

CHARLIE MAYHEW

FROM AVID ADVENTURER TO ARDENT CONSERVATIONIST

FELIX PATTON



is a rhino ecologist, who writes and broadcasts about the species from Africa and Europe. He has an MSc in Conservation Biology and a PhD based on research into individual rhino identification

and social behaviour. He is a frequent contributor to SWARA.

Charles Mayhew is the Chief Executive of one of the most prominent, UK based, conservation charities, Tusk Trust a name well known throughout East & Southern Africa. An Englishman, Charlie grew up with his two sisters in the heart of Sussex enjoying a traditional country life and a passion for motor racing. His introduction to Africa came through the visits of an uncle who lived in Kenya and South Africa. “The romantic tales of the wide open spaces and big cities sparked my imagination” says Charlie although he had planned to go to University to study engineering in order to follow his love of racing.

The opportunity to make the first of many subsequent visits to the African continent came in 1979. One of his masters at Wellington College, where he was educated, had started an organisation to enable students to take a year off before going from school to university now known as a GAP year. Charlie went to South Africa to be a travelling salesman with a stationery company moving widely from city to city. From there he went on to be a cook for skiers in an Alpine restaurant in Switzerland where he met many young

Australians. Now he had to visit the Antipodes!

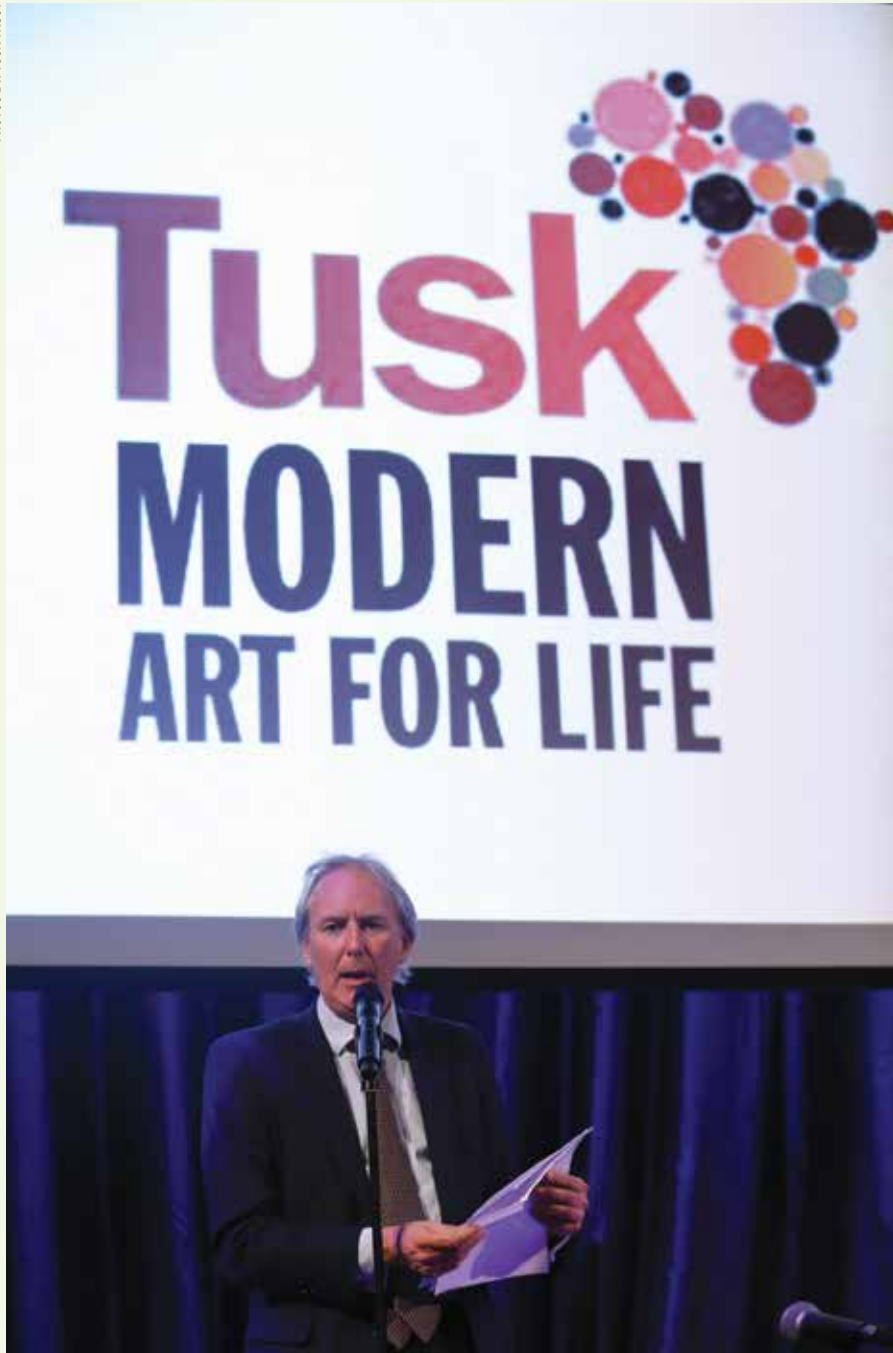
Charlie’s father refused to fund a ticket, so he worked his passage to Australia and New Zealand as a deck hand on a tanker ship. To finance his stay he took small jobs including being a roustabout with a sheep shearing team. By the time he returned to the UK all thoughts of University and engineering had evaporated and he opted to become a marine insurance broker at Lloyds of London with Willis Faber & Dumas whilst moonlighting as a DJ at private parties! London city life gave Charlie a good income but the thought of Africa

