



WHO SHALL BELL THE 'RICH' CAT?

By Edward J McCrea and Harsh Vardhan

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The writers are experienced conservationists and educators, Ed in USA and Harsh in India, and have been responsible for some outstanding projects across the globe.-- Editors

As we juggle many pieces to present the 6th Conservation Times, David Kabambo from Tanzania, informed:

Stopping bushmeat use: "When people are desperate to put clothes on their children's backs and food on the table, the bushmeat trade rises drastically. To eliminate this root cause, Peace for Conservation, an African Non-profit Organization, has initiated the ARTS4Wildlife project for school students.

They will create art and sell it to tourists who visit Serengeti National Park. In Tanzania, wildlife art may sell for US\$ 25, US\$ 50, US\$ 100, or even US\$ 150." David is the Founder and Director of Peace for Conservation.

Julian Matthew, Chairman of TOF Tigers, suggested:

Building better strategy: "Sadly India tourism sector is very unsustainable at the moment. I had predicted this 20 years ago when I first started TOFTigers. Both United Nations World Tourism Organization and Euromonitor Research put India at or near the bottom of the sustainability global travel and tourism ranking.

"We have all become accustomed to the idea that tourism is a basic human right. It's not - and if it was - more than just one in five of the world population would be doing it. Travel and tourism are undoubted privilege for a small part of society - and so it's all travellers'

ultimate responsibility to demand that it's better and more sustainable, and they need to be prepared to pay for it."

Karen Bryant, an eco-tourism aficionado, based in Britain, set an example:

Adopting wild animals: "We have many happy memories of some fabulous wildlife encounters. In 2019, in Australia, we visited Port Macquarie and adopted Anwen, a koala, as a Mother's Day gift for my Mum - thus doing two good deeds in one.

I am pleased to report that she made such a good recovery and has been returned to the wild. This year we've done an e-Adoption and chosen a little koala called Ocean Summer who is blind and therefore unlikely to be returned to the wild." The President of Port Macquarie Koala Hospital sent a "certificate" to Karen, that they have "adopted OCEAN SUMMER!"

A contrasting scenario is perceived at India's Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve:

Hotels rule roost: Nearly 140 hotels have mushroomed at Ranthambhore in India. The Reserve is 'house-full', having 60+ Tigers. What ratio of visitors per Tiger? Half a million people visit it annually. Their turnover is estimated to be about INR 1,110 million.

Nearly 90% of it is pocketed by hoteliers! About two decades ago, Ranthambhore School of Art was started by local artists to sell paintings and make a new living through tiger-tourism.

They are now living in fashionable apartments, probably forgotten is the cause of sustaining the reserve.



Leave only foot-prints behind and practise Responsible Tourism.

Can we derive inspiration from David, Julian, and Karen? Their texts appear in this issue of Conservation Times.

We believe many more are around who would be doing similar ways or even better. The objective is to establish Responsible Tourism as a continued business-practice.

Parks' role: According to <https://worldnationalparks.com>, there are more than 6,000 National Parks in nearly 100 countries that support wildlife conservation and ecotourism. Data differ on this rich natural resource bank shared by citizens all over the world:

*249 National Parks in Africa *985 in Asia *474 in Europe *297 in North and Central America *335 in South America and *704 in Oceania, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). That gives a total of 3044 national parks, worldwide. Asia is the continent with the most, Australia is the country with the most, and the US is the country with the first (Yellowstone National Park). 318 million people visited U.S. Parks in

The Sixth Conservation Times is dedicated to Responsible Tourism -Editors

2018, according to National Geographic.

USD20.2 billion spending: It is incredible that the US National Park Services records have registered over 14 billion visits since 1904. That is nearly twice the planet's population! It is greater than the number of years the universe has existed at all!. (Source: <https://edition.cnn.com/travel/article/most-popular-national-park-service-sites-2019/index.html>).

