

The
Economist

Game conservation in Africa

Horns, claws and the bottom line

Governments have mostly failed to protect Africa's wildlife involving hunters, rich conservationists and local farmers

Sep 2nd 2010 | GOMA, LAIKIPIA, SELINDA AND TSWALU



ONLY eight specimens of the northern white rhino are left alive in captivity. The handful that remained in the wild in Congo have now almost certainly died. A final effort to save the sub-species earlier this year saw whites shipped from a zoo in the Czech Republic to the Ol Pejeta reserve in Kenya.

The senses of these rhinos had been dulled by the cold concrete of captivity, but in their new environment, they found themselves under open skies, with wild birds, the red soil interrupted with termite mounds and the land of Mount Kenya. In such an environment the hearing of the rhinos and their agility returned. "They became wild again," says Berry White, a rhino expert.

move.

Yet the chances of saving the northern white are remote. Short c samples in the future, the best hope of preserving its genetic stc individuals with southern whites. That means the end of a creatu distinct for a million years. Indeed, the decline of the African rhir rhino as well as the white—is among the sorriest and most instru

When President Theodore Roosevelt came to east Africa in 1909 roamed the region. Now there are perhaps 2,000. The problem i half-blind, lumbering, and often infertile—which they are. It is ec medicinal value of rhino horn makes it hard for the rhino to pay

The value of rhino horn in China, ounce for ounce, is higher than with an ageing population; in Chinese medicine the horn is grou fevers and pain, particularly for terminally ill patients. With more Africa, the risk of poaching seems to have increased. Market forc Pejeta, which is protected by electric fences and armed guards, t whites have had to be filed down to limit the risk of poaching. Ar in Kenya last Christmas saw a rhino killed and its horns hacked c later tracked down the culprits and recovered the horns, along w had been paid, with the balance payable on delivery. Sold in 10g seven kilos of horn would be worth \$250,000.

The story of the rhino is an extreme example of a wider decline c study by the London Zoological Society and the United Nations E that the population of big animals in African national parks (excl dropped by 59% since 1970. Poaching for meat is only part of th zebra. The real pressure is from the expansion of human settlem

Population density in Africa is not high and the continent is a negligible polluter, producing less than one tonne of CO₂ per hea against 20 tonnes in the United States. But because most African depend on what they inefficiently grow or gather, and because there is little investment in sustainable farming and forestry, ecosystems suffer. According to the Global Footprint Network, a San Francisco think-tank which seeks to quantify demand and

supply of natural resources, the “biocapacity” of Africa per person has fallen by half since 1960 (see chart).

As smallholdings, or *shambas*, are subdivided, children who have inherited nothing move to new areas. More wire is rolled out, more poison set down, scrub and trees burned and water source silent loss of habitat—shambafication, if you will—transforms ecosystems for humans. It also fragments range, limiting the ability of wild animals to migrate. Shambafication has been particularly hard on the big cats. Some advocates reckon that the number of lions in Africa has dropped to 20,000 today. “If nothing changes, there will be no lions left on the continent,” says Dereck Joubert, who heads National Geographic’s Big Cats Initiative.

That may be an overstatement. Ol Pejeta had no lions until two years ago when it was bought in 1985 to start a new pride. Now there are 55 lions; 35 more have been introduced to control the population. “It repopulated itself,” says Richard Vigney. Yet no matter how fecund nature is, humans are more so. With the world population double to 2 billion by 2050, new thinking is needed to preserve the planet’s biodiversity.

The first step is plain economics: a recognition that the wild has been pushed to the edge of Kenya’s Masai Mara reserve. The number of cows on the reserve increased from 44 to 2,735 since 1950. More Masai mean more cows and polluting the waterholes. But the cows provide the Masai with a sense of belonging. The giraffe, by contrast, stands toweringly near the edge of the reserve. Beyond Koyiaki the commercial wheat farms begin and the giraffe is struggling to earn its way. The results are lethal: some aerial surveys suggest that giraffe numbers in the Mara have fallen by 80% since 1979.

