

**NOMINATION BY NORMAN MYERS FOR THE INDIANAPOLIS PRIZE 2013  
DAVID WESTERN**

**National Parks and Community Based Conservation**

David Western's conservation work began in the 1960s when he was among the first scientists to recognize the limitations of national parks and look into human-wildlife coexistence with a view to ecosystem-wide conservation. Western's pioneering research and conservation work in Amboseli resulted in the first national park planned within an ecosystem context. His Amboseli efforts also pioneered the enlistment of communities in wildlife conservation by making annual payments to surrounding pastoralists for supporting the migratory herds. Payments for ecosystem services have since become routine as a conservation tool in Kenya and worldwide. Western was hired by the New York Zoological Society and the Kenyan government to guide and oversee the Amboseli plan.

Within a year of the plan's instigation in 1977, the community's attitudes towards wildlife changed with dramatic results. The elephant population had been halved in the previous five years by the soaring world ivory prices that saw Kenya's elephant population cut from 140,000 to 20,000 within fifteen years. Even as the numbers in adjacent Tsavo National Park continued to plunge, the local community protected the Amboseli herds, leading to doubling in numbers by the time the worldwide ban on ivory sales came into effect in 1990. The migratory populations of zebra and wildebeest also doubled in the decade following the enlistment of the Maasai community in wildlife conservation. The enlistment of landowners remains the most effective tool in conserving elephants in east and southern Africa today when ivory poaching is again a threat Africa-wide.

Based on his Amboseli success, Western persuaded government to adopt a new conservation policy based on large scale integrated ecosystem planning and community engagement in wildlife benefits. The new policy was supported by the first ever major donor funding in support of wildlife. In 1978 the World Bank awarded the Kenya government a \$40 million Tourism and Wildlife Loan to implement the new policy under a single countrywide agency, the Wildlife Conservation and Management Department. Western was appointed by the Kenya government to set up the Wildlife Planning Unit to oversee wildlife planning countrywide.

Western was commissioned by the World Parks Congress in 1992 to write up the Amboseli conservation initiative as a case study in support of IUCN's broadening approach to parks, *National Parks for Sustainable Development*. The Amboseli initiative stimulated community-based conservation polices in southern African in the ensuing decade, including Campfire in Zimbabwe and Namibia's conservancy movement.

Western went on to promote community-based conservation (CBC) worldwide through his travels, talks and conferences. His most notable international effort was in bringing together examples of community-based forestry, fisheries and wildlife practices from around the world in 1992 at Airlie House in Virginia. The meeting assembled key donors,

including the World Bank and US AID, conservation organizations such as WWF, TNC, CI and WCS, foundations and communities to assess and promote community conservation approaches worldwide. The meeting resulted in the book *Natural Connections, Perspectives in Community-based Conservation*, 1994, which laid the foundation for the CBC movement.

### **Community Engagement**

Western has continued to promote community engagement and ecosystem-wide conservation over the last two decades. In the early 1990s he established the first community-based conservation institutions in Kenya, including the Amboseli and Tsavo Group Ranch Conservation Association, which spans the lands between Amboseli and Tsavo National Parks. He also established the first community wildlife scouts in Kenya. As the CBO movement grew, Western promoted “horizontal learning” exchanges in eastern Africa and internationally in the 1990s. The exchanges led to “Over the Horizon” learning between American ranchers and East African pastoralists in the 1990s, aimed at alerting and preparing them to threats to their land and cultures. A conference and book “The Future of the Open Range,” explored conservation-compatible land practices in the rangelands. The exchanges broadened to China, Tibet, India and, in 2012 an exchange between the Maasai and Navajo in Arizona.

### **Ecotourism**

Western was also among the first conservationists to link wildlife tourism, community engagement and ecosystem conservation. His efforts began with tourist studies in Amboseli and included national tourism planning through the Wildlife Planning Unit in the 1970s. Western as president and Megan Epler-Wood as director jointly set up The International Ecotourism Society in 1990. TIES produced the first handbook on ecotourism and promoted ecotourism bodies around the world, including Malaysia and Costa Rica. Western, through the African Conservation Centre, helped established Ecotourism Kenya in 1993, launched ecotourism studies in the Maasai Mara the same year and, with Epler-Wood, convened the international conference, *Ecotourism at a Crossroad*, in 1997. Jointly with Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai and Martha Honey, he launched the concept of Traveler’s Philanthropy in Arusha in 2008. He was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award by TIES in 2012.

