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## WILDLIFE AND TOURISM

# The Value of Tourism in Combating Illegal Wildlife Trade

Could economic benefits accruing from wildlife tourism be used as the overriding rationale to promote the protection of endangered species and wildlife habitats?

BY FELIX PATTON

In economic terms, the direct contribution of wildlife tourism is worth over five times that of the value attributed to the illegal wildlife trade, according to a report by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) on the economic impact of the global wildlife tourism.

Wildlife Tourism is defined in the report as “viewing and experiencing animals in their natural habitat.” This excludes zoos (or zoo-like parks), circuses or theme parks involving animal performances and also consumptive wildlife tourism such as hunting and fishing. It is not adventure tourism, such as white-water rafting, and, as it is specific to wildlife, it is not as broad-based as ecotourism or nature-based tourism.

Protecting wildlife is an immense challenge with the illegal wildlife trade worth at least \$23 million per year. What the authors of

the report tried to do, using a number of different methodologies, was to quantify the economic value of wildlife tourism. They came up with a figure of \$343.6 billion when multiplier effects across the global economy are included. The Travel and Tourism sector accounts for 10.4 per cent of the global GDP with the contribution from wildlife tourism being 3.9 per cent.

In addition, the authors calculated that of the total number of jobs sustained by global Travel & Tourism in 2018, 6.8 per cent can be attributed to wildlife. This equates to 21.8 million jobs. Understanding the significant, quantifiable economic value that is being and can be further earned through wildlife tourism will enhance attitudes to the protection of wildlife habitats. Combatting poaching and trafficking of protected species while supporting local communities can be financed by monies raised, at least in part, from visitors to Protected Areas. The report suggests that the financial benefits brought

**\$23**  
MILLION

Amount in US dollars protecting wildlife is worth per year because of the illegal wildlife trade.

**TOP**  
Tourists visiting national parks can get a chance to interact with some of the animals as they enjoy their game drives.



PHOTO BY MICATO SAFARIS

## From the mid-1980s, privately-owned wildlife sanctuaries developed alongside those managed by the government creating additional tourist facilities to help cater for the growing number of visitors.

from wildlife tourism are also likely to greatly exceed the approximately US\$10 billion in annual costs of managing these Areas.

As across Africa, wildlife tourism represents over one-third of travel and tourism revenue, it is worthy of investigating how some countries are benefitting.

The creation of national parks and reserves and a ban on hunting has seen wildlife tourism grow rapidly in Kenya. From the mid-1980s, privately-owned wildlife sanctuaries developed alongside those managed by the government creating additional tourist facilities to help cater for the growing number of visitors.

In 2016, non-resident adults visiting National Parks (NP) was estimated to be some 473,280. The most visited wildlife area was recorded to be Masai Mara Game Reserve followed by Lake Nakuru NP, Amboseli NP, Nairobi NP and Tsavo East NP. The main non-resident visitors came from the United Kingdom followed by the United States, Germany and India.

More recently, Kenya has led the way in encouraging local communities to form community conservancies. The model usually

involves a managing organisation, with community involvement, leasing many small parcels of land owned by the community and aggregating them into a suitably sized area exclusively for wildlife albeit with allowance for their cattle to be grazed in the conservancy but under strict control. Local people are trained as rangers, guides, drivers, hospitality workers and so forth, presenting essential employment opportunities and who then have money to spend in local trading centres.

However, on the negative side and despite a decline in wildlife populations in the past, growing livestock and human populations have increased the instances of human-wildlife conflict and of illegal grazing of livestock in protected areas and poaching remains a constant threat.

Neighbouring Tanzania has a particularly high percentage of its land area, 26.6 per cent, dedicated to wildlife.

The most popular area is the Ngorongoro Crater with roughly 40 per cent of all visitors to protected areas in Tanzania going there, followed by Serengeti NP at 25 per cent, Tarangire at 11.2 per cent, and Arusha at 10.8 per cent. Non-resident visitors mainly

**TOP**  
Murchison falls national park ferry. The Murchison falls national is crossed by the river Nile bisecting in to two sectors that is southern and the northern sectors of the park, in order to tour the wild life in Murchison falls national park, one has to cross with the ferry to the northern side of Paraa area in order to do a game drive a round the park.





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PHOTO BY KEITH KINAMBUGA

**Uganda boasts over 50 per cent of the global gorilla population, most of them located in Bwindi Impenetrable NP and Mgahinga Gorilla NP.**

**1,063**  
 Number of mountain gorillas living in the Virunga mountain range of Rwanda and Congo.

**TOP LEFT**  
 A family of vervet monkeys in Nyungwe Forest National Park.

**TOP RIGHT**  
 A mountain gorilla snacks on leaves in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.

**ABOVE**  
 Flamingoes are a beautiful sight seen here in Lake Nakuru National Park.

come from the Netherlands, United States, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The WTTC estimates indicate that the overall tourism sector contributed 11.7 per cent to Tanzania’s GDP, with 2.3 million people employed in the sector.

