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LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY

NEWSLETTER 1996

BACKGROUND

For readers unfamiliar with Lewa, it may be worth quickly tracing our background.

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is located in the northern foothills of Mount Kenya about 65 kms north east of Nanyuki. The land comprises about 55,000 acres of savannah, wetland, grassland and indigenous forest. The Conservancy came into being on 1st April 1993 and was officially registered by the Kenya Government as a Non-Profit Organisation on 20th February 1995. There is nothing new about wildlife conservancies - they have proved highly successful in other parts of the world - but it is a new concept for Kenya.

Our aim can be simply stated:

"To secure the future of Lewa's wildlife with the support and involvement of local communities".

To achieve this, we have set ourselves the following goals:

- *To manage and conserve the wildlife resources on Lewa in close liaison with the Government and the Kenya Wildlife Service.*
- *To perpetuate a truly pastoral form of land management where man, domestic stock and wildlife can flourish in relative harmony.*
- *To provide for the protection and encouragement of the species rhinoceros, both within Kenya and internationally.*
- *To develop programmes for the protection and care of endangered wildlife species and plants.*
- *To make the Conservancy financially self-supporting, largely through the development of environmentally sensitive tourism and a policy of strictly controlled wildlife utilisation.*
- *To encourage the assistance and participation of Lewa's neighbours in wildlife conservation by helping to establish viable community wildlife schemes from which they will benefit financially.*
- *To foster the support of local communities by minimising the conflict between wildlife and human settlement, and ensuring that the revenue earned from wildlife on Lewa radiates outwards and contributes to their development.*

- *To foster and encourage research, alone or in conjunction with other bodies having similar objectives as the Conservancy.*

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy is a pioneer project for wildlife management in Kenya and, although young, is already being recognised as a model for the future stewardship of wildlife on private land in this country. Lewa is one of the leaders in black rhino conservation and the change in emphasis here from cattle ranching to wildlife conservation began in 1983 with the creation of the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary at the western end of the property. At this time in Kenya, systematic poaching for rhino horn had reduced the black rhino population from some 20,000 to only a few hundred.

A start was made by fencing 5000 acres, which was later increased to 10,000 in 1988 - 89. A full time manager was employed and a small security force recruited and trained. Rhino had not been seen on Lewa since the early 70s, and concerted operations were mounted to capture and move to safety those isolated black rhino still surviving on nearby land that would otherwise perish at the hands of poachers. Over time, the rhino which were caught flourished and bred - justifying the faith and generosity of the many overseas donors who had backed the project from its earliest days. Later white rhino were added.

Further funds were raised and after ten years, with the full support of the Kenyan Government, the decision was made to fence the remainder of Lewa, including the adjoining state owned Ngare Ndare Forest Reserve - enclosing a total land area of 55,000 acres (267 sq. km) with 110 km of fencing. A small gap was left in the northern fence line to allow the free movement of migratory species. The whole property now became known as the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary ceased to exist as a separate entity. The construction of the security fence, where it bordered cultivated land, has largely ended previous conflict between farmers and Lewa's wildlife.

WILDLIFE

Rhino

The care and well-being of the rhino within the Conservancy continues to be the single most important and expensive challenge. Today the Conservancy is home to 21 black rhino and 23 white rhino. During the year two black rhino calves were born; a female to Juniper, and a female to Zaria. Both these mothers were animals born within the Conservancy, giving us second generation animals. This we are very proud of and is the return we have hoped and worked towards, together with our many supporters, for the past 14 years. We sadly lost Shaba (one of the original founders of our black rhino population) when she was badly hurt in a tussle with the male Keno. She proved to be over 30 years old which was a surprise. The rhino are now scattered right across the Conservancy and there is a notable improvement in their condition during the latter stages of the dry season. The Ngare Ndare Forest is proving very popular. During 1997 we have the possibility of a further three calves being born, two of these from females born

within the Conservancy. We had five white rhino born during the year; two of these from females brought up from South Africa in 1993. We sadly lost one crushed in a scuffle with a male when one month old. This population now seems to have settled down well and we are confident of a 8-10% annual increment in their numbers.

The security for these animals is provided by a dedicated team of 107 security men in the field every day. This gives us a ground coverage of one man to every 2.5 sq. kms at a cost of \$2,065 per sq. km. This is one of the highest in Africa but is the one reason we have been able to maintain a steady growth in the population. During the year four senior rangers were sent on a course and subsequent attachment to the Natal Parks Board in South Africa. This was an unprecedented success and showed us Kenyans to what level of professionalism wildlife management has reached. This exercise has given us all a new aim and established a very special pride amongst our game guards.