### **Rhino and Elephant Conservation**

Western was among the first to alert the international community to the threat to black rhinos through his research into the declining populations in the 1970s. He was invited to chair IUCN’s African and Elephant and Rhino Specialist Group in 1980. AERSG brought together scientists and government bodies from across the continent to take stock of the status of elephants and rhinos and recommend appropriate conservation action. By the late 1980s the free-fall of rhino losses was stemmed by a new approach, putting rhinos in smaller sized sanctuaries. AERSG headed by Western also began an international rhino alert campaign in collaboration with IUCN, WCS and WWF. Western launched a fresh continental elephant survey in 1982, using improved quantitative methods to refine the estimates of numbers and range maps produced by Iain Douglas-Hamilton. The big gap in elephant data lay in the central African forest at that stage. Western conducted air and

ground surveys across the Congo Basin and launched a survey of the forest elephant in 1986. The findings resolved the uncertainties over numbers and showed the elephant to be in steep decline. He followed on with computer modeling of the impact of the ivory trade on elephant populations and launched an international consortium, the Ivory Trade Review Group, ITRG, to look at all aspects of the elephant and ivory trade and recommend action to stem poaching. ITRG, launched with funding from the Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation, was supported by CITES, TRAFFIC, WWF, WCS and other NGOs. The findings of the 35-person group were released in 1989. ITRG recommended an immediate moratorium on ivory trading in view of the imminent collapse of elephant populations. Western traveled to the US, UK, Hong Kong and Japan to deliver the results to government officials. As a result of the influential findings, all major trading countries introduced domestic bans within two months. In October of 1989s CITES upgraded the elephant to Appendix 1, largely on the recommendations of AERSG and the findings of the ITRG. Western launched Pachyderm in the 1980s as the authoritative source of pachyderm information. In the 1990s, as head of the Kenya delegation to CITES, Western was influential in ensuring that down-listing the southern African elephant populations included safety-net provisions.

### **International Conservation Initiatives**

Western has also been active in the international conservation movement. He was appointed director of Wildlife Conservation Society's international programs in 1997 and set up its worldwide programs in Asia, Africa and Latin America. He traveled widely to launch WCS programs in many countries, including South Sudan, Ethiopia, Belize, Argentina and the Amazon.

As a result of his international work, Western was concerned that conservation was being sidelined by mainstream developments and focusing on rear-guard action. In 1989 he brought together conservation managers, planners and scientists as well as economists, developers and the media to look ahead and consider how to position conservation in development. The resulting publication, *Conservation for the Twenty-first Century*, took a significant step towards a global long-term view of conservation.

### **Kenya Wildlife Service**

In the 1980s Western was deeply concerned by corruption in the government-run Wildlife Conservation and Management Department and the complicity of senior government officers in poaching. He approached the president with a proposal to scrap the existing Wildlife authority, WCMD, and set up a semi-autonomous body, the Kenya Wildlife Service. To make it more effective and stem corruption, KWS would be run by an independent board and collect and retain its own revenues for conservation. The president approved the proposal in 1989. KWS had an immediate effect in turning around the troubled wildlife sector. Under the first director, Richard Leakey, KWS brought poaching under control and established one of the most effective wildlife organizations in Africa.

Western was appointed director of KWS from 1984 to 1989 to address the rising human-wildlife conflict and engage Kenyans more fully in conservation. He launched an

independent review of the status and attitude of Kenyans towards wildlife that travelled countrywide. The report summarized the current status of human-wildlife conflict and recommended solutions. The review was followed by independent studies on biodiversity, land use and legal considerations that led to new policies. Some of the initiatives Western launched that grew out of these activities included *Parks for Kenyans*, which lowered citizen rates and promoted local tourism led to a five-fold increase in Kenyan visitations to Parks. The initiatives also included:

- *Parks Beyond Parks*, a movement to promote communities setting up their own wildlife sanctuaries and enterprises,
- training and equipping community wildlife scouts;
- \$30 million European Union funded Biodiversity Program and Tourism Trust Fund to support community conservation and ecotourism initiatives;
- *Nairobi Safari Walk* aimed educating young Kenyans in conservation;
- a comprehensive framework for assessing and conserving biodiversity, the Minimum Viable Conservation Area network,
- *Ecotourism at a Crossroad* conference to promote ecotourism and develop industry standards.

### **Creating conservation skills and awareness locally**

Western has, from the start of his conservation efforts, been concerned about developing awareness of conservation in Africa and the skills among African nationals to research, plan and manage wildlife and wildlife enterprises. He first engaged local Maasai community members in research and monitoring in the 1970s. In the 1980s he supported many graduate students in wildlife studies and set up the African Conservation Centre to formally engage and train up African nationals in all aspects of conservation. ACC has since overseen over 35 masters and PhD studies, set up many CBOs and African NGOs and promoted their efforts. ACC has become a vibrant hub of conservation activities involving local communities, government agencies, international NGOs and national and international conservation scientists. Western oversaw the development of ACC and, as chairman of the board, continues to assist the director, Lucy Waruingi and staff in its Africa-wide programs. ACC has established many national and regional conservation initiatives, including the South Rift Association of Landowners connecting all the lands between Amboseli and Maasai Mara, The Federation of Community Tourism Organizations, the Amboseli Ecosystem Trust, a Tanzania-Kenya trans-border program, lands use and climate change program and many others.

