



## Center for Responsible Travel

Washington, DC and Stanford University

*Transforming the Way the World Travels*

### **Ecotourism, Conservation and Development in East Africa: How the Philanthropic Traveler Can Make a Difference**

**David (Jonah) Western, Ph.D.**

I began as a traveler in Tanzania. In 1947, I came to Tanzania from Britain, and traveled by train from Mombasa to Moshi and on to Dar-es-Salaam. My first memory was Kilimanjaro, seen from the window of the train. I'm still a traveler these many years later and Kilimanjaro with its majestic fever trees, giraffes and elephants, has been my inspiration ever since.

We all begin life as travelers. The question is, do we leave the people and places we visit the better for it when we move on? This is why I'm so interested in travelers' philanthropy. But what is travelers' philanthropy? How can a traveler's goodwill help the people and places visited?

The goals of traveler's philanthropy include social services, health, education, conservation, social justice and empowerment, climate change, tourism, business and enterprises. I would add equity and knowledge too, if they are not implied by empowerment. Marginalized communities blind to the outside world are vulnerable its exploitation.

To get a feel for the emergence of travelers' philanthropy, I look at the origins of tourism itself, then development of ecotourism to show how they feed traveler's philanthropy. Finally, I show how philanthropy can add value to ecotourism and, perhaps, even to the tourism industry as a whole.

Tourism is the single biggest transfer of wealth from North to South. It fits Africa's call for trade not aid from the developed world. Ecotourism is a small but significant part of the wealth transfer. But, dollar for dollar, ecotourism does far more for people and nature than regular mass tourism. Yet both come down to fees paid for services rendered. The fee is the cost of business and the amenity value the traveler pays. The regular tourist hopes those fees do some good. The ecotourist insists they do. Ecotourist standards and practices, and in some countries policies, are tools for making ecotourism work.

In the final analysis, though, tourism is still based on fees--and ecotourism on fees plus good practices. Lacking in both is the satisfaction that comes of making a personal contribution--and seeing people and nature benefit as a result. The personal contribution distinguishes travelers' philanthropy from ecotourism. But does that make

travelers' philanthropy trade-plus-aid? Or does travelers' philanthropy also involve a personal conscience to ensure that charitable giving does good, not harm? The distinction is important if travelers' philanthropy is to build on the positive force of ecotourism and avoid the negative in tourism. The challenge for travelers' philanthropy is to marshal the raw potential of charity as a positive stimulus to community development and conservation.

These are some thoughts on travelers' philanthropy I wish to explore.

The earliest philanthropic traveler is the Good Samaritan in the Bible. The Good Samaritan was the traveler who helped the poor and suffering he met along the way, strangers he might never see again. The modern philanthropic traveler is the ancient Good Samaritan. How do we translate ancient Good Samaritanism into travelers' philanthropy for the good of people and nature along the road?

I will focus on East Africa, the richest biota on earth, one that has coexisted with pastoral peoples for millennia and humankind since our emergence in the savannas. Here we face the awesome task of conserving wildlife in the face of rapid population growth, poverty and development. How can responsible tourism prompt communities to conserve wildlife to advantage, rather than depend on outside conservationists and donors?

Tourism as a global industry began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. When I traveled from Britain to Tanganyika in 1947, it took 4 weeks on an old steamship. Today, the journey takes me 8 hours. This is a measure of the technological advancements driving global travel.

The economic driving force is rising global wealth and the urge to travel that goes with modern lifestyles. My mother, who grew up in the inter-war years, never went on vacation as a child. Few families could afford one then. Today, few in the richer nations don't take vacation once or twice a year. Tourism numbers have sky-rocketed from a trickle in 1900. According to the UN's World Tourism Organization numbers hit 400 million in the early 1990's, about 700 million in 2000 and perhaps stand at one billion today. By 2020 numbers may reach 1.6 billion. The outcome is visible in around the world: the travel industry has grown from insignificance in 1900 to a 9 to 10 trillion dollar industry presently employing over a quarter billion people.

Is a rising oil price or the current economic crisis likely to stem the rise in tourism? I doubt it. If anything, tourism will account for a bigger share of international travel in future. Business travelers will find it cheaper and more socially responsible to hold video-conferences than take long-haul flights, lose time and arrive exhausted. There is no virtual reality substitute for the traveler bent on beach, bush and culture. A growing number will become ecotourists want to leave a lighter global footprint.

Despite the numbers and money in global tourism, it has its dark side: the demand for cheap flights and cheap vacations has seen the travel industry cut costs to the bone.

