
4. THE LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY

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SUMMARY

This case study is an analysis of the financial viability of wildlife conservation at the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) in Kenya. In the last decade the form of land use was changed from cattle ranching to wildlife conservation. In 1994 the entire conservation area was fenced. Currently the LWC is strongly dependent on donor contributions to sustain the on-going programmes, in particular the protection of both species of rhinoceros and Grevy's zebra. In 1996, 29% of the yearly running expenses were financed by the profit centres developed on the Conservancy and 71% were covered by donations. The main source of income was tourism, followed by wildlife sales (cropping) and farming.

Due to the high cost of the endangered species programme, the current concept of wildlife conservation is not financially viable, nor is cattle ranching. The Conservancy's tourism policy does not enable the costs of protection of endangered species to be covered. Potential trophy hunting would reduce the deficit but cannot compensate for the high costs of the sustained programmes.

This case study demonstrates that financial independence will be very difficult to achieve. A drastic cost reduction or termination of the endangered species programme, together with a change in the current tourism policy, needs to be considered.

On the other hand the contribution of the LWC to national and international conservation, protection of endangered species and the world's biodiversity needs to be recognised. The LWC with its professional security organisation also plays an important role in the security of the area where it is located and for which it has not been financially supported.

INTRODUCTION

The Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (LWC) is situated in Laikipia District, in the northern foothills of Mount Kenya, at an altitude varying from 1,500 to 2,000 meters. The average annual rainfall is 500 to 600 mm. The main vegetation types are savannah, *Acacia* bushland, wetland, grassland and indigenous forest. The Conservancy has been closely modelled to similar operations in Southern Africa where land units under different ownership have combined under a single wildlife policy to achieve common conservation and management goals.

The LWC is amongst the most interesting projects for wildlife management in East Africa. The aim is to establish wildlife conservation as a form of land use and to provide a framework for sustainable management of wildlife outside National Parks. Both private landowners and government have donated and dedicated land to establish a model for wildlife conservation. The Conservancy was formed as a non-profit organisation. Wildlife has been established as a form of land use on private land in other areas of Kenya (see Hopcraft, Chapter 13, Bos, Grootenhuis and Prins, Chapter 14). The difference with LWC is its effort to protect endangered species such as rhinoceros and Grevy zebra, participation of the community and the co-operation of government with private landowners.

The origins of the LWC can be traced back to 1922 when Alec Douglas took up land rights on Lewa Downs under the British government's post war "*Soldier—Settler*" scheme and established a cattle ranch. Alec Douglas and his successors, the Craig family, tolerated wildlife on the ranch and also took measures to prevent their total demise. In the 1980s the emphasis at LWC changed and wildlife conservation became the prime objective. Cattle are still farmed today, but numbers have declined in favour of wildlife. Since then the wildlife to cattle stocking ratio has been reversed from 80% cattle to 20% wildlife, to 80% wildlife to 20% cattle. In 1982, Anna Merz together with the Craig family, established the Ngare Sergoi Rhino Sanctuary, at that time the first sanctuary dedicated to rhino conservation in Kenya. Initially the sanctuary covered an area of 5,000 ha, which was extended to 10,000 ha in 1988–89. In 1994, with full support from the Kenyan government and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the decision was made to fence the remainder of Lewa Downs, including the state owned Ngare Ndare Forest Reserve, enclosing an area of 26,700 ha with 160 km of fencing.

The LWC came into being on 1 April 1993 and was officially registered by the Kenyan Government as a non-profit organisation in February 1995. It employs approximately 250 people, making the LWC the largest employer in the northern part of the country.