

Case study

Combating poverty: the role of animal welfare education and new skills

Problem:

Exploiting wildlife threatens animals and impedes sustainable development

The poaching, consumption and sale of bushmeat from Tsavo West, Kenya's largest national park, is illegal, yet the practice has persisted. People using wildlife for food or income not only risk contact with deadly diseases such as Ebola and anthrax but also fines or imprisonment as overhunting pushes poachers ever further into the park.

The snares used cause immense suffering; animals often die from dehydration or their wounds after many hours of pain. Like other poaching methods – bows and arrows, digging trenches and clubbing – snaring does not guarantee a humane death, nor does it respect laws protecting endangered species.

Until 2006, Tsavo's people were plundering local wildlife far beyond subsistence level, moving inevitably towards the decimation of the animal population. Species such as the dik-dik became rare, proving that bushmeat is an unreliable source of income and protein and that the trade endangers potential earnings from wildlife-focused tourism.

Solution:

Engage people in sustainable livelihoods and animal welfare education

Simply enforcing anti-poaching laws would not tackle the root cause of the bushmeat trade and could compromise local living standards. In 2006, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) carried out a participatory rural appraisal to discover the underlying causes of animal suffering and determine a long-term prevention strategy.

The appraisal revealed that poverty was the key factor fuelling the bushmeat trade. Unreliable rainfall caused poor harvests and surviving crops were frequently destroyed by elephants. Poaching supplemented failing incomes and animal welfare was not a familiar concept.

A community-based approach was necessary to create change. WSPA:

- **designed and delivered education programmes explaining the long-term effects of the bushmeat trade on local animals and people.** The whole community received printed materials, watched videos and heard lectures; adult education considered animals' capacity to feel pain – a new concept despite co-existing so closely with wildlife.
- **provided access to sustainable, cruelty-free livelihoods.** WSPA worked with a specialist NGO to provide a viable alternative income: beekeeping.
- **addressed crop raiding by elephants.** Our humane fencing project benefited local farmers.



Humane education. Children learn about the long-term effects of poaching.

Impact:

Sustainable local livelihoods and improved animal welfare

Education

Ongoing animal welfare education yielded results. With an understanding of the links between poaching, a drop in tourist revenue (which affects government spending on social issues) and effects on the land itself, 120 people renounced poaching.

Ex-poachers now run three animal welfare groups in Tsavo: Kasaani Community for Protection of Animals, Kidong'u Conservation and Development Group, and the Mahandakini Youth Network for Animal Welfare.

Their hunting expertise and knowledge of the land remains a distinct advantage; members of the local groups have formed an anti-poaching patrol programme in collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service community department, which greatly values their experience.

Animal welfare in action

In November 2008, the Kidong'u Conservation and Development Group and Kenya Wildlife Service rangers arrested a poacher with 22 dik-dik carcasses.

Education on the effects of poaching has changed attitudes and increased compassion; people now protect the animals they used to hunt. Under their watchful eyes, dik-diks are becoming a common sight once more.

WSPA's school-based animal welfare programmes and educational outreach – which stops new poachers developing – reached 13 primary schools and 15,000 older pupils in Tsavo West.

To ensure the longevity of the education work, WSPA has employed local people: one community coordinator, one education officer and an education centre manager.

Alternative livelihoods

Former poachers were trained in sustainable beekeeping by Honey Care Africa; to complement the specialist training, WSPA provided 200 beehives. Honey Care Africa is also helping the people of Tsavo find markets for raw and processed honey.

While a prolonged drought affected early nectar yields, 30 beehives have now been colonized. Further colonization is expected during the rains in Spring 2009.

WSPA explained the beekeeping project to tour companies. This prompted one to donate enough for a business start-up fund, allowing former poachers to borrow small amounts to cover their initial costs. The donation is a tiny indication of the revenue safaris could bring.

Crop protection

WSPA's human–elephant conflict project introduced chili pepper fencing to the area. To date, four local farmers have been able to protect 22 acres of crops from elephants, providing an affordable model for others facing the same problem.

In 2008, the project employed nine local people to collect data on human–elephant conflict.

Conclusion:

Animal welfare education and alternative incomes combat poverty and protect wildlife

The delivery of animal welfare education and an alternative livelihood option in Tsavo West has protected wildlife and led to a cultural shift in attitudes towards animals.

Many of the people who once poached, traded and consumed wildlife now consider themselves animal guardians; they are using their newfound skills in beekeeping and animal protection to attract tourism and sustainable trade to their communities.



Local attraction. The dik-dik is just one of the species that draws in tourists.