**Washington, DC** ■ 1333 H St., NW ■ Suite 300 East Tower ■ Washington, DC 20005 ■ P: 202-347-9203 ■ F: 202-775-0819  
**Stanford University** ■ 450 Serra Mall, Building 50, Room 51D ■ Stanford, CA 94305 ■ P: 650-723-0894 ■ F: 650-725-0605

Larger visitor numbers must make up the thinner profit margins. The motor of visitor flows from rich to poor countries is the differential wealth and cost of living. Once in Kenya and Tanzania, it is cheap for tourists to move around and inexpensive to stay. The reason is our low labor cost and services. The upshot of mass tourism and economic differential spells paltry incomes, high social costs and often adverse environmental impact for developing countries.

On the bright side, the poor countries will have a market advantage for the conceivable future, if they can up the benefits and cut the costs. This is where the ecotourism principles come in, and where the philanthropic traveler can add far more than fees, standards, and fair trade practices can exact.

How can the benefits be upped and the costs cut by ecotourism, and amplified by travelers philanthropy? How can ecotourism plus travelers' philanthropy redress the discontents of global travel?

The problem comes down to the dominance of big corporations competing to offer cheaper vacations. Products are standardized and packaged to cut costs. Like supermarkets, big vendors gobble up small ones in the process. In the 1960s and 1970s, most hotels in the East African parks were Hilton or Holiday Inn knock-offs. Windows frames and bathroom fittings were imported. As a result, the export ratio of tourist accommodations (the ratio of imported goods to locally made) ran at 80%. No money whatsoever went back to communities surrounding parks.

The export ratios have declined steeply and benefits to local communities have risen (though less sharply) in the last two decades. The reason is not the big heartedness of tour operators, but the changing sensibilities of visitors. Like supermarkets, the demand is driven by the customer, and customers can change buying habits when they discover the impact they have on the people and places they visit.

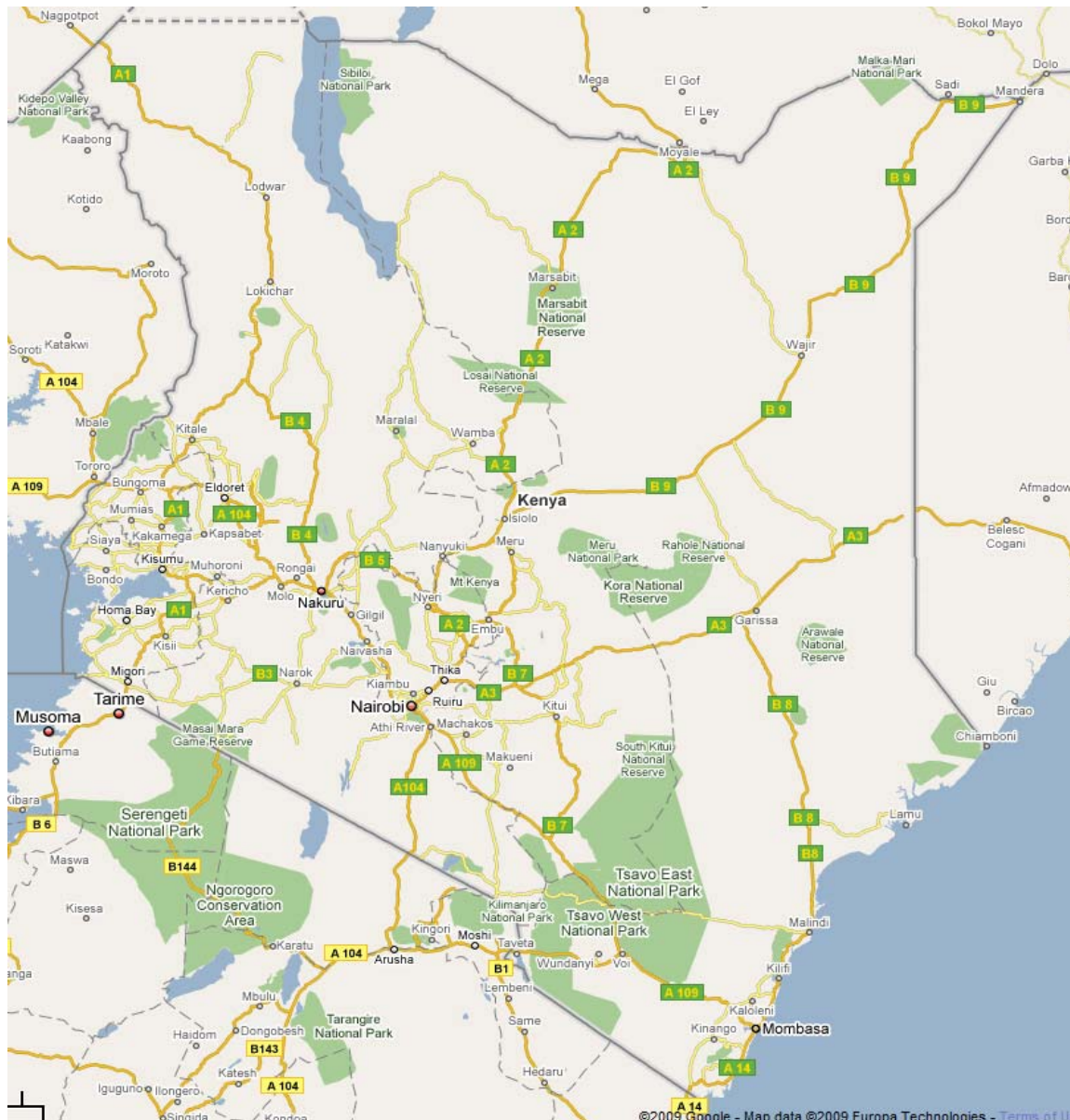
The changing sentiment of the traveler is the driving force of ecotourism. Tourist concerns about rights, justice and fairness, and about bettering the lot of local people and wildlife, have grown in the last decade. These concerns stem from the ecotourism movement and media coverage. The internet and World Wide Web has leveled information access, allowing travelers to tailor a safari to their taste and pocket and cut out large operators in the process. The ecotourism principles, standards, and policies and the new sensibilities of today's traveler are reshaping global tourism. As a result, the benefits of tourism are rising and downside falling for third world destinations. Making the impact of tourism visible was key to these improvements.