The many other wildlife species within the Conservancy continue to thrive and increase.

Grevy's Zebra.

These have now reached a total of 425 animals and it is anticipated this population could reach up to 900 animals in the next 10 years, whereas nationally the population continues to decline. Lewa proudly holds 15% of the estimated wild population, and accordingly the management of these animals will be given the utmost priority.

Sitatunga.

The introduced population within the Lewa swamp continues to breed and although it is extremely difficult to assess the numbers, we believe that there are approximately 12 to 14 animals.

Elephant.

The Conservancy is home to many elephants and they continue to make a heavy impact on the woody vegetation. Seven females were collared early in 1996 in order to monitor their movement. These animals have moved widely and it now appears that the animals using Lewa are part and parcel of the whole Laikipia population of 2500 animals, rather than traditional 'Lewa Families'. This monitoring continues and is constantly giving us new information. During 1997 we plan to translocate 15 bulls whom we consider to be the main culprits destroying trees along the Lewa river.

Giraffe.

The giraffe population is now at about 230 animals and they are breeding fast with many small calves. We wish to hold approximately 115 animals, so over the coming year it is planned to reduce this population by translocating the younger females up to the Namunyak Trust in Wamba. The cost will be about \$12,000, for which a special appeal will be launched.

Research.

The Conservancy continues with a strong affiliation with Pretoria University in South Africa. We presently have one Honours student from Pretoria working on the competition between browsers, specifically black rhino, giraffe and elephant. During 1997 we will be recruiting locally a staff ecologist who will be continuing with the established monitoring techniques within the Conservancy, under the guidance of our newly formed 'Scientific Advisory Committee'.

Capture and Translocations.

During 1996 we translocated 12 Grevy's zebra to Ol Pejeta and a further five to Kongoni Game Conservancy in Naivasha. There is a further planned translocation of 35 buffalo into Lewa, six Oryx out (to Kongoni) and we will be assisting in the translocation of 10 Greater Kudu from Il Ngwesi to Kongoni. The new opportunities arising from the Kenya Government's acceptance of wildlife translocation could well make a major contribution to the finances of the Conservancy in the future. We are very pleased to have been able to assist in the establishment of two new protected populations of Grevy zebra.

Wildlife Utilisation.

The abattoir continued to operate during this year with all the income generated from this exercise going directly back into the recurrent budget. The animals from within the Conservancy are utilised based on a quota issued by KWS on the recommendation of our Scientific Advisory Committee. This quota is part of the overall management of the Conservancy, where we need to balance the numbers of specific species which are either too successful in our fenced situation, or are in direct competition with an endangered species.

INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS

Running Costs.

The Conservancy's annual running costs are \$500,000 - the majority of which is donor funded. We wish to achieve our aim of becoming financially self-supporting by the year 2000, and we will do this by increasing revenue from tourism, wildlife utilisation and farming. In 1995, 70% of the Conservancy's annual budget was made up from donations. This year the figure has fallen to 58%. We will strive to continue this trend in 1997.

Fund Raising and Donations.

We will remain indebted to the many individuals and institutions who have supported Lewa in 1996. Every donor, whatever the size of their contribution, is playing a vital part in our future development and for this we will always be grateful. Between August and

October this year, Anna Merz - who co-founded the original rhino sanctuary on Lewa - undertook a major fund raising tour of North America on behalf of the Rhino Trust. It is too early yet to count the results, but initial reports are promising. Anna herself is retiring to South Africa where she will be working with the Wilderness Trust to establish a Rhino Museum. She will be remaining on the Board of the Conservancy and will continue to spend periods each year on Lewa.

Tourism.

Whilst tourism is being expanded, it will always be kept within very clear limits. No more than 60 tourists' beds will be permitted within the Conservancy in order to retain quality and minimise the impact on wildlife. There are now two safari lodges on the Conservancy: Wilderness Trails (originally established in 1975) and Lerai Tented Camp (converted from the old headquarters of the rhino sanctuary and which started operating last year). Wilderness Trails has 20 beds, and Lerai Tented Camp has 24. The balance of 16 beds is reserved for camping.

This year we identified that camping was being seriously under-utilised and consequently sought an agreement with a major safari company to operate the camping concession more effectively. Negotiations have now been concluded and from the 1st December, all camping on Lewa will be conducted by Abercrombie and Kent. They will be offering an exclusive mobile tented camp from one of four selected sites.

To cater for day visitors, the Conservation Centre was opened last year. It is aimed particularly at tour operators with clients making the journey to and from Samburu National Park, and offers a convenient package of a game drive with lunch and a talk. The response so far has been patchy and much time and effort has been spent in improving our marketing. Bookings for early 1997 are encouraging and we hope that the promised increase in numbers can be maintained.

