

# TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR GLOBAL DOMINATION

**RICHARD VIGNE**  
CEO, OL PEJETA CONSERVANCY



**T**he Chinese are coming and it would appear nothing can stop their inexorable demand for Africa's resources. I think they should be welcomed as an engine for development and wealth creation. Kenya cannot afford to refuse the opportunity for economic progress.

However, this must not come at the cost of Kenya's greatest natural asset,

its wildlife. Growing Chinese demand for ivory, rhino horn, shark fins, sea cucumbers and other "natural products" is leading to disaster. Poachers are now being paid up to USD 240 per kilogram of ivory – that equates to USD 3600 for what would have been considered a small tusk 50 years ago. Consequently the levels of elephant poaching are escalating sharply and beginning now to approach levels last seen in the elephant poaching crisis of the 1980s. Rhinos face similar threats (witness the massive losses in South Africa, but almost exactly equivalent in percentage terms to the numbers lost in Kenya in 2011) and sharks are now hard to come by along the Kenyan coast.

Eventually this assault on Kenyan wildlife will come at great cost to the nation. It will destroy the Kenyan tourism industry (and all the economic multiplier effects that come with it), as well as acting to erode the natural environment upon which all great nations ultimately depend.

Moreover, whilst we continue to pressurise China to start taking responsibility for its expansionist policies, we must also look closer to home in our efforts to ensure proper and sustainable environmental stewardship. Recently, ivory poachers

caught in West Laikipia in the act of hacking out the tusks of a newly killed elephant were fined Kshs 15,000 in the same court that sentenced a livestock thief to seven years imprisonment for the crime of stealing one sheep – all on the same day! This demonstrates how current law-makers, the administration and existing judiciary appear to pay little attention to wildlife crime, despite this resource being the bedrock of the tourism industry.

It would be unfair though to lay the blame entirely at the feet of the administration. A new wildlife law – with greater penalties for poaching – remains "in draft", largely because the conservation fraternity has been utterly unable to arrive at any sort of consensus regarding a new and more suitable wildlife policy for the country.

It is hardly surprising therefore that the government feels pulled in so many different directions that a total impasse appears to have been reached. Consequently the judicial risks to poachers and organised crime syndicates remain minimal, even as wildlife crime becomes more and more profitable and attractive.

But whilst it is incumbent upon the government to begin to treat wildlife crime more seriously, in the

final analysis it is by our actions as individuals that the fate of Kenya's environment will be ultimately determined. I am sure most people reading this are not consumers of ivory or rhino horn, but how many of us pay any regard to the environmental sustainability of our daily lives? We still order lobsters – as a special treat of course – when visiting the coast despite knowing full well that this marine crustacean has been harvested to near extinction in Kenyan waters. How many of us insist that the furniture we buy must be manufactured from sustainably harvested wood, instead preferring to turn a blind eye to the fact that the mahogany table we so covet can only have been made from a tree illegally removed from the rain forests of central Africa? Are readers aware that at least eight of the Chinese restaurants in Nairobi that we all patronise sell shark fin soup, tasteless muck that is cruelly harvested from live sharks along Kenya's coastline?

The state of the global environment – let alone Kenya's – is in a poor and worsening state. The speed of degradation is increasing day by day, year by year. It appears to be inexorable, something that only governments can deal with and stop, but it is not. Actually we as individuals, through our behaviour and the choices we make, are in a fantastically powerful position to arrest current declines. We can boycott health food shops that sell shark products (yes they exist in Nairobi too), we can telephone our MPs to urge new wildlife bills to be passed, we can stop buying Chinese goods until they adopt a proactive approach to stopping the illegal ivory trade and we can say no to that menu offer of a lobster on our next coast holiday.

Unless we begin to make these choices, the world we live in will become a poorer and poorer place. Is that really the legacy we wish to leave our children? I doubt it, so let us not leave this to governments and policy makers,

or "somebody else" to deal with. Instead let us as individuals start to "walk the talk" and do what is necessary to care for and preserve this incredible and beautiful country in which we are so lucky to be able to live. ●

**The views expressed in this article are the author's**

**Copies of this magazine have been sent to the Chinese ambassador in Nairobi, the Ministry of Wildlife and Forestry and the Ministry of Tourism. We will be happy to print any response.**

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