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Inside:

RHINO MAN, RUMINANTS, GAME HUNTING...

and news from World Wildlife Fund

Comment



by Sandra Price

LAKE NAKURU IS ONE OF THE CHAIN of alkaline lakes that occur along the length of the great Rift Valley. The lake and its surrounds are unique, as the only national park in Africa created as a sanctuary for flamingoes. Apart from the abundance and variety of birdlife (450 species) at Nakuru, the surrounding acacia forests and thickets and open grasslands support at least 12 species of ungulates. Currently, only two rhinos inhabit the park, but records from the early part of this century indicate that rhinos were once very numerous in the area.

Kenya's Department of Wildlife Conservation & Management has initiated a Save the Rhino Project; and Lake Nakuru National Park is designated as the first priority area for this government-directed conservation effort. Thirty to forty rhinos will be translocated from vulnerable areas and private ranches in Kenya, to Nakuru, as soon as the necessary infrastructure and support factors for future management are in place. These include installation of electric fencing and refurbishment or construction of bridges necessary for patrolling. Importantly, too, four old windmills, built before Lake Nakuru was a national park, will be rejuvenated to provide fresh water points.

In an unprecedented gesture of co-operation, all the conservation organisations based in Kenya, both local and international, will combine efforts to provide a portion of the necessary funding for the project. They will jointly hold a fund raising party, sponsored by Block Hotels (Management) Ltd, to which 1,000 people have been invited. Proceeds should be adequate to fund one of the practical items mentioned above, for example the refurbishment of the Makalia Bridge, so crucial to vehicle movement within the park.

The organisations involved are The E.A. Wildlife Life Society, The African Wildlife Foundation, The African Fund for Endangered Wildlife, The David Sheldrick Wildlife Appeal, The Elsa Wild Animal Appeal, The Frankfurt Zoological Society, The New York Zoological Society, The World Wildlife Fund, and the IUCN.

Following this unique event, which constitutes a strongly positive endorsement of the Kenya government's intentions, all of these groups intend to continue their individual efforts toward rhino conservation in Africa.

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Michael Werikhe: Rhino Man

by Gavin Bennett

In the words of Michael Werikhe as he started on his 2,000-km trek through East Africa to raise money to save the rhino, 'Conservation cannot be imposed; it must have the understanding and support of the public.' It is the extent to which he has managed to foster this understanding that is the real measure of his achievement.

If we were to ask each of Kenya's 18 million people what *Swara* magazine is, 99 per cent of them would not know.

We could run down the list of all the major wildlife conservation agencies and their score would be similar.

But if we said 'Rhino Man' there would now be almost total recognition. Ah, he's the fellow who has just walked 2,000 km from Kampala via Dar es Salaam to Mombasa to raise money to help wildlife, they would say.

And therein lies the real power and purpose of Rhino Man Michael Werikhe's walk. Forget the 2,000 km. Forget, even, the Shs 500,000 that he raised. What Werikhe did above all was to reach the people who never hear the Gospel According to Tourism, or see the technical papers of professionals

who make a living out of the conflict between Man and wildlife.

He reached the people who are the conflict; whose interests or livelihood do not derive from the problem but whose livelihood is directly threatened by it.

With unrivalled empathy and conviction, he walked as an ordinary man among ordinary people, knowing the very specifics of their hardships, and still he argued with utter sincerity the cause of conservation.

He has achieved this rapport between his people and his subject through two very simple but almost unique qualities: he is absolutely committed to the welfare of wild animal and plant life, and absolutely uninterested in any personal gain or acclaim.

He belongs to that small but dedicated band of men and women who devote their lives to conservation. But he does not belong to the Hollywoodesque side of conservation, nor to the halls of academe—he doesn't have a degree in zoology or biology or botany and he is not funded by a research fellowship.

But where he scores over the famous and well educated is that where they know the theory of game ditches, he has actually dug them; where they know the statistics of ivory trading, he has actually carried and counted the tusks that have been hacked out of the faces of elephants with an axe.

As Werikhe said as he set out on his marathon: 'Conservation cannot be imposed; it must have the understanding and support of the public, and especially the people on whose land the animals live.'

'So much of the conservation message has begun to sound sentimental, and must seem horribly out of place to a man whose maize (his sole means of staying alive) has just been trampled by a herd of buffalo. We need to come up with practical systems and solutions in line with these realities and the present times; positive aims and positive actions.'

'And surely the start of that is to know—really—what the problems are, out there in the bush and among the farmers, at the grass roots.'

