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RESEARCH REPORT

CONSERVATION IN ZIMBABWE  
AS SEEN BY EUROPEANS\*

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THE IDEA FOR this article was formulated at the time of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) conference in Lausanne which (amongst other things) was discussing a ban on the sale of ivory and rhino horn. It investigates the perceptions, opinions and views of Europeans on these issues and what the European press actually reported, which may not be quite what was actually said, but is what people read and presumably believe.

At that time (October 1989) there were a number of emotive articles in the western European press on the subject and as Zimbabwe was one of the countries arguing against a ban on the sale of ivory it figured prominently in a not particularly favourable way. One article headed 'One family's holiday in the killing fields of Zimbabwe'<sup>1</sup> told the story of a family's week-long hunting trip to Dande which included the killing of an elephant, a leopard, a bushbuck, a waterbuck, an impala, a warthog and two buffalos at a cost of US\$30 000. Another article reported: 'While the conference argues about how to save the African elephant from extinction, affluent amateur white hunters from Europe and the United States are joining the ivory poachers in the bush and national parklands of in search of the world's largest land mammal'.<sup>2</sup> The article stated that 'a thousand elephants will be shot in Africa this week alone' and added that elephant herds have been reduced from 1.3 million to half that number in ten years.

*The Times* leader on 12 October noted that the arguments for and against banning the ivory trade should be judged solely by the criterion most likely to save the African elephant from extinction and it concluded that the CITES controls had proved 'horrifyingly ineffective'.<sup>3</sup> When the ban on ivory sales was agreed, the fact that Zimbabwe, Botswana, Mozambique, Malawi and Burundi would disregard the ban was reported with some distaste. The Zimbabwe government's claim that their elephant population was well managed, and had increased from 30 000 to 50 000, was refuted by elephant experts; they rejected the claims on herd size because the Zimbabwe government has never allowed the international community to look at the raw data from which the calculations are made; and it was claimed that animals in herds from Botswana and Angola which were regularly crossing the border were being counted and that dead animals were being included.<sup>4</sup>

\* Throughout this article the word 'Europeans' refers to residents of Europe, not residents of Zimbabwe of European descent.

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 12 Oct. 1989, 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 Oct. 1989, 5.

The initial articles were emotive and not particularly informative. However, by 13 October more information began to emerge. It was reported that the reason why Zimbabwe supported hunting was to provide money for local communities and the game parks. A table of the trophy fees was published showing how costly hunting licences are.<sup>5</sup> The situation in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana (where, it was said, careful controls existed and where there is a flourishing population of elephants which often have to be culled) was compared to the situation in Kenya, where because of a lack of controls, the elephant and rhino population have all but disappeared.

The arguments then centered on the black rhino.<sup>6</sup> A report that Zimbabwe was considering restarting the outlawed trade in rhino horn was swiftly condemned by the World Wide Fund for Nature as 'catastrophic'. It was pointed out that the black rhino population had been reduced from 65 000 to some 4 000 in the last twenty years. Statements from Zimbabwean representatives quoted were 'the black rhino is an animal of no value whatsoever, except perhaps for tourism, with a huge conservation cost' and 'hunting is not a barbaric sport. The animals are a form of renewable resource and hunting is a form of recreation.' These remarks were poorly received. However, not all was bad news — one well-known rhino expert (who preferred not to be named because of the highly emotive nature of the debate) noted that 'a total ban on the horn trade had not stopped the poaching. . . . Pure protectionists forget about the huge costs of conservation . . . if Zimbabwe does not get the cash for a shot rhino or elephant the poachers will.'<sup>7</sup>

It was at this stage that I offered to present a lecture on the subject of Europeans' views on conservation in Zimbabwe. At the time it seemed an easy subject — there were at least two or three articles in the press each day on the subject and readers' letters began to come in. It seemed that all I needed to do was to collect newspaper articles and the lecture would be written. However, the European press works in a strange way. A great deal of attention is given to the 'flavour of the day' and then, suddenly, attention turns to the next topic. In view of the dramatic events taking place in Eastern Europe, it was not surprising when the subject was dropped abruptly at the end of the CITES conference. The few letters that did appear were either well argued and informed or of the 'I must record my outrage and disgust . . .' or 'How can people in their right minds . . .' type.