A most welcome development has been the decision by Air Kenya to include Lewa as a "request stop" on their scheduled Nairobi - Nanyuki - Samburu service. The cost from Nairobi is \$105 one way, or \$180 return.

Farming

At present we hold about 800 head of cattle (beef, registered Boran and dairy herds) and about 1000 sheep. Considerable research has been carried out on the Conservancy's 'carrying capacity', ie. the ability of the vegetation to sustain a given number of animals for a given period without causing a negative change in the condition of the vegetation. This figure is a function of the environment and is determined to a large extent by the plant species composition and the rainfall. Lewa's carrying capacity must be compared with our 'stocking rate', ie the actual number of animals which is being carried on the land. This value is determined by the management and can be either the same as, above or below the carrying capacity. A thorough knowledge of these facts as applied to Lewa is obviously

absolutely fundamental to the successful management of the Conservancy. The Board will be meeting in early January to decide our correct stocking rate, and it is likely that domestic animals will be further reduced in favour of wildlife.

Water

In an era of rapid population growth - and a consequent rise in the demand for water - we have been concerned for some time about the need to introduce measures to ensure that the present flow into the main river systems that cross the Conservancy can be sustained. Accordingly we commissioned a comprehensive water survey and sought recommendations for:

- Water storage for irrigation (a legal requirement).
- Maintaining a broad distribution of surface water for our wildlife.
- Maintaining (and/or improving) the supply of water to our neighbours.

The survey has now been completed. The main points for discussion are:

- Seven suitable dam sites have been identified; three of which are considered priorities. The next step - which the Board must agree to - will be to commission detailed surveys of the priority sites (at an approximate cost of \$2000 per site).
- Measuring devices should be installed to monitor the flow at suggested locations - this has been agreed and is under way.
- A 'Water Users' Association' - initially just for the Ngare Nything river - is proposed. This has also been agreed and the first steps have been taken to form such a body.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

General.

Many visitors to Kenya are surprised to learn that more than three quarters of the country's wildlife is found on private land outside National Parks and Reserves. Human populations are rising and poverty is deepening over most of Africa, putting intense pressure on the environment. As a result, between a third and a half of Kenya's wildlife has disappeared in the last twenty years. Across the continent elephant numbers have halved and rhino have slumped to the brink of extinction. Rural farmers have also suffered. In some districts elephants kill more people protecting their crops than poachers kill elephants. Throughout Kenya farmers regularly lose their entire harvest to animals and children are prevented from going to school for fear of attacks.

We believe that the solution lies in the sustainable use of wildlife with local support and participation rather than in the strict protectionist measures of old. These failed because they did not address the needs and concerns of local communities. Today conservation

efforts in Africa must bring tangible benefit to surrounding communities if they are to view wildlife as an asset rather than a liability. A value must be placed on wildlife, and the revenue it has earned must spread outwards. To this end increased efforts will be made to assist the development of neighbouring communities, and this part of our Newsletter will describe how this is being done at Lewa.

Employment.

The Conservancy is already a major source of employment. We directly employ about 170 men and women, and a further 80 or so work in separate businesses (for example at the lodges) within our boundaries. This makes us the largest single source of employment in Eastern Province - of crucial importance in a generally poor area with marginal land and high unemployment.

Medical Assistance.

Thanks to generous funding from the Robert Hall Foundation in Jersey we have been able to build both a clinic and accommodation for a nurse. This will be of great benefit not merely to our own employees, but to the people of surrounding settlements. Most of the construction of the clinic was done by volunteers from the Project Rhino Charitable Trust. At present the clinic is only able to open one day a week when a visiting American doctor, Dr Marjorie Harmon, is able to call. When Dr Harmon has recruited a suitable nurse, the clinic will open every day.

Schools

There are four primary schools (Lewa, Leparua, Mutunyi, Ntugi) located on the borders of the Conservancy which we make every effort to support, both by attracting assistance from overseas and from within our own resources. Each year four pupils (selected on the basis of their results in national exams, and on the recommendation of their headmasters) are awarded bursaries which pay for their tuition fees at secondary school. Starting in 1997, and for a period of four years, funding for five of these will be provided by the London based Gemini Foundation.

This year we have also helped three schools with the provision of text books, and one (Mutunyi) by building desks. Two new classrooms are under construction at Lewa Primary School, with funding from America.