One of the most powerful forces in the rise of the East African tourism industry was the creation of our national parks. None of our parks was set aside to protect biodiversity, much as we want them to do so today. The lure of tourist dollars was the primary motive. I have a tape of Harold Hayes interviewing the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere. Hayes was writing his book, *Serengeti: Last Place on Earth* at the time. He asked the founding president what he had in mind for Serengeti at independence.

**Washington, DC** ■ 1333 H St., NW ■ Suite 300 East Tower ■ Washington, DC 20005 ■ P: 202-347-9203 ■ F: 202-775-0819  
**Stanford University** ■ 450 Serra Mall, Building 50, Room 51D ■ Stanford, CA 94305 ■ P: 650-723-0894 ■ F: 650-725-0605

Nyerere was clear: the wealth of old Africa could become a wealth for new Africa if wildlife attracted tourists.

### Map of Kenya's Parks



In the slipstream of travelers flow benefits that are far less visible than revenues. Donor countries tend to give aid and support to nations visited by their citizens. Visitors and donors alike see poverty, lack of social services, and injustice. Their concern and support makes a difference to the pace of development. These are not benefits commonly attributed to tourism, but they should be. One man, Edmund Hillary, devoted his life to building schools and health clinics in Nepal after his ascent of Everest. Tens of thousands of other benevolent if less adventurous travelers have donated time and money to development. There is yet another less obvious slipstream effect: where tourists go, businesses and non-government organizations follow.

**Washington, DC** ■ 1333 H St., NW ■ Suite 300 East Tower ■ Washington, DC 20005 ■ P: 202-347-9203 ■ F: 202-775-0819

**Stanford University** ■ 450 Serra Mall, Building 50, Room 51D ■ Stanford, CA 94305 ■ P: 650-723-0894 ■ F: 650-725-0605

Nairobi has attracted business and investments because tourism has made it an international gateway and a comfortable place to live. Its conveniences and internationalism has, in turn, drawn a thriving press corp that reports extensively about East Africa. Such invisible benefits of tourism area seldom recognized or quantified. If you are looking for connection between tourism and development worth quantifying, here is one.

Then, of course, there is the downside of tourism. The most visible is the impact on indigenous cultures and values. Kenya's beach tourism has spawned prostitution, crime, and corruption along the coast. Inland, tourists visit cultural villages semi-dressed, kiss and caress, and offend traditional sensibilities because they are given no code of conduct. In parks, hoards of minibuses crowd around lions and cheetah and drive rough-shod over habitat.

In East Africa, ecotourism emerged out of the downside of our minibus tourism. I was in Amboseli in 1990 when Megan Epler Wood, then an American filmmaker, interviewed me about my work on wildlife tourism. To my surprise she called it a good example of ecotourism. I had seldom heard of ecotourism. "But your already doing it", she told me. "You're trying to turn around minibus tourism for conservation and bring benefit to local people." I was intrigued. Ecotourism certainly had more cache and international appeal than the wildlife tourism. At the end of her filming, Megan asked if I would help her launch The Ecotourism Society,<sup>i</sup> which I did as founding president.

