In recent times, there has been a lot of interest in promotion of sustainable tourism and/or ecotourism. At the fifth meeting of Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP), held in Nairobi, 15-26th May 2000, a group of NGOs supporting sustainable tourism recommended, among other things, that the “COP should request Parties to document best practices on benefit sharing and sustainable tourism”.

They also cautioned on implications of the UN declaring 2002 to be the International year of Ecotourism. While maintaining that there is not a clear definition of the term ecotourism, they argued that the circumstances under which tourism can contribute to the conservation of cultural and biological diversity need to be defined and clarified.

Tourism remains a major and fastest growing industrial sector in the world today. But as with other forms of development, it is as potentially damaging in a variety of ways – environmental degradation, economic dependence, cultural imperialism and social disarray. Kenya’s tourism is largely dependent on biodiversity with its unique selling points being: high biodiversity (seven habitats in one region), long archeological history and cultural diversity. Arguably biodiversity is the most exploited resource for tourism operations, and like the rest of the world, Kenya’s tourism industry cannot afford to ignore the case for developing guiding principles for sustainable use of this biodiversity. Promoters of sustainable development argue that minimal impact as opposed to zero impact is achievable through sustainable growth and best practice.

When Kenya experienced a great slump in tourism earnings in the late 90’s, the Kenya Tourist Board conducted surveys to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and strategies of the industry. From consultations with hotel managers, tour operators and specialty safari operators from Mombasa and Nairobi, it emerged that lack of proper regulations or standards to oversee the operations of the industry had contributed to the slump. While discussing ecotourism, it is reported that the term was generally well understood and the industry did support the concept and was trying to protect the environment. The Kenya National Biodiversity Strategy and Action plan points out that the management of Kenya’s biodiversity resources is characterized by some weaknesses. It acknowledges that more often that not people are unable to make informed decisions regarding biodiversity for lack of information on the non-consumptive values of the resources. It further points that this lack of information has partly resulted in marginal declines in the tourism sector over the last ten years.

Incidentally, since Hector Ceballos-Lascurain coined the term ecotourism in 80’s, there have been as many definitions to the word as there are interested parties. This notwithstanding, there is growing consensus on the general characteristics of ecotourism.

‘The Environment is Good Business’
In Kenya, many of the prime game viewing areas occur in lands belonging to Maasai-speaking peoples, for whom cattle are especially important. The connections between cattle, culture, wildlife and environment in areas of the country traditionally occupied by pastoralists are increasingly well documented. It therefore makes sense (economically and ethically) to try to include cattle in ecotourism activities.

Up until now, the tourism industry has taken the view that cattle must be disconnected from wildlife, as well as from local people during their interactions with tourists. This was due to a perception, derived from elsewhere, that cattle are not “natural”, so they do not belong in game viewing areas. As a result, the tourist arrives, and then leaves with a very distorted view of cultural/environmental connections in East Africa. It also puts the tourist industry in a position for which it is poorly qualified: that of dictating to traditional livestock owners in large parts of the country.

This situation could be improved if tour operators and their clients were better informed about the traditional livestock breeds and the methods used to manage them over the last several thousand years. The solution might be for visitors to spend some time with the Maasai and their cattle. And those of us who live here owe it to the Maasai to do this, at least once.

Maasai cattle are interesting animals, and the interactions with their owners can provide an informative subject of lectures and activities for tourists who are interested in learning something about Kenya and its inhabitants. I also feel that this kind of inter-cultural interaction is more realistic and palatable than the current situation where visitors spend their time staring at their hosts and their ‘exotic’ customs.

During a recent workshop on Ecotourism held at Elangata Wuaas, I spent a morning out with the milk herd of Mr. Koikai Kelai Lorkipoti, one of the group ranch members. Although we missed the early morning milking, we were in time to go out with the cattle that were eating their way down to the river for a drink. The walk provided an opportunity for us to talk to the herders (including the children), watch birds and interactions between the cattle of “our” herd and two others that joined us. Because we were walking and talking, and the cattle and plants provided an alternative focus for us (as opposed to us staring at each other), the conversation soon became relaxed, animated, and highly informative.

