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LAW AND DISORDER



Conservationist and photographer Karl Ammann has spent the past 10 years photographing and exposing Africa's bushmeat crisis. He recently turned his attention to the related trade in live animals, especially young primates, and has uncovered levels of corruption and obfuscation that have enabled one trader in particular to operate with impunity for nearly three decades. **Kristina Roic reports.**

Logging. Hunting. Death. This is the unholy trinity of the bushmeat crisis in Africa. Many people have heard about it and even seen the pictures, but very few have witnessed the butchering, profiteering and destruction firsthand. Conservationist and wildlife photographer Karl Ammann is one of the exceptions. During the past decade, the Swiss native has travelled to every forest and local wildlife market in Africa, capturing the slaughter on camera.

Recently, however, Ammann and his investigative partner Jason Mier have switched gears, focusing on exposing an extensive wildlife smuggling ring that stretches from Central Africa to Egypt. The sale of young primates as pets or zoo attractions is generally regarded as a by-product of the bushmeat trade, but in the course of these investigations, Mier has become convinced that, in many cases, babies are the primary target.

It all started in January 2005 when an illegal shipment of six young

chimpanzees – with a black market value of US\$5 000 each – was intercepted on a Kenya Airways flight at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport in Nairobi. The crate, lacking the necessary health certificates and travel permits, had been rejected by the authorities in Cairo and was being returned to Nigeria via Kenya. The journey had taken its toll on the chimps, which ranged in age from seven months to two years. Crammed into a wooden box only 60 centimetres tall, 118 centimetres long, 70 centimetres wide and divided into six compartments, they had travelled for five to six days without any food or water. One had died, while the other five, covered in their faeces, were suffering from severe starvation, dehydration and, in one case, pneumonia.

Ammann and Mier launched an investigation right away. Starting with very little information, they uncovered a trail that took them from Egypt to Nigeria and back to Egypt over a long, arduous year. It was complicated and ▶

Heba has been operating for more than 30 years, selling



ABOVE The crate in which six chimps were transported in January 2005 contravenes CITES and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) regulations in every way.

PREVIOUS SPREAD A happy ending – two of the survivors of the primate shipment that was intercepted at Jomo Kenyatta Airport, Nairobi, shortly after their arrival at the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary in Kenya.

frustrating work. Documents changed hands, undercover footage was obtained and evidence was lost. Last December, Ammann's hotel room was raided after a meeting with Enab Ashraf, the owner of Hauza Hotel, who refused to go on record about his illegal chimp and gorilla collection. Ammann's 35-millimetre films were stolen and all the pictures on his computer were deleted.

Despite the roadblocks and Ammann's claim that he would, 'rather work at gunpoint in the Congo jungle than deal with Egyptian bureaucracy again', the ongoing investigation has had significant success. It not only led Amman and Meir to the perpetrator of the January 2005 shipment, but they quickly discovered, to the biggest ape smuggler in Africa, perhaps even the world.

Meet 54-year-old Heba Abdel Moty Ahmed Saad. She lives in Cairo and wildlife trafficking is her family business. Heba is the mastermind, her son and three daughters are her travelling sidekicks and her husband assists from Nigeria where, conveniently, he owns a transportation company that also has offices in Cameroon and Egypt. With dual citizenship, Heba has been operating between Nigeria and her homeland for almost 30 years, selling primates to influential buyers throughout the Middle East.

The power of bribes has been instrumental in keeping her in business. Under CITES, permits are necessary for the import and export of all fauna and flora listed under Appendix I, which includes gorillas, chimps and bonobos. But, as Dr Mohammed Assad, quarantine manager at Cairo Airport, points out, 'It's very easy in Africa to get documents, illegal papers.'

Mike Pugh, now an inspector for the RSPCA in the UK, says he learned about Heba in 1997 when he was working undercover at the animal market in Kano, Nigeria. 'I was informed by two wildlife dealers at the market that she was the main exporter,' he recalls. 'They estimated that she was exporting around 50 chimps annually and a dozen or so gorillas.'

This was confirmed in May 2005 when Mier travelled undercover to Nigeria and visited the house of Heba's husband. He recalls how the doorman offered to sell him chimpanzees for US\$360, provided him with two phone numbers of suppliers and promised to

deliver the primates by car to his hotel in a week. Of equal mention, says Mier, was the doorman's insistence that the chimpanzees would have to be supplied from Cameroon as they were no longer available in Nigeria. The country's chimp population has been depleted to such an extent that Heba has turned to suppliers living on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, breaking laws in two countries before the chimpanzees are even in her possession.

Even worse, she has never been jailed or fined, and continues to operate freely. One might think that the authorities would have penalised her at some point during her 30 years of smuggling activity, but a chronic lack of law enforcement has allowed Heba to slip through the net.

