toward the hind legs while Elephas has a straighter spine and a belly line which is either convex or nearly horizontal.

Some experts claim to be able to distinguish ivory coming from either species, although this is not broadly accepted.

6. Comments from Countries of Origin

Questionnaires were sent to CITES Management Authorities in all habitat countries of Loxodonta africana. These questionnaires were provided in either French or English, according to the preference of the Party. To date, the following responses have been received.

BENIN: (Translated from French original) Our country favors the reclassification of the elephant from Appendix II to Appendix I. But preserving the option of returning individual populations to Appendix II once environmental equilibrium is assured.

BOTSWANA: "Botswana is well known for its excellent wildlife protection laws. Its concern for the elephant population is evidenced by the ban pending on-going detailed population studies. The population is increasing at near maximum rate of 6% and constitute one of the largest remaining in southern Africa. The value of the elephant in Botswana economically as well as ecologically, i.e. as dominant species in ecosystems of northern Botswana, is well established fact. The government needs to maintain the economic value of the elephant so that increased conflicts with genuine human development and negative impacts to habitats where elephants congregate most will not be viewed as an unlikeable species. The elephant must remain in Appendix II and decisions to the contrary must be based on country to country merits. Hence it would be serious omission if the Botswana population were ever to be forced on to Appendix I just because elsewhere lack of conservation efforts have allowed their situation to deteriorate and threaten their populations."

BURUNDI: (Translated from French original) "Also as we no longer have an elephant population, we propose total protection of this pachyderm by placing it under Appendix I of CITES."

GAMBIA: "As the CITES delegate for the Gambia, I would like to see Loxodonta africana transfered onto Appendix I of CITES - for as long as an international trade in ivory permitted, the species becomes increasingly endangered. The continental population crash which has

become apparent over the past decade or so is grim evidence that this species - in common with a number of other African species, is in very real danger of final extinction. Even if relict population may survive, it is likely that genetically the species would become so impoverished by isolation that these factors alone could bring about its eventual demise. This species needs and deserves our protection now."

GHANA: The African elephant is seriously on the decline continentally. To stop this trend the species will have to be given a complete protection. Once trade is allowed illegal hunting and smuggling will continue even from countries that accord the elephant complete protection. It should be put on CITES Appendix I.

GUINEE: (Translated from French original) "In view of the endangerment of this species, and the attitudes taken by the elephant and rhinoceros specialists group which met in Gabon, we propose the transfer of the elephant from Appendix II to Appendix I with quota."

LIBERIA: It is a living fact that Loxodonta africana is seriously threatened by extinction in many countries of origin, particularly the West African populations. At the same time, it is also true that some Central, East and South African countries have either stable populations of Loxodonta africana or are managing their respective populations on a sustained yield basis to allow for legal and convenient cropping. A proposal to transfer Loxodonta africana from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES might cause serious problems for those countries of origin who will be confronted with over population because of measures already taken and of the restrictions on trade the transfer will cause. However, we would support a proposal to transfer the West African population if possible. The problem of differentiating ivory from the sub-regions have to be worked out. On the other hand, we would cooperate with the majority of our colleagues from countries of higher elephant population density if they do accept the transfer proposal.

NIGER: (Translated from French originals) "Taking into account the alarming situation of the African elephant, we propose the transfer of this species from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES without quota. To our mind, this is the possibility for saving the African elephant."

NIGERIA: "There is no objection provided the current quota rules of other Appendix I species like crocodile and leopards can be adopted."

SOMALIA: Since the African elephants are nearly extinct in the country and in the other African countries by heavy poaching and the lower protection status, also our feeling is that the CITES quota system and the Appendix II strategy can not strongly enough help the protection of the African elephant. So that we suggest, as a habitat country for Loxodonta africana, that the African elephant should be transfered from Appendix II to Appendix I of CITES.

TOGO: (Translated from French original) "The elephant is a species under constant threat. Togo requests that it be transfered to Appendix I."

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