In the early days of The Ecotourism Society we struggled to define ecotourism and distinguish it from regular tourism. We eventually came up with the following at a board meeting in Airlie House, in Warrenton, Virginia:

*"Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people."<sup>ii</sup>*

I want to stress the word "responsible". The ecotourist is, above all, the responsible tourist bent on doing good for people, places, and nature. Our intention was to use the sensibilities of visitors to create a movement for better tourism, rather than a donor or conservation-driven program. The difference is crucial. The power of ecotourism lies in the millions of travelers' bent on doing good, and in satisfaction they get from it. The traveler's urge to do good gives ecotourism the power to grow spontaneously through contagious social responsibility, rather than by rules and regulations and policies; they too have their place, but are better at fine tuning than fashioning behavior.

Two decades on, has ecotourism succeeded? The answer is directly relevant to travelers' philanthropy. If ecotourism hasn't succeeded, why should travelers' philanthropy do any better? If it has, what can travelers' philanthropy add to ecotourism?<sup>iii</sup> In making an assessment, I look at the track record of ecotourism following the "Ecotourism at a Crossroads" workshop held in Nairobi in 1997. I was director of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) at the time, bent on changing the minibus

image of our parks. We had become the Costa Brava<sup>iv</sup> of the wildlife world, rather than the ultimate safari we should be, given our natural heritage and pioneering efforts in community-based conservation.

KWS and The Ecotourism Society co-sponsored the workshop. I offered to hold up Kenya as an exemplar of the best and the worst in ecotourism. We invited participants from all over the world to take stock of tourism at a critical junction. One path led in the direction travelers' philanthropy is plying, the other to worse congestion, impact, and frustration among travelers, host nations and communities. The message of the workshop was clear: Kenya, and tourism in general, was walking both paths at once.

For Kenya Wildlife Service, the workshop was a sounding board for two programs I launched at the time. The first, "Parks for Kenyans," coincided with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of our first national park, Nairobi. Look anywhere across Africa today and you will see few indigenous African peoples in national parks. Sadly, most parks are still, as in the colonial days, places for foreigners, not citizens, and certainly not the communities that once inhabited them.

"Parks for Kenyans" tried to change that by doing for Kenya what Yellowstone National Park had done for America: make citizens proud of their wild heritage. When Yellowstone was created in 1872, a special rail line was constructed to promote tourism, and give the park public appeal in its battle against miners and loggers. The American, not the foreign visitor, has been the custodian of its parks and wildlands ever since. The same should be true of Kenya's parks and wildlands. Under the "Parks for Kenyans" campaign, we built no rail lines. We didn't need too. We declared a free-entry day on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our parks, and halved the gate fees for Kenyans thereafter. The campaign succeeded: Kenyans began to visit parks. Today, over half Nakuru National Park's visitors are citizens. Kids who once went to movies to see wildlife now take their parents to see the real thing a lot cheaper a half-hour's drive away.

The second campaign I launched was "Parks Beyond Parks." The campaign had a significant influence in promoting community-based conservation and ecotourism in Kenya. The idea behind "Parks Beyond Parks" was two-fold. First, to encourage local communities in prime wildlife areas to set up their own conservancies for their own benefit. Second, through ecotourism, to change Kenya's tarnished tourism image abroad. Instead of adding another minibus to the cheetah's shadowing entourage in overcrowded parks, the ecotourist could stay on a community conservancy at a locally-built lodge and watch animals free of tourist throngs. "Parks Beyond Parks" spread the benefits, spread the load, and made local communities central in tourism rather than peripheral to parks.

The "Parks Beyond Parks" initiative gave community conservation standing and recognition. Since the 1990s, several thousand square kilometers of conservancies have been established, hundreds of community scouts have been trained and deployed and dozens of ecotourism lodges and business enterprises have sprung up all over

Kenya. Lodges such as Iingwesi<sup>v</sup>, Shompole<sup>vi</sup>, and Oldoinyo Uas<sup>vii</sup> have won international awards and given Kenya a positive tourism buzz. The buzz has gone some way to repairing Kenya's battered tourism image.

The Ecotourism Society of Kenya (now Ecotourism Kenya), which we established shortly after The Ecotourism Society, has promoted ecotourism principles in Kenya, established ecotourism certification, and promoted the new face of tourism. Many operators have filled shortfalls in ecolodge bookings with domestic visitors. Domestic visitors boosted the growth of ecolodges and buffered them from a tourist recession in the late 1990s.