### THE QUESTIONNAIRE

In view of the coverage in the press, I decided to wait a few weeks and then to use a questionnaire to establish the views of Europeans on conservation in Zimbabwe and how they had been affected by this coverage. The questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was in four parts. Part 1 established some personal details (age, sex and nationality) to allow some manipulation of

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 Oct., 1989, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 Oct. 1989, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 3.

data around these characteristics. The main objective of Part 2 was to ensure that respondents were thinking of the right country. Zimbabwe is, after all, a long way from Europe and I was not at all sure of the level of Europeans' knowledge of Zimbabwe. (In this respect I was pleasantly surprised by the relatively high level of awareness shown in the responses.) This section also served to obtain a indication of views on Zimbabwe in general. The objective of Part 3 was to test opinions and understanding on general conservation issues. Part 4 looked for opinions on specific issues dealing with conservation in Zimbabwe.

The intention was to look for informed opinion rather than a statistically sound cross-section of the European population; therefore, the questionnaire was given out to fairly carefully selected small groups of university students and lecturers, private-school pupils and teachers, middle managers in industry, professional staff and their spouses.

About 160 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 120 were completed and returned. The nationalities of those who sent returns included 75 Britons, 25 Dutch and about 20 other European nationalities (Danish, German, Belgian, Austrian, Swiss and Norwegian). The percentage returns were rather high (approximately 75 per cent), probably because of the high level of interest in the subject. In a number of cases I received completed photocopies of the original questionnaire from those who had not been sent copies. There were also a handful of responses from people outside Europe which, although their responses were similar to those from Europeans, have been excluded from the analysis.

As a test, some questionnaires were given to a group of people who could be expected to be less well informed than the people previously mentioned. There were no returns from this group.

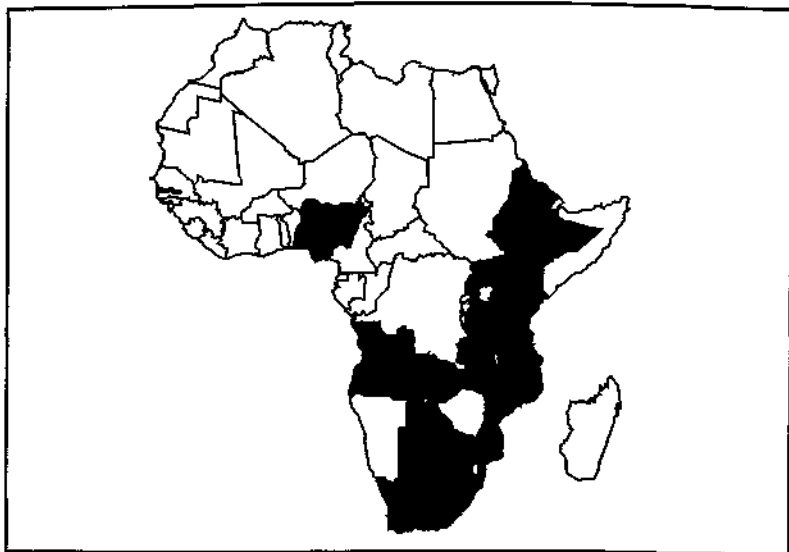
### BASIC INFORMATION

One hundred and twenty completed questionnaires could hardly be considered as a statistically sound representation of the views of several hundred million Europeans. However, they did give a good insight and contained some surprising information. The sample was biased towards males (2 : 1) and the over-50 age group was not well represented. However, there were no major observable differences in opinion between the age groups or the sexes. There were some interesting, but relatively minor, differences between the views of Britons and other Europeans.