The following subjects were covered, and could be built into an interesting lecture for a guide to give as the tourists walk along with the cattle:

1) Two day drinking patterns, and the metabolic adaptation of these to areas where water availability is low.
2) Production figures for cattle in pastoral areas/efficiency of the system compared to energy/inputs consumed. Milk vs. meat consumption.
3) Ear notching: the connection to clans, and an explanation of what this means for travelling clansmen in other areas. This could be tied in to a discussion of Maasai sections.
4) Naming the cows, and gender roles in caring for/ownership/user rights of cattle.
5) Names for different colours of the cattle.
6) Predators, and defensive measures taken by Maasai/cattle/predators during the interaction. (i.e. that lions have learned to avoid herds when accompanied by warriors, grouping patterns of cattle at night, hunting methods used to retaliate against livestock eating lions). Also, something about cattle raiding, and how they respond.
7) Different whistles and commands used by the herders. Ways that the herders have of handling the animals to keep them still when they have to be examined or treated for illness.
8) Medicinal/fodder plants used by the cattle/people/wildlife, which illustrates the connection of all three in that environment.

Hearing lectures on the Maasai is one thing, but being given a practical demonstration is much more exciting. It is also a good break from bumping around in a minibus, and a lot healthier… this was definitely a stress-reducing, therapeutic activity. Come to think of it, we all owe it to ourselves to do it.

For nomadic pastoralists, cattle form part of a highly evolved strategy to transform vegetation in arid lands into sustenance. During the thousands of years that this strategy has co-evolved with the East African environment, domestic livestock and their owners have left their imprint on the natural communities in which they exist.

Cattle, Culture and Environment: a new opportunity for ecotourism? - D. L. M. Nightingale

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Trekking Trash:

you can take it with you

Of all the environmental issues associated with mountain tourism, garbage seems to get the most press attention.

Efforts are made to reduce use of disposable containers and wrappings, cleanups are organized and waste pits are dug. But a weak link remains in the recycling and disposal of trail litter: we simply don’t like to carry around garbage in our backpacks.

Now there is a new item of camping gear that can help solve the problem. The “Garbage Out!” bag (GO!Bag). It is the simplest and neatest way to carry your personal trash for a couple of days until you can find an appropriate disposal site — without mucking up everything else in your backpack. Weighing a feathery 65 grams, GO!Bag is a collapsing water-proof sack that tucks into a sleeve behind a flat Goretex shield the size of a largish postcard. Big enough to carry beer bottles, cans, gas containers, and weeks’ of soggy tissue paper, GO!Bag can be slung across your shoulder or looped over the top of any backpack.

It is designed to be easily filled and emptied by means of a velcro flap, and an anchor cord can be secured in order to prevent the loaded bag from swinging and bobbing.

Designed and tested by Bridges: Projects in Rational Tourism Development (Bridges-PRTD) in collaboration with Tsering Choekyap of Sunrise Trekking (5/241 Jhocchen Tole, Kathmandu), GO!Bag is now being marketed online for $9.50 plus $3.50 shipping. Travel and environmental groups may order GO!Bag with their own logo embroidered on the shield.

For information contact Seth Sicroff at:
E-mail: info@go-bag.com;
Tel: (607) 256-0102;
Fax: (708) 575-6620

GO!Bag is endorsed by the Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP) as an effective means of pollution control in remote destinations.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Your Checklist

1. Do you know what happens to your waste?
2. Do you monitor the types and amount of waste you generate?
3. Are opportunities to reduce wastage identified and acted upon?
4. Do you have systems to minimize, reduce and recycle waste where possible?
5. Do you recycle or reuse most:
   - bottles?
   - waste paper?
   - cans?
6. Is organic waste composted?
7. Do you use disposable toiletries and toiletry containers?
8. Is all solid waste safely disposed of to an official site?
9. Is a register kept of hazardous wastes?
Ecotourism activities have been expanding rapidly over the past two decades world-wide and further growth is expected in the future. Recognising its global importance, the United Nations designated the year 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism, and its Commission on Sustainable Development requested international agencies, governments and the private sector to undertake supportive activities.