The hunting debate

Some environmental economists contend that the failure of cost-benefit analysis seriously has accelerated the loss of biodiversity. The private sector should step in. “Private management structures are better at capturing the economic value of biodiversity,” says Wolf Krug, an environmental economist. He also criticises some animal-rights groups for campaigning against hunting.

tactic, he says, devalues the animals they are trying to save. What is surprising is that a number of conservationists say they would like to see an income stream for local communities.

Some countries have had success with hunting. Namibia, for instance, has increased numbers of its game animals by allowing oryx, hartebeest, kudu to be harvested as high-protein low-fat meat for regional supermarkets. The University of Pretoria argues that animal-rights groups are denying Africa the benefits of trophy hunting—whose ivory is a resource, in his view, because elephants' fertility is harvested sustainably. He reckons trophy-hunting in Africa is now a bonanza for local communities.

But animal-rights organisations like the Born Free Foundation object to trophy hunting on grounds of animal welfare. They argue that many hunters who start with gazelles often do so illegally. And the money does not reach the locals: much of it goes offshore. The debate is bitter. The pro-hunting lobby complains that the money does not splash around, and are even writing legislation in several countries to allow donations to government wildlife services. Hunters say their active clients are happy to stay in shabby, dusty places as long as they can see the animals. The bloodthirsty history of big-game hunting in Africa means that hunting now has an economic value.

Hunting aside, there is broad agreement on how to improve conservation. The plan is to upgrade the continent's national parks. Outside South Africa, national parks have an indifferent record, and tend to mirror the competence of the government that created them. In most places, no chance of creating new ones; the costs are too high. But where they have failed there may be a case for privatising park services such as security. Indeed, it may be better for the entire management to be in private hands.

The African Parks Network, a South African charity, runs national parks for several African countries. Its biggest contract is for the 1.2m-hectare Garamba National Park in Congo. The head of African Parks, Peter Fearnhead, cites Malawi as the charity's biggest success so far. In six years a 70,000-hectare park has been restocked with animals and a tourism industry built up. For many countries the renewal of their national parks is probably the best first step in protecting biodiversity. Only 2% of big game in

Uganda lives outside the country's underfunded national parks. If Uganda were to invest in them, offering concessions to safari operators and even allowing some property development nearby it could expand the protected area and boost earnings at the same time.

Private conservancies are an even bigger opportunity. Some of these are owned by individuals or conservation groups; Ol Pejeta is a not-for-profit company with shareholders. Others are community initiatives, where local people receive an income for. Conservancies can earn money directly from tourism, hunting, fa plants for medicines and cosmetics. They can also be paid for p flooding and runoff, or for offsetting carbon emissions. But the b "non-use" earnings, where large numbers of people around the v shares in African biodiversity not to use it, but simply because th important to the planet. The trick is to create a non-use market

A spectacular example of individual generosity is Tswalu, South / conservancy. It stands high in the Kalahari desert, towards Botsv landscape, painted in shades of yellow and grey. Temperatures d Water is scarce. Some conservationists might sniff at Tswalu's ta running across the property. But that misses the larger land recl into a 100,000-hectare block and turned over to wildlife preserv: Kalahari to itself," says Tswalu's owner, Nicky Oppenheimer, who Beers, a diamond firm. Tswalu's head of wildlife, Gus Van Dyk, s almost everything that had teeth or claws. Rehabilitation is a lon eagles are returning and mountain zebras are back.

Mr Oppenheimer admits that the economics of Tswalu do not add million dollars a year to balance the books. It is not clear if mon and sale of oryx, springbok and other animals, supplemented by charges \$850 a night, will ever be enough to make it pay. The cc residents as well as roads and equipment. New housing has been and a clinic. Making a dent in local poverty is important. Mr Van illiteracy and alcoholism among those living on Tswalu seem to b

Some of the oldest rock art in the world has been found in a rem

scale of Tswalu is so huge that nature dominates. "The value of it but what we don't know," says Mr Van Dyk—the ways of the burr the virtues of the desert grasses. Meanwhile, natural processes a to dry grass. Lions drive the boks into bigger herds. As invasive bubble up. This year, a stream ran for the first time in a decade. nature is very forgiving," says Mr Van Dyk.

Africa does not have enough time or enough Oppenheimers to p to Sam Lawson of the Nature Conservancy, a Washington-based people in the world are rich enough to underwrite a conservancy them are interested in the African bush. "There is not enough ph Lawson. "You need to look at what is economically sustainable."