never faded. Charlie’s professionally honed negotiating skills resulted in Willis Faber agreeing to sponsor him to organise a major trans-Africa expedition for 33 young people drawn from 7 different European countries as part of the United Nations International Year of Youth.

After 18 months of meticulous planning, the Young Europe Africa



expedition set off in 1985 in eight 4x4 wheel drive vehicles taking 7 months to cross the Sahara desert down through Niger and Chad, the forests of the Congo on into Kenya. Here the team, led by Charlie, embarked on a series of projects one of which was to spend six weeks completing a section of fence around Lake Nakuru National Park which, in 1989, became home to a population of



Charlie attends many Tusk fund raising events.

the endangered black rhino. During this time, Charlie became acquainted with well known conservationists Maurice, Count Coreth, founder of Rhino Rescue, and Jock Dawson. “It was from them that I initially learned about the big conservation challenges of the time not the least of which was elephant and rhino poaching” says Charlie. He knew then that somehow he wished to make a meaningful contribution to conservation.

Back in the UK Charlie formed a financial services business and after a few years of ‘going it alone’ he allied it to the St James’s Place Wealth Management Group. This business provided him with a powerful network of high net-worth individuals. But how was he to satisfy his desire to do something for conservation in Africa? A long term friend was the actor Timothy Ackroyd and between them they decided to produce a TV film

using drama to portray the horrors of the ivory trade. However advice came from Oscar-winning film producer David Puttnam, (Charlie had been the DJ at his daughter’s wedding party), and he suggested that such a film had to be made for the large screen. Their plan was to donate the profits to conservation, which Charlie readily admits was naïve! Their feature film, ‘Lost in Africa’, whilst being distributed across 30 countries, sadly never made money, but it did result in the formation, in 1990, of Tusk Trust, as a charity dedicated to the conservation of African wildlife and habitats.

The first five years saw Charlie operate Tusk as a “hobby” while still continuing as a financial adviser. Initial funds were raised by holding parties and go-karting events. As the charity developed and major donors such as the Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust and Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones rock band were recruited, it became clear that some dedicated staff would be needed and a Director was employed.

