

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

There's a New Wildlife Policy In Kenya: Use It or Lose It

From the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro to the shores of Lake Turkana, Kenya teems with elephants, gazelles, giraffes, and lions—and its national parks teem with tourists. Yet parks cover only 7% of the land, and 75% of these animals are not posing inside the parks earning tourist dollars. Instead they are roaming across rural Kenya, often trampling crops, eating grass intended for cattle, killing or maiming dozens of villagers every year, and being killed themselves by angry farmers or poachers.

Surprisingly, the newly appointed director of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), ecologist David Western, wants to keep these animals roaming outside the parks, in fact to enhance their opportunities to do so. Even more surprising is that a number of Kenyans and a host of international development agencies think this is a very good idea. The reason: Many conservationists see this strategy as a way not to exacerbate conflicts between people and wildlife, but to reduce them. They also see this strategy as key to wildlife survival.

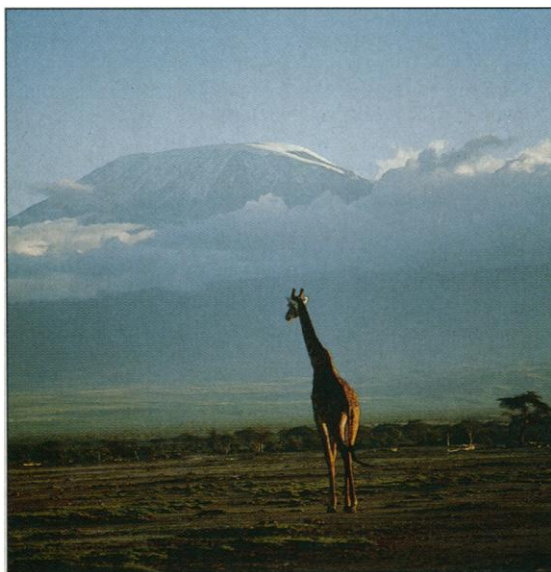
Western, who was appointed head of the KWS in March following the ouster of paleo-anthropologist Richard Leakey (*Science*, 1 April, p. 23), wants to give rural communities and landowners a direct stake in wildlife conservation by providing park revenues and international donor funds to help them establish wildlife-based businesses. These could include hiking, canoeing, or horseback-riding safaris; selling meat and hides from game farms; or earning lucrative fees from trophy hunting on privately or communally owned lands—a sport banned in Kenya since the late 1970s.

His goal is to help Kenyan pastoralists grab a direct share of the \$436 million in tourism-related revenues that flowed into the country last year. If landowners find wildlife more valuable than crops or cattle, Western hopes, they will start to protect it themselves.

But Western is fighting a battle against time. Although Leakey is widely credited with stemming poaching within the parks, agricultural development around them is now a more pressing problem for the animals, Western believes. Traditional pastoralists around many of Kenya's savanna parks, especially the Maasai, are putting increasing amounts of land into cultivation. And once the savanna is fenced and plowed for onions, beans, or corn, the struggle to make elephants or zebras welcome—or to bring tour-

ists through on safari—will be all but lost. Mark R. Stanley Price, director of African operations for the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) in Nairobi, says that Kenya has "a very short time horizon to really make radical changes in wildlife management before we are overtaken by events."

The approach has other risks as well. Getting successful grassroots enterprises going is far from guaranteed, especially on the communal and trust lands where most of



Management problems. Kenyan wildlife and Kenyans, competing for the same land, aren't getting along.

Kenya's pastoralists live. Conceptually, "the principles are all correct, but the devil is in the details," says Tim Resch, the biological diversity adviser for Africa for the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). One detail in particular—how to get development money down to the individual pastoralists through entrenched local power structures that are notorious for siphoning such funds away—may prove to be the policy's undoing.

