



David Western and Utilisation

Cover photo: Bat eared fox in the Masai Mara - what is their utilisation value?
by Rick Edwards

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The Impala antelope is the symbol of the East African Wild Life Society. Swara (sometimes pronounced Swala) is the Swahili word for antelope.

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David Western

Interview by

Esmond Bradley Martin and Louisa Lockwood

There has been some trade in endangered species products along the Kenyan Coast, such as rhino horn, leopard skins, lion teeth and claws. Has KWS taken any action in that area or is the 'trade' too small?

It doesn't matter how small it is, it's important. It is always going to be the forerunner for a much bigger trade. We are very aware of it. But any action has to be preceded by very careful intelligence work and that is actually what we are involved in. It's relatively easy to stamp out the individual case without knocking out the network so KWS will strike where it's really going to matter.

Have there been any elephants poached?

There have been minor movements of ivory, but not amounting to a network as far as we can gather. In other words the odd elephant is being knocked off here and there, and the tusks are sent to wherever optimistically they can get a market.

Has that been in northern Kenya?

Yes, in fact contrary to what came out in the popular press there has been no increase in elephant poaching over the last six months. But those areas which have had poaching are the ones you might expect - all the way across north of the Tana, Isiolo and then further north in Kenya. Those are areas of major insecurity, banditry and a free flow of arms, and a great deal of what has been happening with wildlife poaching, including elephants, has been almost opportunistic. There is no indication at the moment that there is a concerted effort to kill elephants, otherwise they would kill them in large numbers.

Do you have any idea of the number of elephants that have been killed in the last six months?

Until the beginning of June there were between 13 and 15 poached. That low figure is due to the good security that is now in place in the key areas. There was

a big count in Tsavo and the elephant population looks to be up considerably, with not a single elephant carcass reported within the last year. The total is 7,600.

Will you have big game hunting both on private and public land? Do you have any idea when this might be implemented?

Hunting has already been in place. We license 20,000 animals to be shot on private and public land.

But overseas hunters can't come in and do it?

No, but the wildebeest doesn't recognise the difference between the bullet from the hunter, poacher or KWS. But we are hunting for a very particular reason - in response to the pressure on landowners, for they cannot continue to tolerate large wildlife populations on their land and they have asked for licences to cull. Since last year KWS has granted those licences. They are using the meat, they are using the skins; but it is irregular under the Act, that is the problem we have faced over the last six months. The main reason for lifting the hunting ban is in order to regulate legally what is already going on - the culling of animals to make it possible for landowners to make a reasonable living. If we can reinstate bona fide and containable sport hunting then it will mean fewer animals shot and more profit for the landowners. That would apply to all forms of land - to individual land, ranches and communal land.

Is that what you would like to see happening in the near future?

Yes, I would because I believe it would be more controllable. At the moment landowners lose a lot of money over the licences to cull because the skins are exported at US \$100, processed in Botswana and re-exported at \$300 to \$400. Secondly, I believe that the amount of illegal meat coming onto the market is going to be a real problem in Kenya under

culling, whereas hunted animals can be controlled.

What are your comments on the sale of wildlife trophies, such as existed here in the mid 1970s?

I would be very much against it because I believe that when the hunting ban was put into effect in 1977 poaching didn't change. When the trophy ban was put into effect in 1978 the mass poaching of plains game stopped very quickly, and in fact there was a resurgence of wildlife in the main plains game areas in the south. I would like to see an internal trade kept firmly closed.

Would you include elephants eventually in sport hunting?

As a matter of principle I am not against any utilisation that leads to better conservation of a species. But not now and not for a long time to come.

That's a very emotive subject now.

But we're not going to open up elephant hunting. We have to recognise that Kenya is a major tourist destination and a large number of tourists do feel very strongly about elephants. Therefore we accept that, as the elephant is an important species to them. It would serve us nothing to have commercial hunters.

Also the local population would feel very strongly that they weren't benefiting from elephant hunting.

I think that is what will be different about any utilisation in the future. In the past we had big game hunting where the licence fees and monies accrued went back to county councils and governments, not the local landowners. Consistent with our policy of involving local landowners with tourism, it would be the same for all types of utilisation - the landowners themselves would be the direct beneficiaries of the hunting fees, area fees and so on and so forth. So things could be very different by injecting not just an economic incentive but a social one, such as in the Mara.

Is that similar to the cooperative game ranching that KWS is beginning to promote?