So what do Europeans know about Zimbabwe? The majority appear to be much more informed than I had previously thought. The original intention had been to exclude those returns not clearly identifying Zimbabwe, but this was not necessary. It is true that some could not accurately name a country bordering Zimbabwe and if all the responses were included Zimbabwe would occupy a great portion of Africa (see Fig. 1). However, the answers to the combination of general questions on Zimbabwe made it clear that all the respondents had the right country in mind even if some of them were not really sure where it was.

The general view on the size of Zimbabwe's population was that it is somewhat larger than it in fact is (Fig. 2). While almost 50 per cent of the

*Figure 1:* RESPONDENTS' VIEW OF WHICH COUNTRIES ARE ZIMBABWE'S NEIGHBOURS

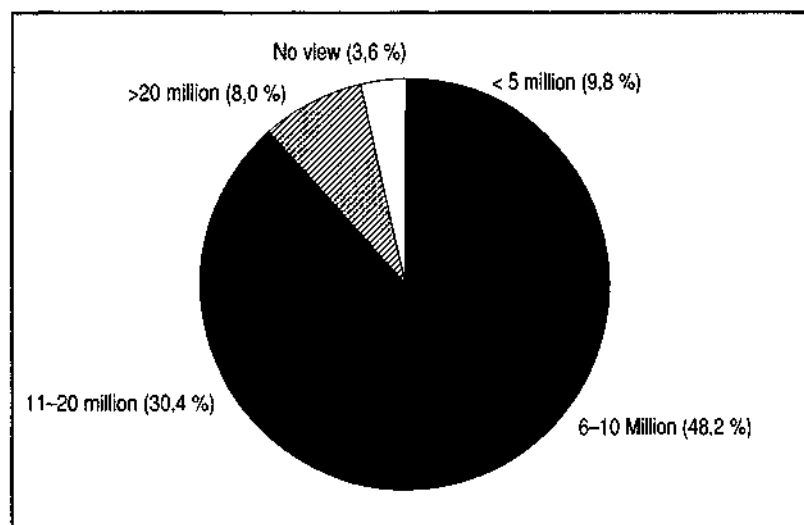


sample correctly identified the population of Zimbabwe to be between six and ten million, 30 per cent believed Zimbabwe to have ten to twenty million people. Of the remainder only 4 per cent did not respond and the other responses were evenly split between less than 5 million and greater than 20 million. In terms of Zimbabwe's neighbours, 42 per cent identified Zimbabwe most strongly with South Africa, 17 per cent Zambia, 10 per cent Mozambique and only 4 per cent mentioned Botswana. Not surprisingly, 1 in 10 could not name a neighbouring country (Fig. 3). Although I asked respondents not to rush to the nearest atlas before replying, there is no guarantee that they obeyed this request.

When it came to identifying the main export of Zimbabwe, a number were clearly misled by the questionnaire into identifying ivory as the Zimbabwe's main export (Fig. 4). All but 14 per cent of the respondents felt able to give (or guess) an answer. Tobacco was the most popular answer (17 per cent), with copper, mineral ores, agricultural produce all being bunched together with 12 per cent. Coffee (11 per cent) and ivory (10 per cent) were also popular answers, with precious metal, coal, diamonds, oil, meat, skins and tourism also being mentioned. I consider these to be reasonable set of responses considering that most Europeans would not be able to name the main export of their own country.

The responses to the question on what associations people had about Zimbabwe were rather illuminating (Fig. 5). It was the answers to this question that persuaded me to include the data from all the returns, particularly since only 2 respondents felt unable to answer this question.