Although Egypt signed and ratified CITES in 1978, the country still has no prison penalty for wildlife traffickers. They can only be held accountable by Law 4 of 1994 under the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA), which imposes a rarely enforced fine of less than US\$1 000.

This infuriates Ammann. He says the problem with CITES is its dependence on the efficacy of the member country to enforce it. 'This doesn't work in poorly governed African countries like Egypt, where you have corrupt officials investigating themselves. You end up with a situation where the wolves are left watching the henhouse. It's a mockery.'

Dr Ragy Toma, the CITES wildlife officer in Egypt, admits there has to be a harsher punishment. 'When I see a chimpanzee in Egypt I think it is probably from Heba but I cannot prove

primates to influential buyers throughout the Middle East



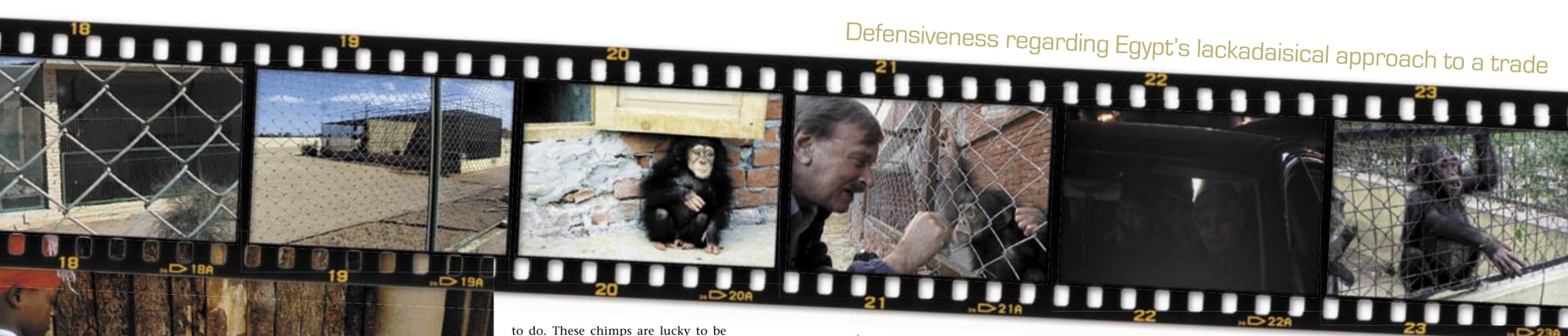
this. The law for smugglers here is too easy. It must have more power. The EEAA is making corrections to this law to introduce a prison penalty.'

It also doesn't help that Heba's clientele consists of high-powered people whose status and money seem to exempt them (and their suppliers) from the law. One example is Gamal Omar, owner of a private resort called Tower Hotel in Sharm el Sheikh. His establishment caters to rich people and foreign dignitaries, such as Hosni Mubarak and Tony Blair, who go there to soak up the rays and feast their eyes on his private zoo, which currently houses 11 chimps and two gorillas.

Another collector is Tarek Abouel Makarem, owner of Africa Safari Park on the highway between Cairo and ►

ABOVE Wildlife trafficker Heba Abdel Moty Ahmed Saad has been operating from Egypt's capital, Cairo, for the past 30 years and has yet to incur even a fine.

TOP, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT The Egyptian market for trafficked animals includes private menageries, roadside zoos and circuses. A solitary teenage chimp languishes at the Hauza Hotel in Sharm el Sheikh; one of two chimps shivers on a rock structure in the middle of a pond at Africa Safari Park; a chimpanzee baby, classified as a 'biter', lives in isolation at the Hauza Hotel; a lion cub, declawed, is offered as a photographic prop by a roadside zoo – a new fashion in Egypt; tigers at another roadside zoo; a hidden camera captures a chimp being offered for sale at the national circus.



ABOVE The chimps who survived transportation in the compartmentalised crate (see page 40) are coaxed back to health at Sweetwaters.

TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT A close-up and a wide-angle view of the ape cages at the Tower Hotel, which hosts dignitaries such as Tony Blair; a recent arrival at Africa Safari Park; Karl Ammann attempts to interact with the same young chimp; a hidden camera shot of wildlife trafficker, Heba; a chimp in a holding facility in Kano, Nigeria, the source of many of Heba's primates.

Alexandria, who has every animal imaginable, including three chimps: two adults and one baby. The young chimp is kept alone in an indoor glass cage with bare walls and a dirt floor; the adults live on a rock structure situated in the middle of a large pond. Last year, one drowned trying to leave the island. Ammann describes the conditions there as 'a total disaster'.

Asked about CITES permits for both of these places, Toma pauses and says, 'Maybe they got some chimpanzees from Heba, but what can we do about this? Confiscate them? Send them where?'