On balance, tourism has improved since the 1997 "Ecotourism at a Crossroads" workshop. Ecotourism has become a reality with recognized principles and practices. It has also overcome the perception of being a green marketing tool of the tourism industry. Domestic tourism has grown, boosting community-based conservation. Cheetahs and lions in parks are less harried by minibuses due to the efforts by Kenya Wildlife Service and Tanzania National Parks to improve visitor services and lessen their impact. Finally, cheetahs, lions, wild dogs, elephants and other species are increasing in many conservancies and national parks.

Other impacts of ecotourism are hard to assess. We haven't monitored tourist perceptions about Kenya, or Kenyans perceptions about tourism, for example. But I sense a sea swell all the same. Tourism has diversified. Visitors now go on game walks, take night drives, bird watch, visit cultural villages, and picnic out in the bush. Ecolodges are in vogue. Big hotels in wildlife areas are struggling. Visitors are more sensitive to animals and local people, and a little less manic about cheetahs and lions. These and our large number of repeat visitors speak of progress.

I don't want to give the impression of a tourism reformation in Kenya. Far from it. There is too little government planning and too few codes and regulations to curb the worst of minibus tourism. The various market segments—package safaris and ecotourists, for example—are seldom zoned and stratified. Our laissez faire policies invite rash development and culturally demeaning practices. The Kenya government still measures tourism by numbers rather than social and economic good. Tour operators still buy favors and build over-sized, under-priced lodges that do little social good and much ecological damage. Lions are still king of the tourist circuit, causing minibus congestion.

Two key points that bear on travelers' philanthropy emerge from this short review of ecotourism. First, Kenya still lacks a national vision and strategy for achieving its tourism potential. Visitor capacity would swell to several times its lion-limited levels, if only Kenya would promote and develop its natural diversity. Second, tourism must adopt good ecotourism principles and practices to become a positive force for development. Travelers' philanthropy will flourish or flounder to the degree that it does so.

In what follows, I show how ecotourism has begun to open the door to travelers' philanthropy by creating the enabling environment, institutions, and governance that community-based conservation calls for.

In the early 1990's Kenya had no legally constituted wildlife associations. Good-willed visitors and a few tour operators spent years struggling against local suspicion, tussles and jealousies, trying to develop tourism on community lands. Local leaders filched money and gave jobs to relatives. Tourist revenues became a source of conflict and corruption. Kenya Wildlife Service, under its Community Wildlife Service, played a key role in the formation of wildlife associations, legalizing them and giving communities a voice and way forward through a representative body, the National Wildlife Forum (NWF). The associations and NWF, with KWS backing, overcame formidable government opposition to the wildlife associations and promoted community participation in the tourism industry. Associations enabled communities to raise conservation and development funds, set up conservancies, and train members in the business and conservation skills. These activities spurred collaboration, openness, and accountability among communities and their development partners. Good governance is the glue that binds them.

Tourism was the trigger for wildlife associations, and ecotourism the stimulus to better practices. Once the communities showed tangible results, a growing number of visitors contributed money and supplies for education, health, water projects, and other development activities.

The knock-on effects of institutional development and better governance among wildlife associations are, like so much else in ecotourism, often invisible and always hard to measure. It begins with a change in attitude, then behavior, and by incremental steps, leads to better development and conservation. But in one respect the outcome is plain and measurable. Wildlife censuses tell the story. Kenya has lost nearly 50% of its wildlife since 1977. The numbers are falling in our parks as fast as outside, reflecting their connection to surrounding areas through seasonal migrations. Only a third or so of our wildlife is found in national protected areas. In contrast, 40% now occupies private and community conservancies. That figure has been climbing since the launch of the "Parks Beyond Parks" campaign and the establishment of wildlife associations. The reason, as in Namibia and other southern African countries that encourage local conservancies, lies in community efforts to protect wildlife and promote ecotourism.