**Figure 2:** RESPONDENTS' ESTIMATES OF ZIMBABWE'S POPULATION



**Figure 3:** RESPONDENTS' VIEW OF ZIMBABWE'S NEIGHBOURS

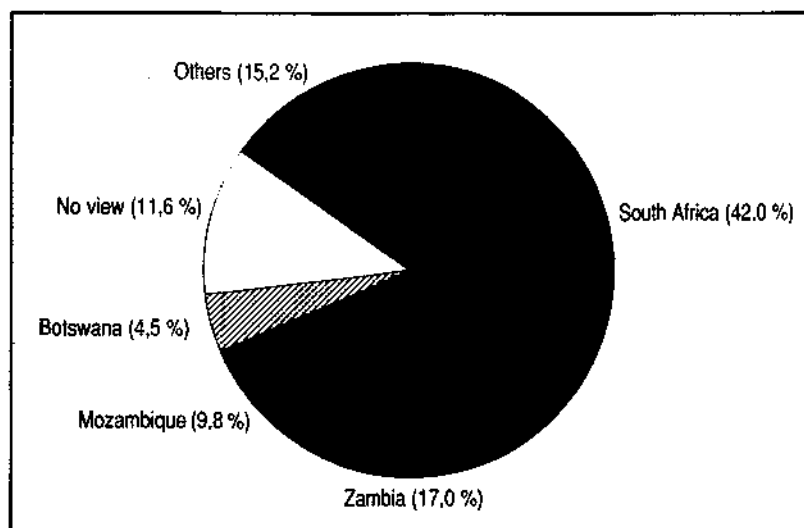


Figure 4: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON ZIMBABWE'S EXPORTS

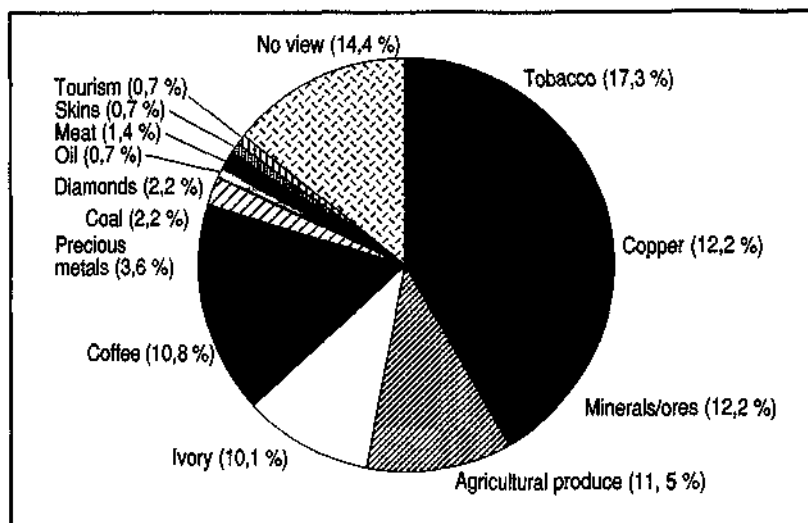
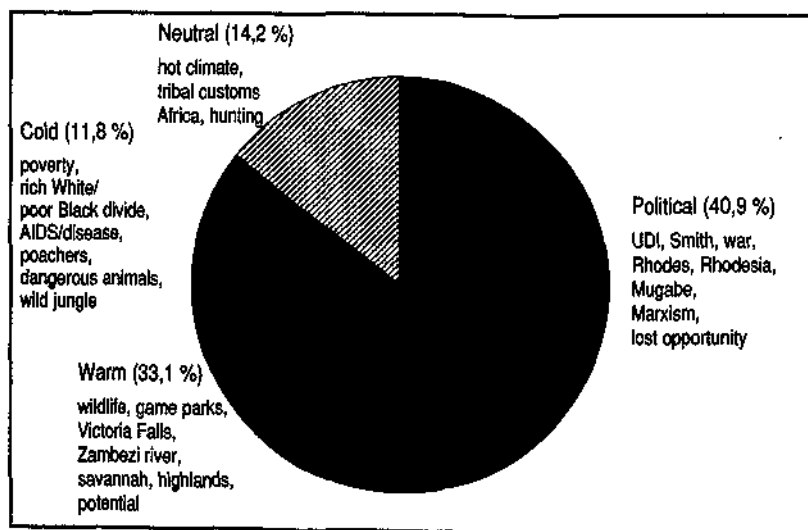


Figure 5: RESPONDENTS' ASSOCIATIONS WITH ZIMBABWE



Most of the associations were political or historical (41 per cent) mentioning Rhodes, Rhodesia, the struggle for independence, the Unilateral Declaration of Independence and Mugabe. I do not find this surprising as the vast majority of the European news about Zimbabwe over the last ten to fifteen years has been about political issues. However, the under-21 age group have a totally different association with Zimbabwe and less than 10 per cent mentioned anything to do with politics.