And in India: Visitors to the National Park sites in the US spent an estimated USD 20.2 billion in local gateway regions in 2018, according to a May 2019 report. It translated into 329,000 jobs, USD 13.6 billion in labor income, USD 23.4 billion in value added, and USD 40.1 billion in economic output. The lodging sector saw the biggest benefits, with USD 6.8 billion in economic output, while restaurants saw USD 4 billion in economic output.

We explored records of almost all government and non-government agencies in India to estimate total turnover of all national parks in India. The answer happened to be a lemon. Even visitor number annually was nowhere available. It indicated a fragmented management approach to such rich biodiversity regimes. The Department of Forest administers all such Protected Areas in the country.



Dave and Anne attired in rural costumes, an example in Responsible Tourism in India.

Even at state level, no record was perceptible to this effect. So, a national wide economic picture could not be drawn-monopoly of government was loud and clear!

How to start: How to kick-start Responsible Tourism at all wilderness spaces? Not many tour operators or hotels may practise it currently? Can INR10 (one-tenth of a USD) per visitor be forked out of total entry receipts and, likewise, can INR 100 (about USD one) per room per day be set apart at all hotels, e.g., at Ranthambhor? This would result into a whopping sum being generated each year. A thorough mechanism can easily be created to spend it among direct stakeholders besides supporting essential needs of forest guards, foresters, nature guides, etc. The pressure on forest authorities will disappear once such a Responsible Tourism approach is put into action –it is possible to put into operation a joint-management approach with private hands.

KEYSTONE SPECIES

- Editors

A keystone species is a species which has a disproportionately large effect on its natural environment relative to its abundance, a concept introduced in 1969 by the zoologist Robert T. Paine.

Keystone species play a critical role in maintaining the structure of an ecological community, affecting many other organisms in an ecosystem and helping to determine the types and numbers of various other species in the community.

Without keystone species, the ecosystem would be dramatically different or cease to exist altogether. Some keystone species, such as the wolf, are also apex predators.

The role that a keystone species plays in its ecosystem is analogous to the role of a keystone in an arch. While the keystone is under the least pressure of any of the stones in an arch, the arch still collapses without it.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

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I love traveling and many years ago I realized that people were willing to pay more for a hotel that followed eco-friendly practices. I experienced a hotel in Mumbai

that kept eco-friendly practices at the core of everything. Out of the many outstanding features, they also had an eco-switch, which on being pressed brought the room temperature to 27 degrees and also informed the management. The hotel would give a letter of appreciation to the guests who pressed the environment switch. This initiative was much appreciated by the guests. This hotel competed with some of the best business hotel brands in terms of occupancy and rates.

The above hotel was an inspiration for the Ecotelhotel that I built in Jaipur. It has become the core of our business philosophy today. New learning: water management, saving electricity, conservation of resources, and community development take the center stage when we plan any project.

Responsible Tourism contributes to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage: eg. city walks, food tours, camel/horse safari, local food; thereby providing more enjoyable experiences for tourists through meaningful connection with local people, etc. Today's traveler is aware, while he would expect a good ambiance and services, he would also appreciate the extra mile a hotel has gone. It would certainly add to the value of the hotel.

I must admit that in my travels to many destinations, especially, wilderness resorts around the country, I have seen many local players doing an excellent job. But at the same time, there are some fake guys too.

The genuine efforts are visible and have a nice scent, and the fragrance of the good effort travels far and wide.

The next issue of Conservation Times will focus on Human Health and Nature

There has been considerable research on this topic lately, and, of course, such a positive link has been mentioned for centuries in literature and religious texts. In the time of the COVID pandemic such a topic is particularly relevant. If you are interested in writing for CT on this topic or any wildlife/environment topic, please send an email to emccrea@eecg.org for a copy of our style sheet.

MUD ON BOOTS

By The Sanctuary Team

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Tiger and cattle live together in Tadoba Tiger Reserve, India, photo courtesy Nikhil Tambekar/Sanctuary Nature Foundation

The Mud on Boots Project is a booster programme designed to empower and support 'mud-on-the-boots' conservationists in India over a two-year period. The project focuses on those individuals whose conservation leadership potential is overlooked by large organisations and government agencies because of limitations such as the lack of academic qualifications, access to technology or language barriers.