Looking across the rift valley to the Masai Mara, you confront the worst of Kenya's minibus tourism and harried predators. The free-for-all has many losers and few winners. Yet, oddly, it is in Mara that ecotourism is pointing to a way out of the minibus nightmare and paving the way for travelers' philanthropy. On the recently subdivided communal lands around Mara, Maasai owners are brokering agreements with a coalition of hotelier and tour operators to establish conservancies, pay wildlife leases to Maasai share-holders, set up a transparent fee-collection system, and commission a professional agency to plan and manage the conservancy. The driving force is ecotourism. The strong institutional framework and transparent governance that

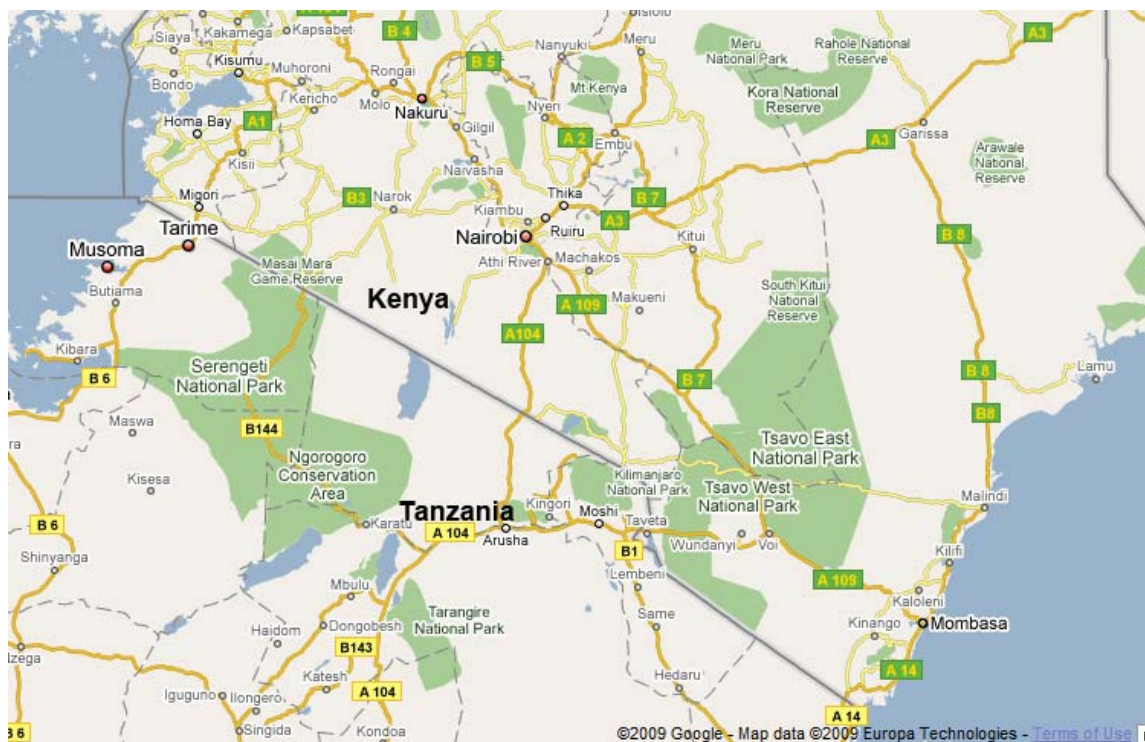
ecotourism stimulates opens the door for travelers' philanthropy to contribute to community development and conservation projects in new and complementary ways. Yet today both external and internal forces continue to undermine responsible tourism. The progressive ecotourism operators are struggling to raise the leasing fees from tourist revenues in the face of global economic recession and to counter corrupt leaders and predatory operators who broker deals that undermine the community conservancies. For the moment, the worst of tourism is outstripping the best of ecotourism. Travelers' philanthropy could tip the balance by playing the Good Samaritan.

I have purposely snuck in travelers' philanthropy at the end of a review of ecotourism to show how it grows out of, builds on, and adds to ecotourism. There has been philanthropic giving in all along, but in small amounts, often boosting the power of corrupt leaders and creating a hand-out mentality. Now, with the institutions and governance it depends on for success growing and maturing, the time is ripe to marshal the power of travelers' philanthropy.

A key role for travelers' philanthropy lies not in our national parks, but on lands beyond parks, working with the communities that created their own conservancies and lodges, together with their ecotourism business collaborators.

Consider Mara and Amboseli Game Reserve, Kenya's two premier wildlife areas. Both face the same fate—ecological isolation and faunal impoverishment--if the lands around and between them succumb to settlement. Now zoom out to the entire Kenya-Tanzania borderlands, all 60,000 square kilometers of it spanning Mara-Serengeti in the west and Tsavo-Mkomazi in the east. This dramatic rifted landscape includes 14 parks and the greatest panoply of wildlife on earth. It generates half a billion dollars a year in tourism revenues for Kenya and Tanzania and has a potential to generate ten times that sum. How can the despoliation of this vast and rich biotic land be avoided? How can we prevent the isolation of parks and the extinction traps they will become in the event of climate change and shifting biotic ranges?