Western has also been dedicated to raising conservation awareness in African youths. He has been actively engaged in the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya since its inception in 1969, served as chairman of the board for many years and is currently patron of WCK.

### **Communicating conservation innovations internationally**

Western has also been an active communicator of conservation around the world. He has written dozens of popular articles, given hundreds of media interviews, been active on the university circuit and in public talk shows and made featured in dozens of conservation films and news items. He established *Swara* magazine in the 1970s to promote East

African conservation. His recent filming activities include BBC's *Unnatural Connection*, *A Place Without People* and NGS's *The Age of Man*. Western holds adjunct professorship at the University of California San Diego and has co-taught a course on *Conservation and the Human Predicament* since 1990.

### **Conservation research**

During his many national and international assignments, Western has continued his ground-breaking research in Amboseli. The Amboseli Conservation Program he set up in 1967 is the longest running ecosystem research program in Africa. His research has pioneered the integration of human-wildlife studies, underscored the significance of pastoralism in savanna ecosystems, shown the underlying basis of human-wildlife coexistence in the savannas and developed many of the basic techniques for studying and monitoring large mammal ecosystems. His research into the life history and ecology of large mammals has been cited as one of the foundational studies in the new field of macroecology. His articles have appeared in *Science*, *Nature*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, *Bioscience*, *PloS*, *Ecology* and other prominent science journals.

### **Current Conservation Activities**

Western has also been one of the principle architects of new conservation directions, including community-based conservation, ecotourism, ecosystem conservation and policies reconciling livelihoods, development and conservation.

He continues to be active in many areas of conservation. Some recent activities include the following:

- Launching the South Rift Association of Landowners to connect up the lands bridging Maasai Mara and Amboseli;
- Engaging communities in monitoring wildlife and natural resources;
- Setting up natural resource centers run by local communities;
- Initiating the Amboseli Ecosystem Management Plan;
- Establishing the Amboseli Ecosystem Trust to oversee the plan;
- Establishing the Kenya Rangeland Coalition to represent the community-based conservation organization in Kenya,
- Promoting the Parks Beyond Parks movement.

The conservancies in Kenya have grown to over 150 since Western launched the movement in 1997. The conservancies now include more wildlife than all parks and reserves combined.

In 2007 Western, through ACC, formed a coalition of organizations, including the Missouri Botanic Gardens, University of York, Yale, National Museums of Kenya, Kenya Wildlife Service and several other organizations to conduct a study of biodiversity, land use and climate change in the Tanzania-Kenya border, the richest biodiversity region in Africa. This influential study resulted in an international conference on *Biodiversity, Land Use and Climate Change*, cohosted by the Kenya government and major NGOs in 2010. The conference included a policy review and

produced a set of recommendations for moving Kenya towards a natural capital audit of its biodiversity and ecosystem services. The government adopted the recommendations in 2012. Western was appointed to a task force in 2011 to rewrite Kenya's environmental legislation. ACC was commissioned to prepare a Biodiversity Atlas of Kenya, due for launch late 2014.

With the threat of elephant poaching on the rise again, Western in 2011 brought together the Tanzania and Kenya government agencies, community organizations and NGOs active along the Tanzania-Kenya borderlands to stem poaching. The many communities and NGOs involved, including Save the Elephants, Amboseli Elephant Project and ACC, have drawn up a joint program to monitor elephant movements and deter poachers. Funds for the cooperative venture have recently been provided by the Liz Claiborne Art Ortenberg Foundation.

Western has also been active in developing a Maasai Heritage Program which, in the process of rekindling Maasai culture, also promotes land and wildlife conservation. In 2012 he was invited to the Tibetan Highlands in China with a view to establishing community-based monitoring and conservation programs and will oversee a visit to learn from Kenya communities in 2014.

In 2013 ACC and Western, working with WWF, brought together organizations from East and Southern Africa to take stock of Community Based Natural Resource and chart the way ahead for CBNRM in the region.

### **Awards and Honors**

Western has received many awards for his conservation work. They include:

- Order of the Golden Ark for his elephant and rhino conservation,
- Presidential medal the Elder of the Burning Spear for his national efforts in Kenya,
- Lifetime Achievement Award from The International Ecotourism Society for his ecotourism efforts,
- World Ecology Award for his international conservation work,
- International conservation awards from the Zoological Society of San Diego and Cincinnati Zoological Society,
- Doctor of Science honorary degree from the Leister University for his ecological studies,
- Distinguished Achievement Award from the Society for Conservation Biology for his conservation science.