

Sustainable Wildlife & Environment Protection

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SUSTAINABLE WILDLIFE

Managing wildlife in an enclosed environment with endangered species costs money.

The funding can either be from benevolence (donors) or business (tourism/sales). Solio believes that the long term future for wildlife can only be assured if it pays for itself. Short term government subsidies and donor money could come to an abrupt end.

For long term sustainability the animals must provide a value - be they on private, community or government land - with most of the value being returned to the land owner to reinvest.

This value can come from tourism and/or sales:

* Tourism income from gate fees and a share of the revenue from accommodation.

* Sales income from live animals or meat/skin etc of culled excess or non-breeding animals.

More than one income stream is essential in case one falls short of expectation. Wildlife welfare is central to any revenue earning activity which should not affect breeding performance or natural behaviour or have a negative effect on the environment.

COUNTING THE COSTS

Between 2000 and 2005, Solio lost 29 rhinos to poaching. The need to establish a security and monitoring system was apparent but at considerable cost. To build and equip ranger camps and all the associated requisites cost \$300,000, with the annual cost to maintain the system being around \$150,000.

In an enclosed, safe environment wildlife



flourishes and populations grow. By 2007, Solio had over 1000 buffalo which research showed were having a negative impact on the habitat. A joint study with KWS recommended the removal of 600+ buffalo. During 2008 and 2009, seven black rhino calves were killed by an increasing lion population, an unacceptable level of



depletion so the lion population had to be reduced. New community based wildlife reserves were willing to take these buffalo and lions but the cost of capture and translocation is high.

DEVELOPING TOURISM

In developing tourism within Solio Game Reserve, the management has applied a set of principles. The first has been to manage the number of visitors and vehicles in the reserve in order to minimise disturbance of the wildlife, to control pollution and give guests a more natural wildlife experience. This has been achieved by building the luxury 12-bed Solio Lodge in conjunction with Tamimi safari company. Along with the Lodge, there are two campsites for up-market mobile safaris.

The second principle is to maintain the habitat and wildlife as naturally as possible. Minimal road grading ensures there is little disturbance to wildlife (if sometimes a little bumpy for visitors!) while the road system ensures sufficient good game viewing and photographic opportunities, also without causing stress to the animals. To encourage biodiversity and allow the landscape to develop as nature intended, long grass is not burned.

DEVELOPING SALES

In 1980, Solio purchased 16 white rhinos from South Africa. White rhinos are not indigenous to Kenya and so they can be privately owned and sold, as were four Solio white rhinos to Uganda in 2004. In 2008, a request was received from the European Association of Zoos and

Aquariums (EZA) to supply white rhinos to zoos in Europe. This appeared a win-win opportunity - Solio could obtain vital income to invest in securing the remaining rhinos, while Kenya tourism would benefit from increased exposure of Europeans to rhino conservation efforts. However, KWS denied an export permit and placed a three year moratorium on white rhino sales out of Kenya.

With no extra income to invest in improving security, this KWS decision has resulted in 15 Solio rhinos killed by poachers. EZA members could not wait; Kenya has lost this market opportunity to South Africa, already their biggest competitor in wildlife tourism. No Solio rhinos have been sold within Kenya. While KWS have removed 250 buffalo, the number remaining is over 700 and growing, destroying habitat daily. The lion population is believed to now be around 20 and soon there will be another flush of black rhino calves for them to destroy.

THE FUTURE

As Solio Lodge increases its occupancy, it is estimated that tourism income to Solio will cover the costs of the Reserve. Wildlife sales would then be used to provide the funds for wildlife management and any extra investment needed in security. The new Wildlife Act and a more business like approach to wildlife management by KWS will secure the future for Solio Game Reserve and the value it brings to the community. Will either happen soon?