## Parks in Kenya and Tanzania Border Region



The Amboseli Ecosystem Plan and establishment of the Amboseli Ecosystem Trust offer one hope for keeping our parks open and viable. The Maasai Mara conservancies offer another. Travelers' philanthropy can help cover the shortfalls in such conservation efforts and tip the balance from inimitable development to profitable conservation enterprises. The far greater potential for travelers' philanthropy lies outside parks on community conservancies.

The African Conservation Centre (ACC)<sup>viii</sup> made a start by launching ecotourism businesses in Shompole and Olkiramatian in the rift valley between Amboseli and Mara. The lodges in two adjoining conservancies, half again the size of Nairobi National Park with four times the wildlife and many more predators to boot, are attracting ecotourists with a taste for naturalistic safaris. The conservancies double as grassbanks for livestock during droughts and have lowered mortality rates relative to neighboring ranches. Not surprisingly, the Shompole and Olkiramatian communities see the conservancies as good for livestock as well as wildlife, and therefore good for its members too. Based on its early success, Shompole formed a Maa Oleng committee to represent its business interests and Shompole Community Trust to oversee planning and development, including education, health care, and enterprises development.

Leveraging the success of the Shompole-Olkiramatian conservancies and grassbanks, ACC forged a far larger landowner alliance, the South Rift Association of Landowners (SORALO)<sup>ix</sup>. SORALO conjoins 16 group ranches covering the 8,500 square kilometers connecting Amboseli and Mara across the rift valley. SORALO has garnered donor and

Washington, DC ■ 1333 H St., NW ■ Suite 300 East Tower ■ Washington, DC 20005 ■ P: 202-347-9203 ■ F: 202-775-0819  
Stanford University ■ 450 Serra Mall, Building 50, Room 51D ■ Stanford, CA 94305 ■ P: 650-723-0894 ■ F: 650-725-0605

NGO support for ecotourism developments in the south rift. The African Conservation Fund, ACC's and SORALO's supporting organization in the United States, pioneered the first safari across the rift between Mara and Amboseli in 2008. ACF, is attracting philanthropic travelers on conservation safaris that highlight ACC and SORALO's community development and conservation programs. Visitors meet communities, see their projects, and make charitable contributions. The tax-deductible contributions are likely to far exceed the net returns from ecotourism in due course.

The impact of ecotourism and philanthropic contributions on community conservancies is already evident in Shompole and Olkiramatian. Wildebeest and zebra numbers have climbed since the sanctuary was established in 2000. Lions have risen from 10 to 50, cheetahs are seen far more frequently. Wild dogs have immigrated to the area. Elephants have spread out from Amboseli and Mara and into these conservancies. Striped hyenas and other nocturnal carnivores seldom seen in parks are primate attractions for Shompole and Olkiramatian tourists out on night drives.

The scope for new ecotourism ventures and philanthropy are growing apace. My wife, Shirley Strum, has for many years studied baboons. Recently she helped Olkiramatian develop baboon walks for visitors. Visitors are fascinated by the soap opera of baboon life close up. In national parks, the average tourist spends less than two minutes on baboons, just enough to snap a picture and move on to the next check-list species. On a baboon walks, besotted visitors spend hours watching the latest family intrigues. Olkiramatian, working with researchers, has similar ideas for other species, for cattle walks and cultural visits. Community guides, with their vast local knowledge and bush skills, bring alive the savannas and wildlife in ways minibus drivers never can.

Olkiramatian and SORALO are also breaking new ground with a natural resource center. At the center, run by a woman's group, researchers, community scouts, and resource assessors collect, evaluate, and apply information on wildlife, natural resources, livestock and livelihoods to community planning, development and conservation. The center draws on the traditions of Maasai scouts, who assess environmental conditions on behalf of their community. As with baboon walks, the center will enrich ecotourism and boost philanthropic contributions to community development and conservation efforts. Such contributions support community scouts, women's' projects, school improvements, resource mapping and training in various skills and crafts.

In Northern Kenya, the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) is connecting up a vast swath of wildlife country that covers Laikipia, Mukogodo, Samburu, and the Mathews Range. More of NRT's funding already comes from philanthropic contributions than ecotourism.

By reinforcing and adding to ecotourism, travelers' philanthropy can help conserve our parks and connect the vast open landscape that elephants, lions, and other large herbivores and carnivores need to survive. Amboseli, Mara, SORALO and NRT show the enormous potential of travelers' philanthropy--if it builds community capacity in the process. There are dozens of other wildlife hotspots under threat around East Africa. All

could benefit from similar community development programs that stem from conserving open healthy landscapes.

I end by considering whether travelers' philanthropy can tackle a far larger goal it has set itself, climate change.