Dr Samy El-Fellaly, head of the CITES management authority in Egypt, emphasises that people like Omar and Makarem were given permission by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment to 'keep' the animals, not to 'own' them. 'They will stay there until we decide what

to do. These chimps are lucky to be living in these private zoos. You cannot compare Nigeria with Egypt; we conserve our wildlife. You know what they do in Cameroon, in Congo? They eat the ape meat. If we stop smugglers and ask them why they take this animal from the wild, they say, "We do it to save the animals". So what can we say?'

This defensiveness regarding Egypt's lackadaisical approach to a trade that is threatening the survival of Africa's great apes is common among Egyptian authorities. El-Fellaly did not even file a report about the January 2005 case until Ammann and Mier placed pressure on the authorities and informed Interpol of what was happening. In fact, when confronted with their lack of enforcement, the authorities unanimously point the finger at Kenya Airways for allowing illegal shipments of wildlife on its planes in the first place.

The airline has been pegged by many as the worst for wildlife smuggling. Asked about its poor track record, George Faltaous, Kenya Airways area manager for North Africa, says it is up to the customs officials, and not the airline, to inspect luggage and check for the correct documentation.

'Maybe Kenya Airways routes are convenient for the smugglers,' he elaborates. 'We are always the final transporting carrier or the connecting carrier. We don't even see the bags in transit when we are the connecting flight. We are responsible for the ticket purchases and the check-ins. The airport authorities check the luggage, not the airline.'

Mier claims that this is not true. 'According to the IATA (International Air Transport Association), the airlines are ultimately responsible for everything

that is threatening the survival of Africa's great apes is common

that gets on their planes. Throughout Africa, the more responsible airlines use their own staff, two people on each flight, who search all hand luggage right after the airport authorities have done it.'

Such a policy would have undoubtedly found – and possibly prevented – another illegal shipment, this time of eight vervet monkeys that were drugged and stuffed into a carry-on suitcase on a Kenya Airways flight last year.

When pressed for more answers, Faltaous calmly replies, 'We are not a loose carrier. We are strictly against smuggling and we want to do the right thing. But this is Africa. These things happen because of poverty. We have lots of animals, there are lots of poor people and the governments are corrupt. The customs people and authorities in airports are not exactly well taken care of, so I wouldn't be surprised if some of them were accepting bribes and letting smugglers go through.'

While there may be no easy solutions to those deep-rooted problems, Ammann and Mier's vociferous anti-smuggling campaign, with Heba as its poster girl, is having an effect. In October and November last year, El-Fellaly met with Faltaous to discuss wildlife trafficking. He also sent letters to Sudan Airways and Egypt Air. Then he met with the Nigerian ambassador to Egypt (and suggested to Ammann and Mier that Heba could be extradited to Kenya or Nigeria if she had broken any laws there). And, finally, he sent Ammann's

documents to Maher Hafez, general director of Egypt's Environmental Police, and asked him to investigate Heba and her family, as well as place their names on the passport and immigration watch list.

Although Ammann points out that this last action failed to include a vital Interpol 'Blue Listing', which requires police and immigration authorities worldwide to monitor suspicious parties, this collective effort is a step in the right direction. Both he and Mier just hope that action comes sooner rather than later, or there won't be any apes to save.

Last March, I visited the surviving chimpanzees from the January 2005 case in their new home at the Sweetwaters Chimpanzee Sanctuary in Kenya, where they were nursed back to health. The newly named Edvard, Julia, Jane, Romeo and Victoria were swinging on ropes, making faces and running around like little kids. I would never have guessed that they had been on the brink of death just one year ago.

Dr Mona Hakib Allam, head veterinarian at Cairo Airport, says she once asked Heba why she was a wildlife trafficker. Apparently she wailed, 'I haven't any job. This is the only way for me to get money. I am poor with no food at home, and I have three daughters who need money for university.'

When confronted in front of her apartment building, Heba refused to comment and sped away in her brand new Renault.

Readers who would like to express their concerns about the trade in wildlife described here can do so via the magazine (see page 8 for contact details). Alternatively, you can tackle Kenya Airways directly by writing to Titus Naikuni, CEO of Kenya Airways, on e-mail Titus.Naikuni@kenya-airways.com and George Y. Faltaous, Area Manager for North Africa, 11 Kasr El Nil Street, Cairo, Egypt, or e-mail kenyaair_caibz@yahoo.com

To urge Egypt to apply CITES regulations more stringently, write to Dr Maged George Alias Ghattas, Minister of State for Environmental Affairs in Egypt, Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs, Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency, 30 Misr-Helwan El-Zyrae Road, Maadi, Cairo, Egypt.

You can also send a letter to Dr. Samy El-Fellaly, Head of the Egyptian CITES Management Authority, Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation, Minister's Office, PO Box 12619, 1 Nady El Seid Street, Dokki, Giza, Egypt.