

Cheap love costs the Earth

February 13 2009

Ecology and conservation biologist at the University of Leicester, Dr David Harper, who has conducted research for over 25 years at Lake Naivasha in Kenya, today warned that cut-price Valentine roses exported for sale in the UK were 'bleeding that country dry'.

Dr Harper, of the University's Department of Biology where he is a senior lecturer, claimed that cheap roses grown by companies that had no concern for the environment were having a devastating effect on the ecology of Lake Naivasha- the centre of Kenya's horticultural industry.

Instead, Dr Harper urged UK shoppers to buy Fair Trade roses, produced by companies that were conscientious and had a transparent supply chain.

Dr Harper said: "Roses that come cheap are grown by companies that have no concern for the environment, who cut corners and avoid legislation, who sell their flowers into the auction in Amsterdam so that all the buyer knows is the flowers "come from Holland".

"In reality, they have come from Kenya where the industry is - literally - draining that country dry."

However, some companies took a more responsible approach and sold direct to British supermarkets - many of them being "Fair Trade" certified.

Said Dr Harper: "These companies want a sustainable future for the

wildlife and the environment, as well as the people, where they grow their roses. Sadly, there are not enough of them.

"At Lake Naivasha, the good companies make up about half of the total. That is not enough; together, the industry is sucking the lake dry. The country's legislation is strong, but its enforcement is weak so companies whose only interest is profit take advantage of that."

Dr Harper said the demand for the ten thousand tonnes of roses sold in the UK for Valentine's Day and for Mother's Day had contributed to the devastation of the ecosystem at the lake.

Almost half a million people now live around the shores of the lake - drawn there by the flower trade. The shanty towns that have emerged around the lake have no sanitation- water comes from the lake and sewage returns to it. This pressure - from people - is destroying the lake that supports their jobs lives and their livelihoods.

David and his colleagues from other UK - and Dutch - universities first raised the alarm about the situation in 2002, just as the new Kenyan Water Act was passed.

Since then, the lake has continued to shrink.

Source: University of Leicester

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