A new type of conservation. The new wildlife managers can't be accused of dallying. Two months after he was appointed, Western won approval for his goals from the government board of trustees that oversees KWS. He's also got the backing of major development agencies which currently supply 60% of KWS's operating budget. "We're giving him our full support," says Agi Kiss, who oversees the distribution of World Bank funds to KWS in Nairobi. Resch agrees that community management of

wildlife and other resources is "the trend that's rolling across Africa."

Without these changes in wildlife policy and programs, Western sees a bleak future for both the parks and the animals. Kenya's fast-growing human population, which rose from 6 million to 20 million between 1957 and 1987, is placing more pressure on the land to sustain it. That means more pressure to plant crops, which in turn means more opportunities to go head to head with baboons, zebras, and elephants—a contest the animals will always lose.

Nor will game parks alone continue to sustain the animals: They are losing biodiversity. Confining herds of waterbucks or elephants to relatively small areas has transformed many vital savannas into barren moonscapes. In Amboseli National Park, for example, most of the woodlands have disappeared, along with half of the park's plant species and woodland animals such as giraffes and vervet monkeys. The complexity and diversity of the savannas can only be maintained by extensive management, including culling of animals, or by providing more room for large animals to migrate, Western says. And they will only find that room outside the park. Making wildlife directly profitable outside parks "is the only way to move beyond what I call the 5% solution," he says. "That's the amount of land in protected areas around the world today, and unless we can make some inroads for wildlife on the 95% outside, those parks will never ever be ecologically self-sustaining."

The perils of protection. Another problem is that Kenya's parks are not yet financially self-sustaining. Only 11 of Kenya's 26 national parks actually earn revenues, and only about eight could be considered self-sufficient. Overall, KWS earns about \$1 million each month in park revenues. The continuing calls from the community for a share of that money as compensatory damages for marauding wildlife will, Western says, soon drain the coffers. "Containing the conflict between agriculture and wildlife is the single biggest cost KWS will incur in the coming years," he says. "If we have a very strong protectionist policy towards wildlife, the cost is going to completely overwhelm us. Yet if we can reverse the dependency on park profits, reinstate a policy of wildlife utilization, and make wildlife profitable outside the parks," KWS may be able to meet its longtime goal of reaching financial independence within 5 years.

Certainly the present system has brought people and wildlife toe to toe. In Kenya, this

conflict helped inflame the controversy that ended the 5-year tenure of Western's predecessor. Leakey had taken over a corrupt and ineffective operation and, through vigorous anti-poaching patrols and successful fund raising, strengthened the agency's coffers and its ability to protect the animals within the parks. To win the tolerance of park neighbors for damage caused by wildlife, KWS had also begun a program that included both revenue sharing and the promise of financial help for wildlife-based businesses. But Leakey was charged with favoritism by some members of government in the disbursement of these funds—charges he vigorously disputed. In the ensuing furor, the KWS board of trustees failed to approve guidelines needed to make more than \$8 million in AID and World Bank funds, as well as some of KWS' park revenues, available to landowners to help launch game farms or build tourist facilities.

This made a bad climate worse. The expectations for revenue sharing from the parks have gotten "completely out of hand," says Kiss. "You can read the mood of the country from the letters in the newspapers. Anywhere you're growing maize, you've got baboons [and] bush pigs," which destroy the crops. "People don't have to be anywhere near a national park to feel KWS is responsible for those problems" and should therefore pay out money as part of a solution, Kiss notes.

Moving toward changes. Western's appointment seems at least to have restarted the stymied moves toward a solution. The wildlife-based business guidelines were approved by the trustees in June. Stanley Price, whose foundation was contracted by AID to help draw up the guidelines, calls this development a "major logjam broken." KWS has now begun reviewing proposals from land-

owners—and providing staff help to other landowners and communities to plan and draw up proposals—for grants and loans to finance new enterprises.

Western also won board approval to send an independent five-person team out this summer to listen to the views of private



Fighting for space. Maasai herders, on park outskirts, prefer cows to wildebeests on their land.

ranchers, holders of communal land, and local officials who control both game reserves and trust lands occupied by pastoralists, tour operators, and others. The team's report in late August will be used to reassess various KWS revenue-sharing projects.