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) have joined forces to take the leading role in the preparation and co-ordination of activities to be undertaken at the international level during the IYE.

What is ecotourism?
Much has been written about ecotourism, but there is little consensus about its meaning, due to the many forms in which ecotourism activities are offered by a large and wide variety of operators, and practised by an even larger array of tourists.

While there is not a universal definition for ecotourism, its general characteristics can be summarised as follows:

1. All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas
2. It contains educational and interpretation features
3. It is generally, but not exclusively organised for small groups by specialised and small, locally owned businesses. Foreign operators of varying sizes also organise, operate and/or market ecotourism tours, generally for small groups.
4. It minimises negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment
5. It supports the protection of natural areas by
   - generating economic benefits for host communities, organisations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes,
   - providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities,
   - increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.

Over the years, it has also become clear that some concerns still need to be wholly addressed in ecotourism, such as:

- land tenure and control of the ecotourism development process by host communities,
- efficiency and fairness of the current concept of protected areas for protection of biological and cultural diversity
- the need for additional precautions and monitoring when operating in especially sensitive areas
- indigenous and traditional rights in areas suitable for ecotourism development,

Is sustainable tourism the same thing as ecotourism?
A clear distinction should be made between the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable tourism: the term ecotourism itself refers to a segment within the tourism sector, while the sustainability principles should apply to all types of tourism activities, operations, establishments and projects, including conventional and alternative forms.

The international year of ecotourism will offer an opportunity to review successful ecotourism experiences world-wide, in order to consolidate tools and institutional frameworks that ensure its sustainable development in the future. This means maximising the economic, environmental and social benefits from ecotourism, while avoiding its past shortcomings and negative impacts.

Efforts to better understand ecotourism, as well as to improve its planning, management and marketing techniques have been conducted by many ecotourism companies and practitioners, governments and research people throughout the world. However, there has not been so far a truly comprehensive effort to allow the various stakeholders to voice their views, disseminate widely the results achieved, or to integrate such results so as to produce the necessary synergies that will ensure that ecotourism will indeed generate the economic, social and environmental benefits expected from it.

With the above in mind, WTO and UNEP aim at involving all the actors in the field of ecotourism during the International Year, with the following objectives in mind:

(a) Generate greater awareness among
Among the many activities to be undertaken at the global, national, regional and local levels on the occasion of the International Year of Ecotourism throughout the world, this Summit will be the major landmark and it will be held in Quebec, Canada, 19-22 May 2002.

The Summit is expected to be the largest ever world-wide gathering of all types of stakeholders involved in ecotourism, including Ministers, public sector officials, tourism companies and their trade associations, local authorities, national park managers, NGOs relevant to the ecotourism sector, the academic community, and others. Further information will be provided one year before the Summit.

Take action and prepare for the IYE!

With a view to spreading as much as possible the results expected from this International Year, WTO and UNEP recommend that:

1. Governments encourage the establishment of inter-ministerial working groups within the National Tourism and Environment Administrations to co-ordinate activities relating to the International Year at the country level with those to be undertaken by WTO and UNEP at the international level.

2. Governments define, strengthen and disseminate as appropriate, a National Strategy and specific programmes for the sustainable development and management of ecotourism.

3. National governments provide technical, financial and promotional support for, and facilitate the creation and operation of small and medium size firms in the field of ecotourism where appropriate.

4. Multi-stakeholder regulating and monitoring systems be set up regarding ecotourism activities, particularly in what refers to the environmental and socio-cultural sustainability.