Well, cooperative game ranching is really based in areas where you have individual landowners collaborating so that they can contain the larger movements of wild populations. Otherwise the biggest problem we have with any utilisation, and that goes for tourism too, is that each landowner tries to capture the animal in

their area and of course it then deprives the person next door, and that is compounded when you are shooting the animal because everyone takes the maximum number on their own land.

How far has KWS gone with that programme?

It's gone a long way in quite a short time. The Laikipia Forum and the Machakos Forum have already implemented that kind of programme and they undertake a variety of collaborative efforts, which I think are moving ahead fairly fast now.

And the individual landowners are finding that they are benefiting substantially from that?

Yes they are. They are benefiting largely from the reduction of animals that are competing with their livestock. They are benefiting to a lesser extent through the sale of meat and hides - in fact the profit margins are very low indeed as at the moment in Kenya they cannot get the full export value of the skins.

Can you see KWS marketing sport hunting to the States, Europe and the Arab States in the future?

I'm not sure that we want to, or need to, get into marketing. In so much as there is a sport hunting market Kenya has always been one of the most attractive areas in Africa. The big question that we have to face is the degree of individual choice because the landowner, in principle, should have the right to use that licence in any way that he or she sees fit. So the landowner should be allowed to shoot the animal himself, to give that licence to a tribesman or a kinsman, or to sell it to the highest bidder on the international market.

Does KWS go to these ranches, see the animals and grant a quota to kill so many, or does it take the landowner's advice?

It would be a combination of a large-scale count, specific counts that KWS could do, counts that the landowner himself would do on the ground and the returns of animal skulls which are culled. **It would be very easy not to return a number of skulls.**

Yes, there are all sorts of loopholes. But I have to say that hunting management

programmes have evolved along the way in the last 50 years and we are going to look at every single one we can that has direct relevance to here.

The white rhino is privately owned here because it has been imported from southern Africa. White rhinos are hunted by sport hunters in South Africa even today. Since they are pri-



Wildebeest migrating across the Mara River.

Frants Hartmann, FRPS

vately owned here, would that be allowed in Kenya?

No, we are specifically not allowing white rhinos to be utilised.

Certain southern African countries have recently come up with a policy of dehorning rhinos for two reasons, firstly that it will be more of a deterrent for poachers and secondly that they have control over a viable asset. Is KWS thinking of changing its policy in regard to dehorning rhinos?

No, I think the record speaks for itself: the rhino population is going up very well and the sanctuary approach has been very effective. There is no need for us to consider dehorning the rhino - our predator load is probably far greater here than in southern Africa and the evidence coming out of Namibia is that the loss of calves is significant when the mothers are dehorned. I think the risks at this point don't merit taking horns off rhinos. If we were in a last ditch effort to save the rhinos we have left we might be willing to consider it, but as we aren't at that point it isn't a consideration.

Is it the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife that is responsible for compensa-

tion for crop damage and loss of human life at the moment?

Only for human life. Compensation for crop damage was introduced, I think, in the late 1970s and it was finally dissolved by Parliament in 1990 because it was out of control, deeply corrupt and basically unaffordable.

Don't you feel that as KWS has the responsibility to control animals the responsibility of compensation should lie with it?

There are two aspects to that: whether or not we feel the responsibility lies with us and whether or not we feel that it is practical. The responsibility is Tourism and Wildlife's because that was an Act of Parliament.

But the revenues from the parks go to KWS?

The revenues from the parks could never cover the cost of damage to crops and to livestock. Secondly the fair adjudication of assessing damage, given the park practices, isn't honest.

The issue of compensation is one that has been raised again and again and it is one that KWS

was wrongly branded with over the last six months. The reality is that there is no utilisation that the landowner has at the moment that can make wildlife anything other than a loss. That is part of my reason for trying to reintroduce utilisation at the local level. At least they can turn wildlife from a local loss to an asset, at least the intense antagonism can be reduced, at least the enormous costs can be obviated - costs of protective barriers, electric fences, sending out protection units to drive 500 elephants back into Tsavo National Park and so forth. These things in the long run are going to put such an enormous strain on KWS that it will not ever be financially viable.

The national parks in the future are going to become closed to the migration of animals as there is a lot of development especially around Nairobi National Park. What can KWS do about that?

We, in Kenya and elsewhere, have put all our eggs in one basket with national parks and the protected areas system but the area they cover worldwide is only about 5 percent of the land surface area. So how do we keep the migrations open?

It goes back to the whole concept that so long as landowners are benefiting they will regard wildlife as their second cattle.

The ceiling of the tourist revenue in Kenya is restricted by our tiny national parks. When you open up tourism outside the parks, revenue will go up two or three times. Two-thirds of the present lodges are already outside the Masai Mara and that means that all those landowners, not just the private landowners, but also the group ranches, are clubbing together in wildlife associations to preserve wildlife and to benefit directly. That's where I see the future of the migration.

