

## CORRESPONDENCE

## Transforming Wildlife Trade Interventions: Reply to Phelps *et al.*

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In their response to Challender & MacMillan (2014), Phelps *et al.* (2014) agree that more multifaceted approaches are needed to address illegal wildlife trade, especially where high-value species are concerned, but advocate a cautionary approach. However, given the precipitous decline in populations of these species, we believe that more innovative approaches are now needed, as enforcement is simply not working. Also, we must act by working with, rather than against, the forces shaping the modern world.

Phelps *et al.* (2014) question our call for stronger community buy-in and although we agree that Integrated Conservation and Development Programs (ICDPs) have had mixed effectiveness, we believe that this is largely due to limitations in terms of meeting local livelihood expectations. With better funding and bottom-up policies that recognize local aspirations, we believe that direct negotiation with communities' will pay dividends if they perceive conservation as a means to escape poverty and provide opportunities for their children, and examples of successful community-led conservation initiatives are emerging from around the world, for example, conservation of the Suleiman Markhor (*Capra falconeri*) and

Afghan Urial (*Ovis orientalis cycloceros*) in Pakistan (Frisina & Tareen 2009).

Phelps *et al.* (2014) also have concerns about wildlife farming, and while we agree that further research into supply-side interventions is needed, we believe that current concerns are overstated without sufficient justification. Although studies have documented reasons why these interventions can fail, there are examples of successful substitution of farmed for wild products in certain situations (e.g., Hutton & Webb 2003; Shairp 2013) and we believe that a coherent program of research that integrates questions of consumer preferences, governance, and regulation is long overdue.

Although we agree with Phelps *et al.* (2014) that there is a need for thorough investigation into the current failings of enforcement, it is worth noting that past enforcement-focused research has typically promoted messages of failure (e.g., Shepherd 2010), and there is a stark lack of peer-reviewed research and understanding in this area as a result. Conservation remains remarkably ignorant of the processes, actors and networks involved and lacks an in-depth understanding of the sociocultural, institutional, and governance factors undermining

current enforcement efforts, and there is a dearth of information on the impact of trade bans on the consumption of given wildlife products, prices, and trade dynamics more generally.

Finally, we are happy to plead guilty to the charge of attempting to contribute to this debate in the mainstream media and influence policy, as for too long it has been dominated by pro-enforcement lobbyists. While this may have raised funds for such NGOs to “fight” poaching, they have, in effect, turned a blind eye to the complexities of wildlife trade and largely ignored the aspirations and ambitions of communities and nations where the real solutions can be found.

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