

Fighting for Kenya's inheritance

“We are being disinherited. Our rightful heritage is being taken away from us”

Chairman, Vision 2050, at a meeting discussing the rhino poaching crisis.

Sandra Obudo | Tourism and Communications, Laikipia Wildlife Forum

The current Wildlife Conservation and Management Act (Cap. 376) in Kenya does not create a disincentive to illegally kill wildlife. It does not protect threatened and endangered species. The maximum fine for killing rhinos (there are fewer than 600 black rhinos remaining in Kenya) and selling their horns is only Ksh 40,000 (approximately £270). This does not reflect the value of these animals to the nation and people of Kenya and is no disincentive to killing these rare animals.

This is why Laikipia Wildlife Forum (LWF) is supporting Vision 2050, a national grassroots wildlife and environmental conservation network, in lobbying the Government to change the penalties contained in the current Act. The amendments being called for seek to increase the fines to 10 million shillings (approximately £67,500) and imprisonment from 10-20 years.

Trained community scouts from local community conservancies in Laikipia and Samburu have given accounts of growing demoralisation, due to the weakness of current penalties. Many have apprehended the same poachers as many as six times, followed them through from court case to court case, only to have the same people return due to lenient fines and sentences. One scout recounts how, after efforts to catch and apprehend five poachers, he stood in court and watched them get fined Ksh 20,000 (approximately £135). Another watched the poachers he had arrested being sentenced to either three months in jail or a Ksh 3,500 fine (approximately £23), paid off in front of him by relatives. The poacher walked away free, ready to return on another day.

So grim is the current situation that poachers have been known to gloat and taunt scouts over the fact that they will be back and there is nothing much that can be done.

At a meeting held by a community conservancy to discuss the escalating cases of poaching, morale was so low that this pastoralist community talked of giving up wildlife conservation in favour of farming; for them, wildlife conservation just didn't seem worth it anymore.

LWF has also been taking a different approach to tackling the rhino crisis and Asian demand for wildlife products.

Thanks

Our very grateful thanks to USFWS RTCF, which has confirmed a grant of \$20,611 to help fund the Environmental Education and Literacy Programme for another year, and to Chester Zoo, which has assisted with monitoring and evaluating the EELP over the last 5 years.

The Forum has been making connections with Chinese conservation organisations to begin working with people in China, recognising the need to work closely and collaboratively with them. LWF met and discussed conservation challenges in Kenya with senior members of the China Wildlife Conservation Association on a recent visit to Laikipia. In the course of the same week, together with active members Zeitz Foundation, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Mugie and Halvor Astrup (Enasoit), LWF met with a leading Chinese entrepreneur, who was accompanied by a senior member of the state news agency and a senior economist of the China Guanghua Foundation. The visits went extremely well and were successful in stimulating interest amongst key, strategically placed Chinese people.

LWF continues to work at every level to propose a rise in fines and penalties to a meaningful level. It is slightly hopeless to be fighting so hard on the ground to protect rhinos and to be engaging with China, whilst the crime remains a minor misdemeanour in the eyes of Kenyan law.

'Kwaheri'

Dr Anthony King

We say a sad goodbye to Anthony who is leaving the LWF after six years of outstanding service and dedication as Executive Director. His efforts and the gratitude felt by all simply cannot be put into words. Anthony will join the Board and continue to be an active member of the Forum and Laikipia more generally.



LWF Director Anthony King and Martin Mulama from Ol Pejeta Conservancy at one of the quarterly Unit meetings