More recently, Western also won board approval for legislation to lift the ban on sport hunting. The proposal has now gone to Kenya's cabinet, where it is facing little opposition so far "because of the perception that this is for the benefit of local communities," he says. Although hunting may create some public relations problems in the West, Western points out that KWS itself had to authorize culling of more than 20,000 animals last year—most of them herd animals encroaching on cattle-grazing or crop lands, but also including 50 problem elephants that were threatening human lives and property. These killings brought no protests, but they also brought few profits. "Basically [a return to hunting] is inevitable," says Kiss. "If wildlife doesn't have direct utility, it will disappear."

Western argues that a return to tightly controlled big game hunting for non-endangered animals on private lands and the re-opening of markets for meat and skins of abundant species can bring both profits and an understanding that wildlife must be sustained to be useful. This has been the outcome of an AID-sponsored hunting and game-farming program for rural communities in Zimbabwe called Campfire—touted by Resch and other development specialists as one of the most successful examples of community-based conservation.

A potential for failure. These projects all make sense in theory and in limited practice, but even proponents concede that

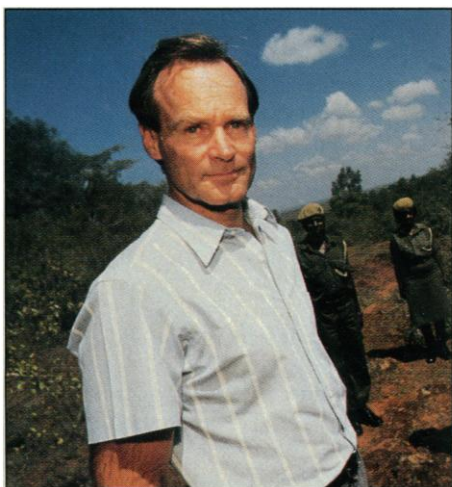
creating successful wildlife-based tourism or hunting operations will be a tough challenge, fraught with the potential for failure. One problem is that many of these projects must involve Kenya's communal landholdings such as the Maasai group ranches, which Stanley Price and others note are legendary for their "fossilized" power structures and mismanagement. Yet these are the lands that border most of Kenya's savanna parks. If profits from wildlife-based enterprises don't make it all the way to individual farmers or herders, their incentive for permitting wildlife on their lands will vanish—and the animals may follow shortly thereafter.

"I'm not pessimistic, but I think we have to be realistic and cautious about our expectations," notes Michael Wright, the new president of AWF. Economic development programs in rural communities are difficult enough even when they are not linked to a second goal of wildlife conservation, he says. Dennis McCarthy, who oversees AID's programs with KWS, says his agency realizes that "when you get into the development of enterprises with group ranches in particular, there are going to be some failures."

Western hopes to minimize problems by encouraging the formation of legally registered and audited landowner conservation associations, a relatively new type of organization that can either build on or bypass traditional power structures. These associations could apply to KWS for technical and financial help to create private game parks or negotiate with tour operators to view wildlife on their lands. Since 1992 he has had a hand in encouraging formation of such associations on Maasai ranches near Amboseli and Tsavo national parks, the Maasai Mara National Reserve, and more recently in the Rift Valley. But the track record is too brief to tell how well such associations will fare at launching businesses or serving all of their members.

Conservationists around the world will be watching what happens in Kenya intently, and their opinions are divided on whether Western can pull off his ambitious agenda. Community-based conservation is a long-term investment, Wright notes. "We're trying to figure out how to manage and build a relationship between people and wildlife for the next century, and we really need time to figure out how to put the puzzle together." Time, however, is one thing that wildlife conservation in Kenya may not have in any abundance.

—Yvonne Baskin



New face, new policy. David Western, director of the Kenya Wildlife Service, wants less protectionism and more wildlife utilization.

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