In recent years, in keeping with global conservation goals, most African nations have widened their horizons from "game" animals to biodiversity--all forms of life, big and small. The challenges of conserving biodiversity are far greater than conserving our large charismatic animals. Let me show why.

Look at the distribution of all mammal species across Africa. Immediately evident is the great concentration of species in the Kenya-Tanzania borderlands. The reason is because alternating forest, desert, and savanna habitats have been swept into eastern Africa by oscillating climates linked to glaciation cycles. Elsewhere in Africa, these habitats retreat with the climate regimes that brought them. In East Africa, the contorted topography of the Great Rift Valley and our high volcanic mountains provide sufficient altitudinal relief to retain the wide range of habitats brought by wet and dry climates. On the Ngurman Escarpment above Shompole are remnant rainforest species of plants and animals, such as the giant forest hog. In the sere flats at the bottom of the rift are oryx and gerenuk, remnant arid land species. The Kenya-Tanzania borderland's buckled landscape and high mountains capture and hold a large portion of all the species that ebbed and flowed across the continent over the millennia.

Climate change and topography together explain the biotic richness of the borderlands. But to withstand future climatic changes, the rich panoply of plants and animals in the borderlands must have the latitude to move up and down the altitudinal gradients and across large open landscapes. I have been looking at the vulnerability of wildlife, biodiversity, and rural communities to land fragmentation and climate change in collaboration with the African Conservation Centre, Missouri Botanical Gardens, University of York, University of California San Diego, and the African Conservation Fund. The outlook is deeply worrying.

Two human-induced changes are underway that in tandem threaten the biodiversity of the Kenya-Tanzania borderlands. First, land subdivision and settlement is breaking up the open landscape and the continuity of habitats strung along altitudinal gradients. Second, global warming due to carbon emissions is accelerating climate change. These two forces threaten the borderland's natural buffering system and put at risk species evolved over millions of years and accumulated over climatic oscillations.

The risk is brought home by the threat of human population growth, spreading settlement, and climate change to our premier wildlife areas. The rich wildlife populations in Mara and Amboseli stand out like skyscrapers against the low densities elsewhere. A sea of human settlement surrounds the 14 borderland parks. How can these great wildlife herds withstand encirclement and climate change?

The only solution is to create large land associations such as SORALO and Northern Rangelands Trust in order to buffer wildlife from climate change. With their wealth of wildlife, there is still hope of keeping the borderlands open to the benefit of its communities. But it will take collaboration between landowner associations, conservationists, ecotourists and the philanthropist to pull it off. This is not to say governments and donors have no role to play. They do. Kenya and Tanzania working together have a large role to play. My principle message here is to identify and open the door to a new and important player, the philanthropic traveler.

I hope that the examples I have given will open up discussions on the role travelers' philanthropy in conservation and community development. I am cautiously optimistic that it has a new and vital role to play, if done thoughtfully. The extra money and support philanthropy brings could spell the difference between community-based conservation success and failure. But like so much donor money, it could create dependency rather than self-reliance, if done badly. The challenge for travelers' philanthropy is to be a Good Samaritan.

####

David Western, Ph.D., is founder and chairman of the African Conservation Centre in Nairobi. He is also the former director of the Kenya Wildlife Service and the first board chair of The International Ecotourism Society (TIES). A Kenya citizen, he was raised and educated in Tanzania, obtained a B.Sc. (Hons.) from Leicester University and a Ph.D. from the University of Nairobi. His research and writing has centered on the local people, parks and tourism. This paper is based upon the keynote address he gave at the 2008 Travelers' Philanthropy Conference.

---

<sup>i</sup> Megan Epler Wood was founder and president of The Ecotourism Society (TES) through 2002, and David Western was the first chair of its Board. TES changed its name to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) in 2002. See TIES website, [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org).

<sup>ii</sup> The International Ecotourism Society, [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org).

<sup>iii</sup> For a solid overview and review of ecotourism see Martha Honey, *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2008).

<sup>iv</sup> The Spanish coast which has earned an unenviable reputation for out of control mass tourism.

<sup>v</sup> Il Ngwesi Group Ranch, <http://www.ilngwesi.com/>.

<sup>vi</sup> The Art of Ventures, <http://www.shompole.com/>.

<sup>vii</sup> Ol Doinyo Was, [www.africatravelresource.com](http://www.africatravelresource.com).

<sup>viii</sup> African Conservation Centre, <http://www.conservationafrica.org/>.

<sup>ix</sup> South Rift Valley Association of Landowners Trust, <http://www.tourisme-solidaire.org/projet/pdf/C3KenyaSORALO.pdf>.