Of the remaining associations mentioned, 33 per cent were 'warm' or pleasant associations — with wildlife, animals, game parks, Victoria Falls, and the Zambezi River being the most mentioned associations. About 12 per cent were 'cold', being relatively unpleasant associations with poverty and the rich-poor divide appearing most frequently. So the general view of Zimbabwe is that it is an ex-colonial nation, which struggled for independence and political control and is now a Black African country with some potential. Its particular advantages are climate, the beauty of the scenery and its natural resources which are different from those in Europe.

### CONSERVATION

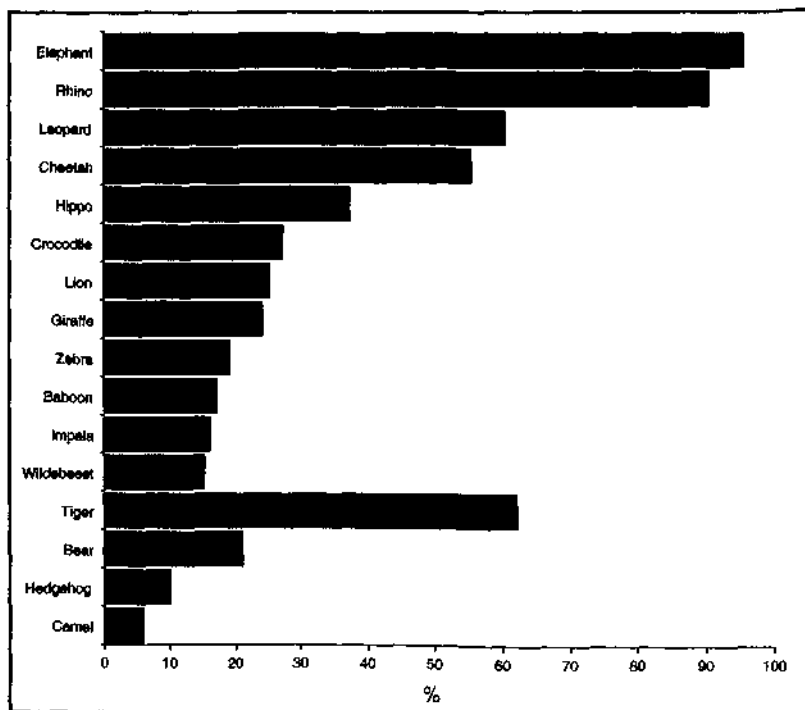
Concern with conservation of the environment and wildlife is now a major issue in Europe, so it was not surprising to find that no one admitted that conservation was unimportant and that there were only 5 per cent 'don't knows'. Of the respondents 40 per cent had major concerns about conservation and 55 per cent had some concerns. While this level of response is encouraging it remains to be seen how strongly Europeans will react to the situation in Zimbabwe.

In the minds of Europeans, elephants and rhino are definitely endangered species (see Fig. 6). Virtually everyone identified the elephant as being endangered, with the rhino close behind (85 per cent of the respondents). The majority also identified tiger (63 per cent), cheetah (60 per cent) and leopard (55 per cent) on the list but thereafter it became somewhat hit-and-miss. Several respondents took the easy way out and stated that all the animals listed on the questionnaire were endangered. This probably accounts for the fact that 16 per cent believe impala are an endangered species. Few gave any qualifications to their answers; two noted that only some species of the tiger were endangered.

