

CONAKRY CONNECTION

THE ACID TEST

— *Second in a series by Dan Stiles* —

DAN STILES



first came to Kenya in 1971 to assist on the Koobi Fora paleoanthropology project at Lake Turkana. He taught at the University of Nairobi from 1977-1981 then worked for UNEP

and other UN agencies for several years. He has researched extensively in Africa and Asia on forest and drylands natural resource utilisation. Since 1999, he has been carrying out ivory trade studies and he just completed an assignment with UNEP to help prepare the Stolen Apes report, along with another one on the elephant crisis, both launched at CITES 16 in Bangkok.

I trust we agreed that making progress on establishing the whereabouts of the 10 gorillas ...would be a goal and an acid test ...

E-mail of Karl Ammann to Juan Carlos Vasquez, CITES Secretariat

The acid test that Karl Ammann referred to was for the CITES Secretariat to demonstrate that it wished to cooperate in locating over 130 great apes – probably infant orphans whose mothers had been killed – that were illegally trafficked from Guinea to China between 2007 and 2011 (see SWARA Oct.-Dec. 2013), and to initiate action against those involved. The Secretariat allegedly has in its possession copies of Guinea export permits and corresponding China import permits that contain information on who exported the apes and who imported them, providing names and



PHOTO BY: IAN REDMOND

Villagers commonly capture young apes after older ones in the band have been killed for bushmeat and trophies. The orphans are then sold to traffickers.

addresses. Ammann has requested that information.

The great ape episode is actually the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the trafficking of protected species to China, but the case can serve as an illustration of the problems involved with the CITES system, which is responsible for preventing the overexploitation of wild species vulnerable to international trade.

According to Ammann, the CITES Secretariat thus far has failed the acid test, along with its sister United Nations organization GRASP (Great Apes Survival Partnership), to act in accordance with their stated objectives and responsibilities regarding the protection of great apes from live

trafficking. Why? They seem to be protecting China.

Illegal wildlife trade has been growing in recent years in tandem with a number of driving factors, such as increased prosperity in countries that traditionally value wildlife products (including live animals), massive deforestation and land degradation that evicts wildlife from their habitats, and the rise of organised illegal wildlife trade networks. Some say the increasing Chinese presence in Africa is also a factor. Estimates of the illegal trade value go as high as USD 19 billion annually, which CITES is charged with controlling, admittedly a daunting task. If CITES cannot resolve the high profile great ape trafficking case, how can it be expected



PHOTO BY: HTTP://WWW.CHIMELONG.COM/ENPARK/WILDLIFE.ASPX

Chimpanzee drummer at the Chimelong Safari Park, Guangzhou, abducted from a West African forest.

to deal with the much tougher and broader issue of wildlife trafficking in general?

Ammann and associates of Pax Animalis, a Swiss conservation NGO, and Sean Whyte, CEO of Nature Alert in the UK, have joined forces to present evidence they claim demonstrates that the CITES Secretariat and GRASP are ‘covering up’ China’s involvement in a criminal conspiracy that involves national CITES officials and wildlife dealers to traffic great apes for commercial use in Chinese safari and amusement parks. Great Apes are CITES Appendix I, which theoretically protects them from trade for commercial purposes.

What is the evidence for a cover-up?

China reported the imports of chimpanzees and gorillas to the CITES Trade Database for each year 2007-2011, indicating that most of them were imported from Guinea. To make the imports appear legal, the source

code given on the permits was C and the purpose code was Z. A ‘C’ indicates that the animal is a second generation individual born in captivity and that the breeding is done in a controlled environment meeting certain criteria. A ‘Z’ indicates that the animal is to be housed in a public zoo after importation.

When in late 2010 the Secretariat’s attention was drawn to what appeared to be increasing trade in chimpanzees from Guinea to China, with no corresponding export reports from Guinea, alarm bells sounded.

Two Secretariat officers visited Guinea in September 2011 to investigate. In their mission report they stated, ‘Copies of export permits allegedly issued by Guinea were received from China and these all declared the animals as being captive-bred.’ This statement indicates that the permits were with the Secretariat before the mission began. Also, the Secretariat

knew of no ape breeding facilities in Guinea.

They found a number of irregularities and collected all of the export permit copies held by the Guinea CITES office, of which 126 were subsequently examined in detail by a knowledgeable consultant. None of the collected export permits were those included in the copies sent to the Secretariat by China. These missing ape export permits were not mentioned in either report, in spite of the fact that unusual ape exports was the purpose of the mission. The permit copies obtained from China were not given to the consultant to analyse.

Ammann and other members of Pax Animalis attended the CITES Conference of the Parties in Bangkok in March, 2013. Prior to that they travelled to major cities in China, visiting zoos and safari parks in search of the trafficked chimpanzees and gorillas. They found several of the Guinea chimpanzees, but none of the gorillas.



PHOTO BY: DAN STILES

Karl Ammann (right) confronting Juan Carlos Vasquez of the CITES Secretariat with copies of illegal Guinea export permits. Vasquez claims the Secretariat does not have the copies, in spite of a Secretariat report stating China sent them, confirmed by the China CITES office.