5. National and/or local committees for the celebration of the International Year of Ecotourism are set up involving all the stakeholders relevant to this activity (public tourism and environment authorities at the national and local levels, private sector, NGOs, host communities, etc.), as well as the local media.

6. Governments and other stakeholders are invited to inform the WTO Secretariat and UNEP of the activities planned for 2002 at the national level. These will be disseminated internationally.

ESOK is calling on all stakeholders to come forward with proposal or ideas on the approach that Kenya should take in preparation for the IYE. Please contact the undersigned;

Judy Kepher-Gona
ESOK Secretariat
P O Box 10146
00100-Nairobi

Tel: 225570 / 331286
E-mail: info@esok.org

For more information, please visit

www.world-tourism.org
www.uneptie.org
The woodcarving trade in Kenya dates back to the end of the First World War when Mutisya Munge, a Kamba man from Wamunyu village, traveled to Tanzania to learn the trade from the Makonde carvers. Mutisya brought the carving trade home, and since that time the industry has continued to expand. Many Wakamba have few other employment alternatives, due both to Kenya’s current economy and the fact that they are arid land dwellers making dependency on crop production a near impossibility.

Woodcarvers in Kenya have traditionally used specific tree species in their work. These include muhuhu (Brachylaena huillensis), impingo (ebony or Dalbergia melanoxylon), and olive (Olea africana). As the industry has grown and the demand for these woods has increased, carvers have become one of the many forest users contributing to the severe taxation on Kenya’s forests.

As a result of this, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and Kenya Crafts Co-operative Union (KCCU) are working to address the issue through the Sustainable Woodcarving Project sponsored by Micro-Enterprises Support Programme (MESP). The Sustainable Woodcarving Project is working with member woodcarving co-operative societies to change from the traditional slow growth hard woods, to faster growing woods, termed “good woods.” Good woods are multipurpose trees which were introduced to Kenya many years ago, such as Grevillea robusta, introduced to Kenya as a shade tree for coffee and tea plantations. Other good woods include Jacaranda mimosifolia, and Azadirachta indica or neem. Common and fast growing, these tree species reach maturity in 10-15 years as compared to 80-150 years for traditional hardwoods. Good woods can sustain Kenya’s woodcarvers and be harvested with minimal ecological impact.

The project is focusing on two major areas, product development and establishment of tree nurseries. Designing of new products in good woods is accomplished through product development training sessions and one on one work with carvers. Carvers have the opportunity to work with the new woods and learn how to create new designs. As new products are produced, a catalogue of new good wood products will be produced to inform buyers of the availability of good woods and new designs.

Also of great importance is the development of tree nurseries through KCCU member co-operative societies and community groups in Kitui District. The establishment of tree nurseries gives carvers the opportunity to plant both good woods and traditional hardwoods to replace those they have used and for use in the future. A long-term goal of some co-operatives, with the help of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO), is to establish

In My Opinion

Petitioning the decision to excise 64,000 hectares of Kenya’s forests

‘I lived and grew up in Kenya and am now studying in America. I was shocked to learn of the amount of forest you want to destroy and concluded that you are extremely shortsighted. As any child learns at school, trees are a vital part of the earth. They bind the soil and prevent landslides and erosion, they also capture moisture for other plants to live on. You destroy them and you will cause death from starvation, landslides etc. Is that what you want? Please open your minds and look beyond your shallow pockets. Cutting trees affects human life not just trees. Thank you for considering what Kenya needs and wants. Think before acting and do not ignore what people say’.

Miss Delia Brown
Friend of Kenya Abroad -USA
Responding to ESOK’s online petition against the intended excision of forests.
The latest venture of the Nairobi alternative energies company, Chardust Ltd., represents a unique collaboration between the public and private sectors. Chardust has entered into a 4-month research partnership with TRAFFIC, a programme of IUCN (the World Conservation Union) and WWF (the Worldwide Fund for Nature).

