

World's wildlife critical to the economies of nations

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Wildlife is critical to the economies of nations. New Zealand's wildlife – whales, dolphins, red deer, thar, albatross, kiwi, tuatara, fish and kauri – attract tourists. And the tourists who come to see or hunt our wildlife stay for longer and spend more, especially in our provinces and small towns, than those who come for our casinos and high-end hotels.

In Australia the economic value of koala alone was estimated at A\$1.1 billion. There are no estimates for how much wildlife contribute to New

Zealand's economy, but if they contribute as much to our \$10 billion tourism industry as they do to Australia's, then our wildlife are worth about \$1 billion in tourist spending.

But when the United Nations launches World Wildlife Day (3 March) it is not us but the world's poorest nations, especially in Africa, on which attention will be focused.

Africa's poorest nations earn critical foreign currency from tourism—US\$83 million in Sierra Leone, US\$26 million in Malawi and US\$66 million in the tiny nation of Eritrea.

Between 20 to 40 percent of international tourism is for wildlife. Tourism brought over US\$7 billion to the South African economy last year—about 80 percent of which is for wildlife. Only Kenya's coffee exports earn more each year than the US\$400 to 900 million from wildlife tourism.

And, of course, wildlife is food in Africa's poorest nations—without wildlife, much of rural Africa would be less nourished, even starved.

But the national and household livelihoods of these poorest countries are threatened by heavily armed, well organised international crime syndicates illegally hunting and trading their wildlife to extinction.

The challenge of illegal hunting has grown. Trade between countries has become easier. Rhinoceros and elephant, critically endangered in Africa and Asia from demand for their horns and tusks, are just the small tip of a gigantic illegal trade iceberg.

This is not just a battle for the survival and conservation of species, it is war for a better future in the world's poorest nations.

In New Zealand, we can feel somewhat removed from all the threat. But we have a role to play—an opportunity to support international wildlife economies and to grow our own.

New Zealanders are frequent travellers for wildlife tourism and our dollars support wildlife-economies. But Kiwi's can also be a part of the problem. Returning home with rare corals and shells, butterfly, or plants native to southern Africa and the Asia-Pacific is common.

There is also an ongoing threat from the illegal capture and export of our own wildlife. Thirty-two New Zealand species are listed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, or CITES.

Although intensely controversial, legitimate trade in wildlife, including endangered species, has to also be a part of the conservation solution. Income from wildlife trade ensures that nations are highly motivated and their economies can afford to protect wildlife. South Africa, for example, should be allowed to sell rhino horn and elephant ivory, albeit in ways that improve wildlife protections.

New Zealand could be doing the same with its wildlife.

Many zoos and wildlife centres would like to have a real life kiwi, kakapo or kokako in their collections and they should pay handsomely for the privilege. Our wildlife could be leased to the world's public and private zoos and wildlife parks. China has mastered this. It has been several decades since China gave away a giant panda. Nowadays they lease them to the world's zoos—generating millions of dollars in foreign revenue.

What we need is a legitimate market that can be supplied sustainably. Wildlife conservation should not be a charity but a business. The New Zealand taxpayer should not be a wildlife philanthropist, but a wildlife

investor.

Importantly, if we make more money in these ways from our native and exotic wildlife, in addition to that from ecotourism, we increase wildlife's value to a greater diversity of New Zealander's.

To make this future possible, many of us will need to leave our qualms about exploiting wildlife-as-a-resource behind. New Zealand could learn very much from Africa's modern [wildlife](#) economies and their entrepreneurial and pragmatic conservation industries.

Provided by Victoria University

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