And to that end, a 27-year-old factory worker with a pet snake round his neck and the initiative and stamina to hoof it through 2,000 km of countryside has got certain very definite advantages over the professional zoologists, botanists, sociologists and anthropologists.

Men of Werikhe's background and dedication are as rare and as valuable. . . as rhinos.

That is why the East African Wildlife Society has thrown its full support behind his efforts, adding organisational skills and official contacts to augment this man's extraordinary individual charisma.

Werikhe's walk started in Kampala in early February, and ended back in Mombasa, at the AVA vehicle assembly plant where he works as a security supervisor, at the end of May.

In between, Werikhe filled his diary with a kaleidoscope of incident ranging from playing 'Pied Piper' to hundreds of school children on the road to Lake Nakuru, to spraining his ankle near the semi-desert town of Voi, to having his companionable python unwittingly assaulted, to giving lectures to schools and wildlife clubs, touring



Inspired by the dedication shown by Michael Werikhe in his efforts to save the rhino from extinction in East Africa, artist David England decided that the best way he could make a contribution was to put his own particular talents to use—and painted this beautiful picture. He has donated this original painting to the Society, who will be auctioning it to the highest bidder at a gala ball being held in Nairobi in July to raise money for the rhino (see Editorial).

game parks, meeting officials and well-wishers, strolling along the road with farmers, pausing to hear the logic of charcoal burners in decimated forests, chatting quietly to a single security man in a railway station yard where he bedded down for the night, lying frightened yet entranced in his sleeping bag as a herd of elephant filed past within a few feet of his siesta tree, sometimes trekking through scrubland as parched and crisp as a cornflake, at others trudging through dank, lush forest, watching the animal world respond and revive as an entire rainy season came and went, piecing together a very special picture for the conservation cause, and filling in several important information gaps.

There was a tremendous response to the concurrent funds drive initiated by the EAWLS, and we were delighted when the national newspaper *The Standard* picked up the strain and ran an extensive weekly diary on Werikhe's progress. (In terms of public awareness, it may be of interest that the Rhino Man reports in *The Standard* amounted to around Kshs 200,000 worth of publicity!)

The total number of pledges was phenomenal—ranging from the substantial institutional support of the New York Zoological Society and a co-ordinated funds drive by Coast Hotels, to donations big and small from local companies and literally thousands of individuals.

Several schools organised collections,

with children giving often just ten cents each (US 1 cent), but those little coins were perhaps the most precious of all—each one representing a child imbued with the conservation ideal.

On his return to his factory, Werikhe was given a tumultuous reception as all 550 workers gathered in the AVA forecourt to cheer their colleague back into the plant. The workers had staged their own collection, and presented a further Kshs 18,000 to the fund; and while Werikhe formally thanked them, an office secretary who before Werikhe's influence would have shrieked at the sight of a lizard, happily held his pet python for him.

But while Werikhe's walk has most certainly spread the conservation message to the masses with stunning success, hopefully it has also conveyed an important message to the conventional conservation system. Despite forecasts of the danger, warnings, appeals and even emergency action in recent years, the rhino is today virtually extinct in the Kenya wild. We have been entrusted with the task of keeping the rhino alive in Kenya and we have come perilously close to failure. We are still losing ground.

Unless there is some dramatic reverse, we will shortly have to file the rhino alongside the dodo and the dinosaur, rewrite the tourist brochures, and content ourselves with an occasional trip to look at the last remaining rhino—the metal ones which swing from chains at every game park entrance, the

very symbol of worldwide conservation in windblown rusty parody.

If our current approach, no matter how earnest, has allowed the rhino to die, then there has to be some fundamental change of attitude if we now strive to bring the rhino back to life.

It is attitudes as much as knowledge, imagination as much as resources, that have been at fault. For we know what rhinos need to live on. We know what is killing them and why. We have been well aware, for many years, of the decline in their numbers. We have informed the world of the danger of extinction. We have set up and developed systems to try and rescue the rhino, and we have gathered funds in that cause.

And still the rhinos are dying faster than they are being born.

Perhaps the answer lies in simply doing more of what we have already done—more money, more equipment, more volunteers, more effort.

But perhaps it lies as well, or instead, in new thinking, in better use of high-tech genetics, a total shift of emphasis in the tourism/agriculture balance, a much more businesslike approach to the private enterprise economics of conservation...

But central to any formula, whether it be based on money or technology or politics, it must add up to a viable bottom line... for the people on whose land the animals live.