TRAFFIC’s mission is to ensure that trade in wild plants and animals is not a threat to the conservation of nature. Within this mandate, TRAFFIC looks for ways to reduce the impacts of environmentally destructive businesses such as the charcoal trade. Chardust is a private company that develops affordable and environmentally sound substitutes for charcoal. The potential for collaboration was evident.

TRAFFIC has commissioned Chardust to assess the feasibility of producing charcoal briquettes from agricultural residues and other biomass wastes in Kenya to substitute for traditional lumpwood charcoal. Feasibility is to be assessed from three perspectives: practical, social and economic. Not until the study is complete will it be possible to confirm the most viable fuels or most workable locations for pilot production, but it already looks likely that the use of both sawdust and sugar cane waste (bagasse) has considerable potential.

For readers unfamiliar with Chardust, the company already sells charcoal briquettes which it fabricates from salvaged waste. The TRAFFIC research is intended to broaden the range of waste materials that can be utilised. The existing briquettes are cheaper than regular charcoal (@ Sh 275 per 50 kg. sack), burn for much longer and emit no smoke, sparks or smell. Sales have reached 100 tonnes per month to restaurants, lodges, tented camps and chicken farms. Leading customers in the tourism industry include Conservation Corporation, Abercrombie & Kent and Savannah Camps & Lodges. Chardust also sells water heaters designed specifically for its briquetted fuel.

For more information on the charcoal briquettes or water heaters contact Chardust: Tel: (02) 884436/7 or e-mail: briquettes@chardust.com.

Ecotourism & Sustainable Tourism

Amongst many other definitions, ecotourism can be defined as “nature and culture based tourism that invests in and supports the protection of environment, respects local cultures and involves local communities to ensure equity amongst all stakeholders”. This definition is illustrative of three basic elements of ecotourism: environment (culture & nature), conservation (sustainability) and equity (positive economic impact/ improved livelihoods for local communities). Sustainable tourism on the other hand can be defined as tourism that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Ecotourism is therefore a logical component of sustainable tourism and like all sustainable development, ecotourism requires strict guidelines and regulations to guarantee sustainable operations. This can only be achieved through intersectional involvement where government, private sector, local communities and NGO’s all play a role.

In Kenya, the tourism industry has indeed recognized and taken advantage of the fact that conservation of biological diversity is important, both from the point of view of economics and that of the industry’s own image. There are numerous good examples of efforts by tour operators, hoteliers, industry associations and conservation organizations to promote sustainable tourism practices. But, at policy level, a lot more needs to be done to formulate explicit concepts and plans of action, which would contribute to the preservation of biological diversity as a basis of life for present and future generations. There is need to create conditions that will enable the poor to benefit more from the multiple values of biodiversity through policy, institutional and legislative change.

If the importance of biodiversity conservation is well understood within the private sector and appreciated in the public sector, then why is there a reluctance to change among some stakeholders? Are the costs associated with change of behavior too heavy on the investors’ pocket, risky for policy makers and “scary” for managers of biodiversity, or is it a question of short-term benefits as opposed to a long-term outlook? Has sustainable tourism been misconstrued to mean ecotourism? Whatever the answers to these questions, action must be seen to accompany the support for sustainable tourism if Kenya expects to compete favorably in the global tourism market. It is time to define national principles for sustainable tourism and promote ecotourism. The general assumption that only ecotourism investments can be sustainable may be a misguided notion; all tourism, including mass tourism, can be sustainable provided it is planned and managed responsibly.
Ecorating Update

In the last issue of this Newsletter, we reported the developments in Kenya’s efforts to develop an ecorating scheme. Following the workshops held in October & November 2000, ESOK has made further progress by identifying appropriate consultants and has now received proposals for the development of the scheme. The proposals are under review by the Ecorating Technical Committee, who will meet to evaluate them and deliberate on the way forward.