### IVORY SALES

When asked to give a reason why they thought Zimbabwe did not support the conference decision to ban the sale of ivory the answers given were crystal clear — only two respondents were unable to give an answer. The majority (63 per cent) quite clearly felt that the sale of ivory was an important source of national revenue that the government did not wish to lose. While many qualified their answer by saying that the country desperately needed foreign-currency revenue, it was clear that these respondents considered the stance taken by Zimbabwe to be for political reasons or for revenue rather than for conservation. Just over 20 per cent stated that



*Figure 6:* RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON ENDANGERED SPECIES

they believed Zimbabwe has a sound management programme of the elephant population, that the sale of ivory is a bonus which provided revenue for conservation projects and that, therefore, Zimbabwe's stance was a conservation-led response. The other main attitude, found chiefly among the Dutch and Britons, was that a ban on ivory sales would drive the trade underground causing a rise in the price of ivory thus making poaching more profitable. One or two people felt that the reason for Zimbabwe's stance was because a ban on ivory sales was not practical or effective.

More than two thirds (67 per cent) of the responses supported the ban on the sale of ivory. There was much emotion on the issue and the adjectives 'appalling' and 'disgraceful' appeared frequently. The European responses (excluding Britons and Dutch) were virtually unanimous in their condemnation of the sale of ivory. The British were slightly more pragmatic with a small group wanting to sell existing stocks but ban sales from then on. Some 30 per cent of respondents believed that sales of ivory should continue provided they could be legally channelled and controlled.

There were a number of qualifications to the answers here ('if humane', 'if controlled', 'profits cannot accrue to poachers', 'providing all profits are used for conservation', etc.). The Dutch were more positive on controlled sales with half giving support. A small number (2 per cent) believed it was not practical to implement any ban.

### WHY IS ZIMBABWE CULLING ELEPHANTS?

The responses to this question were a little more varied although 70 per cent responded with various combinations of the following: 'It is a measure to avoid habitat destruction by controlling the elephant population.' 'The sale of ivory adds to the national income.' 'The sale of ivory provides income for conservation.'

The Dutch responses were virtually unanimous in this respect (almost certainly influenced by a Dutch television programme on elephant management during the period that the survey was being carried out — but with up to sixteen different channels available is it possible that the whole Dutch nation watched this programme?).

A relatively large proportion (16 per cent) of the total respondents felt culling was purely commercial to obtain stocks of ivory for sale. The other responses (totalling 14 per cent) included: 'There are no reasonable excuses for killing animals at all.' 'To stop the poachers killing the animals first.' 'Competition with man for the land.'

When asked to state a personal view on culling there was obviously a great deal of heart-searching and almost 20 per cent were unable to answer. Even though 42 per cent of those who did respond believed culling to be acceptable to save the majority, there was again a great deal of qualification to the answer ('if humane', 'if controlled', 'if planned', etc.).

The second largest group were those who did not support culling for any reason. Once again the 30 per cent who gave this answer did so with such emotive words as 'immoral', 'unnecessary', and 'evil'. The continental Europeans in the survey particularly condemned culling with three-quarters taking this view. One person in 10 believed culling should be curbed and that resources should be employed to move the animals to an area where overpopulation was not a problem. A similar percentage (all of them Britons) failed to see any reason at all for culling animals. The remaining answers suggested pointing guns at poachers and not animals, elephant farming, or moving people away from parks areas to make more room for the animals!

### HUNTING AND POACHING

The subject of hunting provided something of a surprise. In total almost two thirds supported hunting, this being particularly true of the Continental Europeans. The British were more reserved but even so support outweighed dislike of hunting. Although 17 per cent gave relatively unqualified support for hunting ('fine', 'better than poaching', 'full support especially if revenues are channelled to conservation'), the majority qualified their answers by

saying hunting was acceptable if it was 'recorded', 'controlled', 'humane', 'applied only to non-endangered species', etc.

Many of the 37 per cent who condemned hunting did so for emotional reasons, seeing hunting as 'commercial', 'barbaric', 'repulsive', 'inhumane' and 'unnecessary'. Surprisingly, there were few abstentions from the question on hunting.

There were more surprises on the subject of shooting poachers. Over 45 per cent of the responses gave support with varying degrees of qualification; just under 33 per cent disagreed with hunting and the remainder were undecided. Of the supporters, 24 per cent saw shooting poachers as a better form of hunting — the poachers know what they are doing; a further 14 per cent agreed without any qualification; 8 per cent disagreed on principle but added that it was a desperate situation warranting desperate solutions. At the other end of the scale 18 per cent used language like 'hypocritical', 'outrageous', 'illegal', in condemning the shooting of poachers. A further 13 per cent believed in the education of poachers, catching, trying and passing sentence on poachers, apprehending the dealers, making poaching unattractive, or putting in more resources to make poaching unnecessary.