Tusk established the inaugural Safaricom Marathon at the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy in 2000. Charlie attends the event every year with his staff as it has become Tusk’s most profitable fundraising event and one of the top ten marathons in the world.

By 2002, Charlie decided he needed to give up his ‘commercial’ career to focus on the charity. He stepped down as a trustee of Tusk and became its first Chief Executive, a role he maintains today. In his words, Charlie is “the chief fundraiser, deal clincher and sponsorship negotiator seizing on the opportunities that arise from introductions that Tusk patrons, trustees, supporters and friends help to make”. Skills honed from his time broking marine insurance and from his financial services business have stood Charlie in good stead for persuading large organisations and major charitable trusts to contribute generously towards conservation.

The profile of Tusk was raised considerably when Prince William chose to give it his royal patronage in 2005. Through Tusk, the Prince has been

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both vocal and visual in his support of conservation and this has led to the organisation, and Charlie in particular, becoming “a lightning rod for media comment be it TV, radio or the press”. It has also opened up new opportunities especially for Tusk in the US which registered Tusk USA Inc as a non-profit organisation based in New York in 2008. As its Chairman, Charlie now expects to visit the USA on fundraising trips up to four times a year.

Charlie spends some two or three days a week in London maintaining current and developing new donor relationships. “It is not enough to persuade people to make one-off donations. Conservation is a long term game and many of the projects which Tusk support need to be sustained over many years. We need to ensure that donors appreciate how their money is being spent and that it is producing positive outcomes for the wildlife, the habitat and the communities involved so that they will carry on supporting us.”



PHOTOS BY: TUSK TRUST



Top: Charlie briefs Tusk Patron Prince William on a regular basis.
Below: The Duchess of Cambridge is introduced to Tusk grant recipient Tony Fitzjohn of Mkomazi National Park, Tanzania at the launch of the US Patrons Circle.



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Top: One of the half dozen annual visits Charlie takes to a Tusk project to review progress first hand. Below: Visiting a school as part of a Tusk community support project. Top Right: Managing the daily operations of the Tusk team.

With 57 projects in 18 African countries, Charlie cannot hope to be 'hands-on' but makes a point of visiting five or six himself during a year for 10 days at a time. He says "whenever I get off the plane in Africa I get a real sense of belonging, I love Africa".

Vetting new projects is also an important role of the Chief Executive. Charlie says "With my team I try and seek out the best possible conservation investments based around the track record of individuals and then allow them to do what they are good at with Tusk acting as a communication vehicle for them". Charlie is proud of the

fact that Tusk has been "the financial incubator of some projects that would otherwise have never seen the light of day".

In the UK, Charlie communicates weekly with the Chairman of Trustees and attends the quarterly board meetings reporting on general operations, the impact of the project grants and future strategy. The board is the 'guardians of donor money' with a grant making committee separate from governance, financial and legal responsibilities.

High on the current agenda is creating an infrastructure to develop

and ensure the long term stability of the organisation and fundamental to this will be the appointment of an Executive Director.

Charlie hopes that this new role will free him up from some of his day-to-day operational responsibilities so he can develop his network of contacts and respond to increased media interest in the charity's work.

As to the future Charlie says "The conservation challenges are greater than ever before but you have to be an optimist. I get my drive from the successes we get in the field. It is beyond me that we should be the generation that allows iconic species such as the elephant, rhino, lion, gorilla and wild dog to disappear".

Charlie Mayhew is a conservationist who has quite simply put his passion into practice. He is a prime example of someone who has used skills honed in the commercial world to make a significant contribution to wildlife conservation. It is to be hoped that others, from all walks of life, will consider a similar course thereby ensuring the conservation industry benefits from the widest variety of talents and expertise.

In recognition of his services to conservation in Africa, Charles Mayhew was awarded an MBE by Her Majesty the Queen in December 2005. ●

For more information on the Tusk Trust visit www.tusk.org