Meanwhile, ESOK approached a number of donors with a view to secure funding for the project. On the whole, the response has been positive with funding expected during the last quarter of 2001. What this means is that the proposed and agreed time schedule for implementation of the scheme will be reviewed to reflect changes. ESOK has also entered into a partnership with the Ecoforum magazine to provide the industry with practical information on ‘green’ products and services, as a means to backstop the rating scheme. (See page 8 - Green guidance). Further, ESOK has established an electronic discussion group called “Kenyaecoratings”, with participants of the workshops all listed as members. This forum is being used to encourage discussions on ecorating, give updates and debate general issues related to sustainable tourism. You can join the group by sending a blank e-mail to: kenya-ecoratings-subscribe@egroups.com.

Participants to the ecorating workshops will recall that availability of resources for developing a Kenyan scheme was amongst the issues discussed. A brief outline of the types of resources that would be needed was presented with participants acknowledging that securing resources would be a challenge for the scheme. Closely related to the issue of resources, is the question of ownership. Ultimately, the other challenge facing the scheme is how to enhance ownership. How do we (read industry) demonstrate commitment to the scheme?

Please write to us with your ideas, comments and views or share them through the ‘Kenyaecoratings’ forum.

Green Guidance

Ecoforum and ESOK join hands to provide practical information on sustainable tourism

While awareness on sustainable tourism is growing, however, practice still lags behind. As ESOK facilitates the development an eco-rating scheme to help operators gauge their performance, the ESOK/Ecoforum partnership is designed to backstop the ratings scheme with practical advice and news about what is being and can be done, how to go about it, and who can provide the necessary products and services to green Kenyan tourism.

This collaboration will take shape in the form of an eight-page colour supplement in each issue of Ecoforum, filled with ideas, plans and success stories about how to make tourism in Kenya more environmentally and socially responsible.

The first supplement will focus on Solid Waste Management, including recycling options, finding ways to reduce consumption, and making environmentally-friendly purchases. We welcome submissions of ideas and experiences from all those in the tourism industry, and from indeed all walks of life. Submissions should focus on actual experience or well-thought out ideas, with a view to spurring others to action.

For more information, please contact: John Scully at Ecoforum, or Judy Kepher-Gona at ESOK, P.O. Box 10146, GPO Nairobi. Tel: 225570, 331286. Fax 218402. E-mail: info@esok.org

Sustainable Wood Carving in Kenya

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Ecoforum and ESOK join hands to provide practical information on sustainable tourism

In the last issue of this Newsletter, we reported the developments in Kenya’s efforts to develop an ecorating scheme. Following the workshops held in October & November 2000, ESOK has made further progress by identifying appropriate consultants and has now received proposals for the development of the scheme. The proposals are under review by the Ecorating Technical Committee, who will meet to evaluate them and deliberate on the way forward.

Meanwhile, ESOK approached a number of donors with a view to secure funding for the project. On the whole, the response has been positive with funding expected during the last quarter of 2001. What this means is that the proposed and agreed time schedule for implementation of the scheme will be reviewed to reflect changes. ESOK has also entered into a partnership with the Ecoforum magazine to provide the industry with practical information on ‘green’ products and services, as a means to backstop the rating scheme. (See page 8 - Green guidance). Further, ESOK has established an electronic discussion group called “Kenyaecoratings”, with participants of the workshops all listed as members. This forum is being used to encourage discussions on ecorating, give updates and debate general issues related to sustainable tourism. You can join the group by sending a blank e-mail to: kenya-ecoratings-subscribe@egroups.com.

Participants to the ecorating workshops will recall that availability of resources for developing a Kenyan scheme was amongst the issues discussed. A brief outline of the types of resources that would be needed was presented with participants acknowledging that securing resources would be a challenge for the scheme. Closely related to the issue of resources, is the question of ownership. Ultimately, the other challenge facing the scheme is how to enhance ownership. How do we (read industry) demonstrate commitment to the scheme?

Please write to us with your ideas, comments and views or share them through the ‘Kenyaecoratings’ forum.