Many of the chimpanzees they found, which included some imported from other countries as well, were dressed up in costumes and were performing trained entertainment acts before a fee-paying public. These safari and amusement parks, which have become big business in China, do not qualify for the Z CITES purpose code.

At the Bangkok CITES conference, Ammann interviewed Juan Carlos Vasquez, the CITES Communications and Outreach Officer, on the subject of the permits that the Secretariat had obtained from China. Ammann informed him that he had found some of the trafficked chimpanzees in China, but not the gorillas. The permits would indicate where the gorillas went. Where were the gorillas?

Vasquez denied that the Secretariat was in possession of any permit copies relating to the great ape exports from Guinea. Ammann even showed copies of permits he had obtained from

traffickers, but Vasquez maintained that CITES Parties were responsible for Convention enforcement, not the Secretariat, and that Ammann should contact Guinea and China regarding the permits.

In April, Pax Animalis emailed Mr. Vasquez and asked once again for information contained in the permits, and Vasquez repeated that the Secretariat did not have them. Pax Animalis then wrote to the CITES office in Beijing, China, in May with a number of questions concerning the great ape imports, including the permits. Meng Xialin, the head of the China CITES office, replied in part, ‘...we have provided all relevant export and import permits to the CITES Secretariat for its information’, thus confirming what the Guinea mission report stated.

Sean Whyte of Nature Alert, who has campaigned for 20 years on behalf of Asia’s wildlife, particularly apes, took up the case of the Conakry Connection

apes. He also wrote to Vasquez with various questions, and received a reply concerning the permits on 28 June stating in part, ‘...we can simply repeat once again that the Secretariat does not have copies of these documents.’

In spite of numerous communications more recently concerning the permits and the Conakry Connection case sent by Pax Animalis, Nature Alert and myself to the Secretariat and to the China CITES office, no replies have been forthcoming. Nature Alert has begun a public awareness campaign using an email newsletter and Facebook posts to publicize the fact that the CITES Secretariat appears to be covering up China’s rôle in the conspiracy to import great apes for commercial purposes.

The plot thickens. Evidence obtained by Ammann suggested that the CITES office of the Democratic Republic of Congo was involved with the Guinea great ape case. Investigations of the DRC connection with Guinea were

Dear Mr. Scanlon,

Why do some member states of CITES (such as China) not comply with Article VIII of the convention?

Namely:

- Prosecution of traders
- Use of imported Appendix 1 species for commercial use - as we see here in China?
- Confiscation of illegally imported species
- Repatriation if possible




Why do they totally ignore CITES?

Is it because they know CITES hasn't the guts to enforce the rules?

CHINA HAS BROKEN THE LAW AND BREACHED THE CITES CONVENTION

SO WHAT WILL THE CITES SECRETARIAT DO ABOUT BOTH?



130 wild caught chimpanzees and 10 gorillas - stolen from the forests of West Africa to be stuffed into Chinese Zoo's and abused like this.

This cannot go unpunished - swept under the carpet by CITES - or can it?

JOHN SCANLON
WILL CHINA BE SANCTIONED AND THE APES RETURNED TO AFRICA?

THEIR LIVES ARE IN YOUR HANDS.

PHOTOS BY: SEAN WHYTE

Nature Alert has begun a campaign to shame the CITES Secretariat into action.

carried out in collaboration with Ian Redmond of Ape Alliance. Leonard Muamba Kanda, head of the DRC CITES office, and DRC GRASP focal point, sent a report to Redmond indicating that he had visited China in April and that he had seen chimpanzees, gorillas and other species that had originated in the DRC. He even reported that he knew the identity of the traffickers and the trade route that was used to ship the animals via Guinea to China. He expressed a strong interest in stopping this illicit trafficking, prosecuting those involved and in other correspondence indicated that he wished the apes to be repatriated to the DRC.

CITES hit Guinea with a suspension of trade last March because of the great ape affair, a serious sanction, as it means that countries belonging to CITES should no longer accept CITES-listed species from Guinea, including timber, reptiles, birds and so on. Pax

Animalis and Nature Alert are asking the Secretariat why China should not be treated as Guinea was. They have pointed out numerous deficiencies in the way the China CITES office dealt with the Guinea export permits, yet the Secretariat has done nothing publicly (though they may be working behind the scenes).

GRASP is aware of the Conakry Connection affair, and even referred to it in a report it co-sponsored on great ape trafficking (*Stolen Apes*, see SWARA April-June 2013). This UN programme, along with CITES, has the responsibility to protect great apes from illegal trade. By not taking action against those who facilitate the illegal import of great apes and other protected species into China, these United Nations bodies are only encouraging the insidious system to continue. When problems with Guinea supply started up in 2011, China quickly shifted to other countries and imported

chimpanzees – with a C source code – from Sierra Leone. Traffickers told undercover investigators working with Ammann that several African CITES offices are now offering export permits with C source codes, for a price. When will the CITES Secretariat finally meet the acid test? ●

This is only a small part of the story, and the next installment will contain interviews with senior CITES and wildlife officials of the DRC indicating that they are colluding with China to export great apes held in sanctuaries to China for 'scientific purposes'. Other cases of illegal great ape exports will also be exposed and it will highlight law enforcement work being carried out in West and Central Africa by the EAGLE network to snare the ape traffickers.