The fence-sitters believed that shooting was too severe a punishment but that a hard line (unspecified) was needed which should be used only as a last resort or in self-defence. Once again there were only a handful who did not respond to this question.

### THE EFFECTS OF TOURISM ON CONSERVATION

Clearly, respondents were on safer ground in answering this question and everybody answered it (see Fig. 7). Just under 50 per cent viewed tourism as entirely beneficial as it benefits the tourist through education and relaxation, and leads to an increased awareness of and outside pressure for conservation. It benefits the country by generating income for the national economy. It also benefits conservation by channelling income into game reserves.

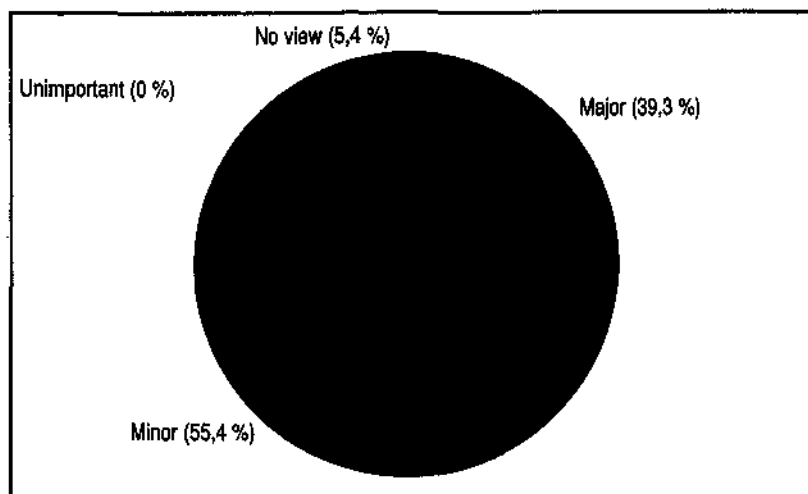
On the other hand, 11 per cent saw tourism in a totally adverse light as it encourages ivory sales, may disturb the environment and may cause animal migration. It also causes secondary damage as tourists want comfortable hotels and souvenir (and other) shops. In any case tourists show an interest only in the 'exciting' animals.

Fully 40 per cent saw tourism as being double-edged, containing all the good and bad elements just described. The general view emerging from this group of respondents was that tourism needs careful management to ensure that it can be of long-term benefit to the country, to the animals and to the tourists themselves. In summary: 'Don't spoil it.'

### IS ZIMBABWE CONSERVATION CONSCIOUS?

Nearly 55 per cent of the respondents did not answer this question. Of those who did give an answer, two thirds felt that Zimbabwe was conservation minded, the remainder did not. This lack of a clear view indicated

Figure 7: RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ON CONSERVATION



that many respondents were formulating their views for the first time. Many of the earlier answers were crossed out and re-written as respondents really thought out the implications of the subject and changed their minds. Several actually admitted that their answers to later questions had caused them to change their minds on the earlier ones.

Apart from the general view that the sale of Ivory should be banned, the October newspaper articles did not seem to have had more than a minor impact on public opinion. Nevertheless, people were much more aware of the problem of elephant conservation than I had anticipated. I discussed the matter further with some of the respondents within easy reach. Most had not seen the articles in the newspaper but had seen reports on television during the CITES conference. Television coverage was muted compared to that of the press and less emphasis was placed on the national positions of the affected countries. A greater degree of emphasis was placed on poaching, which was covered somewhat graphically. I believe that this caused the surprising views given by respondents on the shooting of poachers. Furthermore, television wildlife programmes are extremely popular and informative. The combination of pictorial and verbal information gives television an edge over the press in the retention of knowledge and the forming of opinion.

