

CONSERVATION IN AFRICA

Richard Leakey Quits Post, Charges 'Smear Campaign'

After months of political battles in which he fought charges of corruption, mismanagement, and racism, paleoanthropologist Richard Leakey resigned on 23 March as director of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the government agency charged with overseeing Kenya's national parks and game reserves. During his tenure, Leakey built the 5-year-old KWS into an effective force for both conservation and science, and his supporters fear his departure could jeopardize the reforms he engineered.

The future of those reforms now rests with David Western, a conservation biologist with the Wildlife Conservation Society in Nairobi, who was named on 28 March as Leakey's replacement.

In an interview before his appointment was announced, Western said, "It's hard to say how the conservation and science programs at KWS will change, but I don't think they will be whittled down. On the contrary, I think these programs will be kept and expanded." Leakey responded to the announcement by saying, "I called David a few moments after hearing the news and gave him my full support and congratulations. In any contest someone has to win, and he won. And, in fact, his appointment may prove to be a very good thing for KWS. I got it to one stage; I hope he is able to take it to the next."

Leakey had offered to resign earlier this year, at the height of the attacks against him, saying that "the stress and pain of being vilified by senior politicians...is more than I think is good for my health." (He lost both legs in a plane crash in Kenya last summer.) But President Daniel arap Moi declined to accept his resignation at the time, and just 2 weeks ago asked him to stay. Leakey told *Science* he believed he no longer had Moi's full support, however, and so could no longer be effective as KWS's director.

The criticisms leveled against Leakey include accusations that he was an arrogant, inflexible leader who paid too little attention to the needs of people living near the national parks who have been harmed by wildlife. In addition, a Kenya Government Probe Committee, appointed in January after 23 influential politicians called for Leakey's resignation, spent weeks investigating allegations of misconduct in the KWS. Leakey, it was charged, had spent KWS money to aid wealthy ranch owners, favored white em-

ployees, and was attempting to take over the Masai Mara Reserve, which is owned by a local council. Leakey dismisses the committee's report, which has not yet been made public, as "a smear campaign" since he was never allowed to defend himself from the charges.



Out. Richard Leakey.

JOHN READER/PHOTO RESEARCHERS

Many observers believe the real battle is for control of the millions of dollars Leakey attracted to KWS. With that money, critics and supporters alike say, Leakey had reinvigorated the Kenyan conservation system, in which corruption and poaching were once common. "Leakey turned what was a very derelict and corrupt organization into one with a lot of exciting new ways for doing conservation and one with an enormous esprit de corps, from the rangers right to the top," says Mark R. Stanley Price, director of African Operations for the African Wildlife Foundation in Nairobi.

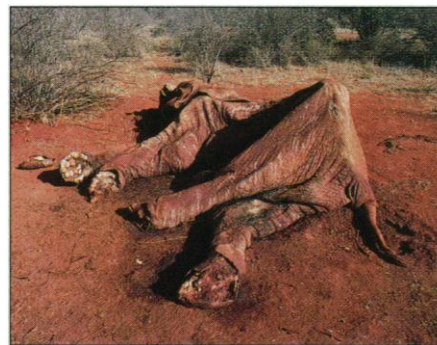
KWS's value in protecting Kenya's wildlife has already been shown by the increase in poaching during the past 2 months of political turmoil. Between 25 and 30 elephants have been killed—as many as in the past 2 years—because KWS's anti-poaching patrols have been on hold. "We had no money for fuel," says Leakey, "because the Minister of Tourism and Wildlife has been holding up our funds."

Ironically, it was partly because of Leakey's success in bringing poaching under control that the conflict between humans and wildlife emerged—a conflict that proved to be his Achilles' heel. Because anti-poaching patrols and other measures diminished threats to the elephants, the animals wandered from the safety of the national parks, destroying crops and hurting people. Leakey launched several successful revenue-sharing projects with nearby communities to compensate for the damage, but powerful politicians in areas where projects hadn't been set up complained KWS was not doing

enough. And some conservationists agreed. "Despite the appearance of a number of programs to address the problems between humans and wildlife, KWS never adequately dealt with this issue—which is one of national concern," says Western. "And the Probe Committee was quite right in pointing to this as a very neglected area."

Western and others feel Leakey resisted the Probe Committee's recommendations, which were presented to Leakey in a letter from President Moi on March 10. Those recommendations, however, were too much for Leakey to swallow. Among other conditions, the committee advised that all KWS's revenues be spent outside the parks and reserves, and that the anti-poaching patrols report to the Commissioner of Police—moves that would have reduced Leakey's power and perhaps returned the situation to that of the pre-KWS days. "The government had issued a series of conditions that I could not work under and that, I fear, will ultimately lead to the destruction of KWS," Leakey said. "Rather than be the agent of that destruction, I decided to quit."

One of Western's immediate priorities may be to persuade scientists Leakey recruited from quitting along with him. Joyce Poole, an elephant behaviorist and coordinator of KWS's elephant project, has already decided not to renew her contract. Before Western's appointment was announced, several other young scientists recruited by Leakey also told *Science* they were considering resigning. Their resignations could jeopardize two key projects: an environmental



Poachers encroaching. In turmoil preceding Leakey's departure, elephant poaching shot up.

BRUCE DAVIDSON/ANIMALS

monitoring program for all wildlife areas in Kenya, and a program designed to extend some of KWS's revenues to people living closest to the parks.

The potential departure of highly regarded young scientists isn't the only concern raised by Leakey's resignation. Conservationists are also worried about the future of several parks and re-

serves that some Kenyan politicians have been trying to reduce in size. "Because of his nature and because he had the president's support, Leakey was able to resist those kinds of political pressures," said one ecologist. "But I wouldn't be surprised now to see protected areas—such as the Tana Primate Reserve, the only place in the world where the endangered red colobus monkey is found" removed from protection.

In the coming months, Western will have plenty of opportunity to show his mettle.

—Virginia Morell