Uganda is a growing destination for wildlife tourism with some 286,000 visiting the National Parks of which a little over 40 per cent are non-resident foreigners. The most visited destination is Murchison Falls NP at 33 per cent and followed by Queen Elisabeth NP at 29 per cent and Lake Mburo NP at 11 per cent. Uganda boasts over 50 per cent of the global gorilla population, most of them located in Bwindi Impenetrable NP and Mgahinga Gorilla NP. Gorilla-based tourism is estimated to produce some 60 per cent of the foreign exchange earnings received by the Uganda Wildlife Authority.

The remaining populations of mountain gorillas are found in Rwanda. A relative minnow among the East African tourist industry, Rwanda is rapidly becoming a wildlife destination with the recovery of Akagera National Park under the stewardship of African Parks (see Swara Jan-March 2019). The recent introduction of lions and black rhinos has further increased its appeal with some 44,000 visitors in 2017 while Volcanoes

NP had 35,600 visitors and Nyungwe Forest NP 14,400.

While East African countries can be proud of their wildlife tourism industry, they have a long way to go to match South Africa. Some 8 per cent of the country is given over to around 1,500 protected areas, the majority of which are controlled by private landowners. Due to South Africa’s support of the sustainable use of wildlife (so that owners can make money from the wildlife they host) large areas of agricultural land have been converted to conservation land use. Overseas visitors are particularly drawn to the areas occupied by mega-herbivores and large carnivores with elephant, rhino, lion and leopard mainly sought after.

Overseas visitors to South Africa account for around 2.6 million people led by the United Kingdom at 16.1 per cent, with 14.1 per cent from the United States and 12.8 per cent from Germany. The most visited area is Table Mountain NP, which includes the Cape of Good Hope, but this is primarily for the mountain scenery and the flora rather than its wildlife.

The country’s protected areas are managed by two main bodies based on geography – South African National Parks (SAN Parks) for all NP’s except those in KwaZulu-Natal which



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are administered by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (KZN).

For wildlife tourism, Kruger NP stands out with 1.8 million of the 6.7 million visitors that utilise SAN Parks NPs, the majority of which are South African residents. Kruger NP is one of the largest parks in Africa, well managed with a wide diversity of good populations of the wildlife species sought after by tourists.

In the KZN area, the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park is the most visited with around 250,00 of the area's 650,00 tourists of which 21 per cent are from overseas, mainly Germany, United Kingdom and France.

As to the future, there is plenty of opportunity for wildlife tourism to benefit from the growing Asian economies with ever more people travelling. Countries which offer guides or interpreters who can communicate appropriately with their visitors and hospitality areas which offer suitable food and accommodation will be sought after. These new markets will give opportunities for

**TOP**  
The Table Mountain National Park. Recognised globally for its extraordinarily rich, diverse and unique flora, this singular land formation, with rugged cliffs, steep slopes and sandy flats, is a truly phenomenal natural, scenic, historical, cultural and recreational asset both locally and internationally.

**ABOVE**  
A group of Zebras crossing a road in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park .

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) is the global authority on the economic and social contribution of Travel & Tourism. Council members are the Chairs, Presidents and Chief Executives of the world's leading private sector Travel & Tourism businesses.

A commitment to helping to eradicate the scourge of wildlife trafficking in the world was made by over 40 WTTC Member CEOs at the WTTC Global Summit in Buenos Aires in 2018. Since then, over 110 WTTC Members and leaders from the wider global Travel & Tourism sector have signed a declaration on illegal wildlife trade (IWT). The signatories have pledged to work together towards a common goal of changing behaviour of 1 billion travellers as it relates to illegal wildlife trade. WTTC's ambition is to raise awareness of the issue and through a partnership with WWF and devise a zero-tolerance policy and toolkit.

employment, infrastructure development and income generation.

This is all good news for wildlife as it will maintain and increase the economic rationale, as presented in the report, for the protection of endangered species and protecting wildlife habitats.

The WTTC report gives a better understanding of the importance of wildlife tourism to the economies of many nations. That WTTC members have the ambition to raise awareness of the illegal wildlife trade with one billion consumers is laudable and, if successful, will likely have a major effect on helping to reduce the decimation of wildlife resulting from that trade. ●

*Note: The figures quoted in the article are from the WTTC report and other sources. Some are educated estimates while others may come from non-comparable years. They should be considered as 'for guidance' and not necessarily absolute.*



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