For a number of years we have encouraged educational visits by schools to the Conservancy. This is important for wildlife conservation generally, and this year demand for these visits has grown to such an extent that we have been forced to limit them to the maximum we can manage, which is three a month. Since few local schools can either afford, or have access to transport, we are hoping to acquire a bus to solve the problem.

Military Assistance

We have succeeded in enlisting the help of the British Army's Royal Engineers with a number of community development projects. A troop from 29 Field Squadron, 35 Engineer Regiment are currently based on Lewa and constructing the two classrooms at Lewa Primary School, the nurse's house, and about 3 kms of road through a nearby settlement. In addition to providing adjoining communities with vital all-weather access to the main Isiolo - Nanyuki tarmac road, this will relieve pressure on a section of road that passes through the Conservancy and which is currently a favourite short-cut for commercial traffic.

In January we hope another troop will continue this work, by building a classroom and office at Leparua School, restoring their water supply and building two further roads: one from the Conservancy to Leparua School itself, and a second to link Lewa with the neighbouring Group Ranch of Il Ngwesi.

Community Wildlife Scheme - Il Ngwesi.

Il Ngwesi is a 16,000 acre group ranch adjoining the Conservancy's northern boundary, and it is to here that the elephant and giraffe migrate during the rainy season. It is therefore vital that this migration route is kept open and that the owners of this land consider their wildlife as an asset not a liability. Through the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and the Liz Claiborne and Art Ortenberg Foundation, funding was provided in the form of a grant to construct a small tourist lodge within the ranch in order to maximise the opportunities for tourism from the wildlife and rugged terrain. This lodge is due for completion by December 1996 and has already been rented for a five year period by a local tour operator. This will generate \$50,000 per year for the community from a previous amount of less than \$8000.

Already there is a new attitude to wildlife in the whole area; school children and cattle herders alike who previously considered wildlife a menace and Government property, now openly see this as their wealth and part of their future. It is anticipated that money generated in this way will be used for the construction of schools, water projects and a chief's office. All expenditure is authorised by a General Meeting of the Group Ranch members, where a quorum needs to be present in order to make any decisions. The accounts are also audited by an accounting firm in Nairobi. As a team running this Conservancy we consider this a major achievement and the basis for a sound future both for the people and the wildlife - together living in harmony.

Community Wildlife Scheme - Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust

The Conservancy is also working closely with the Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust based in Wamba. This is a very similar concept to Il Ngwesi but a much larger area (75,000 acres); more remote and with different challenges. It is the main area used during

the wet season for a large part of the Laikipia elephant population (2500 animals). During the year a radio system has been installed giving cattle herders direct communication with KWS and the Conservancy, and consequently any illegal killing of wildlife is reported instantly back to the relevant authorities. There has been one elephant poached during the year, the culprit was arrested and the ivory recovered. Security in this area is volatile and therefore different opportunities for generating revenue have to be sought rather than the 'traditional' tourism. This is the major challenge now facing the management team of the Trust to generate an income based on the wildlife in order to establish the wildlife resource as an asset similar to Il Ngwesi.

The Conservancy translocated a male rhino (Keno) into the area during October. This animal was released from the pens and initially did very well, however whilst feeding on a steep cliff he slipped falling about 80 ft to his death. This has happened within Lewa over the past years and has to be considered a natural hazard for rhino in this terrain. The wildlife numbers are now increasing, but in order to boost the tourist potential as the security improves, the Conservancy is raising funds to translocate 25 Reticulated giraffe annually from Lewa to Namunyak. Giraffe are in no competition with the traditional use of the land with livestock and can therefore be used in a step by step approach to show the land owners how wildlife can be an asset. The Trust works closely with KWS security personnel and as a result we expect the security situation will improve in the coming years.

The annual budget for the Trust is \$50,000 per year, which covers the employment of two senior staff members (Field Coordinator and Community Liaison Officer), one Radio Operator and 10 game guards. The Trust operates a Toyota Land Cruiser and an office in Wamba. The Trust has had a good year of consolidation and recognition; the challenge now is to generate a recognisable income based on the wildlife.

CONCLUSION.

The past three years have been a period of establishing all the personnel and systems to make this Conservancy work clearly and effectively. These are now in place. To meet the present poaching threat, the security for the rhino is at a level we feel is appropriate. This could change. The challenge now is to look at the longer term and plan for the future of the rhino, solving the many complex issues involved in giving them and the 4000 + head of wildlife a future within this Conservancy. These are social, ecological, political and financial - and it is in finding a delicate balance of all of these issues which will govern whether 50 years from now we can consider Lewa a success or failure. We believe we have a highly committed team both on the ground and supporting us worldwide - it is a challenge we are now equipped and confident to carry.