### CONCLUSION

The questionnaire generated a great deal of interest. More than 50 per cent of the respondents asked for a copy of the findings. Since an information sheet (see Appendix B) was given out to all the respondents after the

completion of the questionnaire, there are at least 120 Europeans who are much more aware of the subject than they were before. There is also one European and his wife who have enjoyed researching and writing this article.

## APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

### 1. General (please tick)

- (a) Age Under 21 ..... (b) Sex Male ..... (c) Nationality .....  
 22-50 ..... Female .....  
 Over 50 .....

### 2. What you know about Zimbabwe?

- (a) Do you have any personal connection with Zimbabwe (family, friends, etc.)? .....

- (b) How many people do you think live in Zimbabwe?

Less than 5 million ..... 6-10 million .....  
 11-20 million ..... More than 20 million .....

- (c) Can you name one of the countries bordering Zimbabwe?  
 .....

- (d) What is Zimbabwe's main export? .....

- (e) What comes into your mind when you think of Zimbabwe?  
 .....  
 .....

### 3. Conservation in general

- (a) How conservation minded are you? (please tick one)

Have major concerns ..... Have no strong view .....  
 Have some concerns ..... Conservation not important .....

(b) Which of the following are endangered species?

Baboon .....	Elephant .....	Leopard .....
Bear .....	Giraffe .....	Lion .....
Camel .....	Hedgehog .....	Tiger .....
Cheetah .....	Hippo .....	Rhino .....
Crocodile .....	Impala .....	Wildebeest .....
Zebra .....		

#### 4. Zimbabwe and conservation

(a) Do you believe Zimbabwe is conservation conscious?

Yes ..... No view ..... No .....

(b) A recent International Conference banned sales of ivory; Zimbabwe did not want this. Can you give a reason why they might have taken this position?

.....  
 .....

(c) What is your view on the sale of ivory? .....

.....

(d) Zimbabwe is currently culling elephants in some of its nature reserves. Can you think of a reason why they are doing that?

.....

What is your view? .....

(e) Zimbabwe allows hunting of wild animals in some of its reserves.

What is your view? .....

(f) Zimbabwe is combating poaching to the extent of shooting poachers.

What is your view? .....

(g) What effect do you think tourism has on conservation of wildlife?

.....

## APPENDIX 2: INFORMATION SHEET

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. If your interest has been aroused the following may be helpful.

Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) is bordered by South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia. Some 8,5 million people (1986 estimate) live in the country which has an area of 150 000 square miles or 1,5 times the size of the UK. The main export is tobacco.

The main thoughts you might have had about Zimbabwe are: Victoria Falls, Zambezi River, Kariba Dam (all shared with Zambia), Stanley and Livingstone, the Zimbabwe Ruins, UDI and the struggle for Independence, Mugabe and Nkomo.

Endangered species from the list are: Cheetah, Elephant, Rhino, Tiger but Giraffe (outside East Africa), Leopard (some species) and Zebra (2 out of 3 species) are also on the endangered species list.

Elephant remain abundant in the Zimbabwe nature reserves. If there are too many elephants they start to destroy their own environment and that is why culling is carried out in some areas. Poaching is the main problem for elephant and rhino owing to the value of ivory and rhino horn. This is why the Zimbabwean authorities are vigorously combating poaching in the national game reserves.

There are two views on the subject of ivory which expressed simply are: (1) By stopping trade, ivory will become worthless and as a result poaching will cease, and (2) By stopping official trading, the black market value of ivory will increase causing an increase in poaching.

It remains to be seen which view is correct, but Zimbabwe takes the latter view. Furthermore, if they are forced to control the elephant population, they see the sale of ivory as revenue to pay for costly anti-poaching measures.

Hunting is a means to gain foreign currency, desperately needed by most African nations. Hunting licences are extremely expensive. It does, however, cause a tremendous reaction against those countries still allowing hunting of animals.

Tourism is double-edged. On the one hand it allows us to see wild animals in their own environment and is a powerful source of foreign currency. On the other hand too many tourists will destroy the natural environment. The challenge is to find the right balance.