Involving the locals

Just as the stately homes of Europe were forced to open up to th Africa have to open up to their neighbours. "A fortress mentality countries with high levels of poverty," says Chris Thouless, a zoo

This means that a conservancy has to earn more for locals than land. Because conservation in Africa has to compete at market p will probably be forced into marginal areas which cannot be farm conservation in Africa will increasingly be in drier, remoter areas. Costs can be offset by selling a luxury home to jet-setters who w board of the conservancy. Or an endowment might be raised by pay for running costs. Either way, overseas capital will be needed problems.

Community initiatives may be cheaper and more politically durat to give farmers the right to own wild animals on their land. This animals and their offspring, admit paying tourists and, in the cas The result has been a dramatic rise in the number of southern w 20 individuals in 1900, there are 16,000 now. Namibia already h community projects, supporting 230,000 people. It has increase community and private land by 60% since the 1960s.

The situation is more complicated in a country like Kenya, where

Ian Craig helped set up Lewa, a 23,000-hectare conservancy not \$16m buyout by the Nature Conservancy seems to have secured. Craig has turned his attention to saving nature in the vast expanse working with communities. He maintains that "small and local" is his Northern Rangelands Trust, for example, is setting up a slaughterhouse—Boran, Rendille and Samburu tribesmen can fatten and slaughter at premium prices to the market in Nairobi. The test of Mr Craig's approach when black rhinos will be introduced into the wild in northern Kenya is to rely on the local community for protection.

Then there is tourism. The debate here is how upmarket the safari should go. "As upmarket as possible," says Mr Bell, a pioneer of luxury safaris. One of Mr Bell's camps is Selinda, in northern Botswana. 20,000 hectares of mopane woodland and waterways are leased from the government. Security is no problem. Botswana provides its own anti-poaching force. The president, Ian Khama, is a partner in the enterprise. The land is rich in layers of ancient soil. It has one of the highest densities of elephants. A seasonal spillway fills with floodwaters from the Angolan hills once every 2 years. hippos, pelicans, snub-nosed ducks and rafts of water lily which are a special place—at a special price. Selinda costs around \$1,400 a night plus the small plane that gets you there.

Mr Bell brushes aside complaints about exclusivity. "The best model for the wilderness is no visitors at all," he says; if they must come, better to have a high price and low numbers. All the same, his safaris beat hunting: "Hunters get 12 visitors a year, we get 12 visitors a day." Botswana has been less interested in fostering tourist numbers than in moving from the bargain basement of safaris to the top end but, all the same, tourism revenues have grown from \$300m in the 1990s to about \$3 billion today. Around 40% of the country is now under some kind of wildlife management. Mr Bell wants to push that higher.

But the safari business has shown little interest in extending operations even to Francophone Africa, where wild animals are under more

the continent. In insecure areas such as eastern Congo charities London-based group, end up doing the hard work. Its 70,000-he initiative aims to protect 750 gorillas in 80 families. The locals ar poach them. Rangers are supposed to collect gorilla stools and s analysis. But the Walikale exists only on paper. Since it was set u lack of funds have limited surveys to the most accessible parts o

Groups like Greenpeace question the point of spending limited fu yet another piece of savannah when the entire Congo basin is th safari industry argues back that, for decades, it has stimulated in the bling of that industry gives pause: a tent with Afghan carpet. mention a native guard standing by with a spear, may have more customers than with stewardship of the land.

In the end, though, there is more in play than science. In terms admits that Texas could serve as a safer home for rhinos than Ol considerations. Beauty, for instance. Mr Joubert of the Big Cats I life photographing lions and other beasts in the African bush. "Th untouched land which cannot be measured," he maintains. "It be not yet been born." If space and silence do have a universal valu as well as Africans, may eventually contribute to the conservatio task is to leave them something to take care of.

Briefing

[About *The Economist*](#) [Media directory](#) [Staff books](#) [Career opportunities](#) [Contact us](#) [Subscribe](#)

Copyright © The Economist Newspaper Limited 2010. All rights reserved. [Advertising info](#) [Legal disclaimer](#) [Accessibility](#)