But there are more problems outside the Mara reserve - people may be benefiting directly but they are not actually using sustainable conservation methods. There are road tracks everywhere, land is degrading, there is scrub growing up . . .

My impression is that the approach in the Mara has been informal, it has never received strong government or KWS backing. What it needs now is a form of recognition that the future of the parks and wildlife depends as much on what happens outside as inside. You've got a point - but if a person goes into the Masai Mara Reserve with its well-developed roads and suddenly goes outside and finds all the tracks a mess, tourism out of control, shanty towns and so on, the perception will be that the Mara is a mess because there is a free flow between the inside and the outside. The good side of it is that landowners are forming their own associations - in Amboseli and Narok - to come into the planning process, to link up with the county councils and KWS. We have just re-formed the Masai Mara Working Committee and we are writing a memorandum of understanding which will draw all those different groups together so that they can benefit from the facilities that KWS can offer and from donor funding. The enormous problems are merely a reflection of the informal approach that has developed and the fact that we now need to turn it around and make it as thoughtful as it has been within the national parks.

Are you getting a good response from the landowners?

I think the landowners' response, considering how much antagonism there has been, is tremendous.

Certain landowners and lodge owners

did get together to raise enough money to put down permanent roads outside the reserve area, gave this money to Narok County Council and nothing has been done since.

Yes, the issues of greatest concern have to do with who owns the wildlife and the equitable distribution of income. Of course that is fraught - there are accusations against county councils where they haven't put money back into areas out-

'The issues of greatest concern have to do with who owns the wildlife and the equitable distribution of income'

side national parks, but the same can be said of KWS. For example, 40 to 50 percent of all the migrations in Amboseli are outside the national park - have we remitted money to the landowners? No - nowhere near enough. We've probably covered about a quarter of their expenses, so the issue of equitability has to be resolved by all interested parties. I would add that the biggest problem in the Mara is not inequitable distribution, although that is a big one, but the fact that they are missing out on well over half the revenue - over a hundred million Kenyan shillings a year is being lost because no one is collecting it, or as we have in KWS, there is tremendous fiddling on the gates. **Why can't the fiddling at the gates be dealt with? I would think that you would have to take the highest possible priority on this problem.**

It has the highest priority. It is 90 percent of our income. It's probably 99 percent of the income of those people at the gate.

They have a higher priority than you do!

They have an enormous incentive, given the amount of money that is coming through those gates, to have in place every single method that they can. You can come up with every check and balance you like, but our biggest problem is collusion. Collusion exists between the gate owner, the senior officials in the parks, people here in KWS, people in KATO (Kenya Association of Tour Operators), and printers in town. It's at every single level. We are largely going over to a non-cash voucher system.

Can you tell us in general about the KWS budget?

We get about 700 million Kenyan shillings (US \$14 million) a year in park entries, but the total budget, depending on whether we get the Treasury to reinstate it or not, would be about 3.4 billion Kenyan shillings (US \$68 million). The largest component is of course coming in the form of development and donor aid. We also have a significant stipend from the government - 160-180 million Kenyan shillings (US \$3.4 million) a year. The intention was to make KWS a parastatal and then exempt it from the State Operation Act which we now have, to become more self-sufficient financially and to undertake a large commercialisation programme. In fact we have a commercial department heavily supported by the donor aid, in particular the British Overseas Development Agency, to find out how we can use our existing wildlife resources and land more effectively, more profitably. After the donor aid money and the Government's stipend has receded we need to find new sources of income - otherwise we will have to cut activities. Staff account for 50 percent of our budget. We are probably going to be short by 300 to 500 million Kenyan shillings (US \$6 to \$10 million) a year. Partly that has happened because the current costs of KWS have gone up due to big infrastructure developments under the programme. Secondly, as we become a more independent organisation, the level of salaries has to rise to be competitive. **Do you have any ideas of how you would like to diversify your revenue earnings?**

Five percent of revenue comes from lodges. It should be an enormous proportion and under the commercial sector we are looking at how we can change the nature of leases and take on more of the enterprise, so that a larger proportion of tourist money going into parks in every form goes into KWS.

We have to become more commercial, but at the same time I would add the caveat that the mandate of KWS is conservation not commerce. If, in carrying out that mandate, it incurs us in some costs over and above what we can recoup, then we should be very clear that the country as a whole should be willing to undertake that cost. We should not simply look at KWS as a profit centre. ●