Through this project Sanctuary is enabling a network of on-ground conservationists across the country, each of whom is contributing steadfastly to biodiversity conservation and community engagement in distinct and measurable ways. In addition to monetary support, Sanctuary works to raise the profiles of these Project Leaders, connect them to pertinent organisations or experts and forward their causes. The Project has been developed to be flexible to the needs of each Project Leader and Sanctuary's support to each one is customized. While keeping paperwork and bureaucracy to a minimum, Sanctuary ensures that every project develops holistically.

Project Leaders are selected through a

closed nomination process. Nominations are invited from trusted conservationists within Sanctuary's extensive network and are reviewed by the Sanctuary team. Priority is given to nominees who do not have the tools to expand their work through external funding; and are working in neglected landscapes, on conflict mitigation, or on community engagement.

Nominations for the Mud on Boots Project are considered on a rolling basis, as and when funds become available.

The sponsorship of a single Project Leader's work is INR 500,000 for the two-year period. This includes administration costs and overheads. Donations of any amount towards the Mud on Boots Project are appreciated.

Small Grants: Sanctuary's Small Grants are monetary awards of less than INR 100,000 that are bestowed upon veteran grassroots wildlife conservationists in recognition of their service to India's biodiversity and ecological health.

Cocoon Conservancy: Community Owned Community Operated Nature (COCOON Conservancy) Conservancies are critical rewilding

initiatives undertaken outside India's Protective Area Network. The project is based on an innate belief that communities living closest to our most biodiverse wonderlands deserve to be the primary beneficiaries and custodians of our vanishing biodiversity.

The effect of this initiative is to expand the size and improve the quality of habitat available to wildlife by encouraging local communities to convert their own marginal and failed farms back to its natural wild state.

The land holding will continue to be in the hands of the community but would serve as biodiverse nature refuges capable of offering communities assured livelihoods and economic security in an era of climate change.

COCOON Conservancies serve to act as effective buffers to absorb the biodiversity that spills over from protected core areas, thus reducing human-animal conflict. By locating such conservancies in corridors, the objectives of widening and refreshing the gene pool is also met. For more information you may like to connect to:

<https://sanctuarynaturefoundation.org/projects/cocoon>

ADOPTING ANIMALS RESPONSIBLY

By Karen Bryant

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Derek and Karen caressing their adopted Cheetahs, a unique process in Responsible Tourism

The writer is based in Britain and has been voyaging for a long time to distant wildlife parks to experience conservation and contribute to it. – Editors.

Never before has it been so important as we go about our daily lives to think about the impact our individual behaviour has on the planet. Many wildlife species are now facing extinction due to loss of their habitat, climate change, deforestation, and now Covid-19 which has resulted in a loss of revenue as the tourist trade is put on hold. (Because of deforestation in Indonesia for oil palm plantations, we no longer buy products that contain palm oil out of protest at the plight of the Indonesian Orangutans.) Recent figures suggest the world used to comprise 62% wilderness but nowadays it is nearer to 35%. It is therefore paramount that we act now before it becomes too late to reverse the damage that human activity has done, and this requires educating farmers, poachers, adults, and children alike.

Many years ago, on a safari in Zambia, we were fortunate to see the country's entire population of Rhino (5) that were sadly followed around the clock by armed guards, and only approved vehicles with licensed plates known to the guards were allowed to approach the family.

This was quite upsetting, and we hated the thought they lived their lives being tracked the whole time, but it was for their own good. We live in hope that one-day poaching can be eradicated world-wide for good.

From a young age, I have always liked dogs and horses so when growing up I persuaded my parents to let me have weekly riding lessons. Then as a result of watching some amazing animal and travel programs, I developed a great love of big cats (cheetahs being my favorites) and a desire to include a wildlife element in many of our holidays.

Fortunately, my husband Derek shares my passion for animals so we've since been lucky to visit many countries and witness some magical wildlife encounters along the way, though annoyingly we've yet to see a jaguar sighting despite trips to several reserves in Belize and Brazil.

We have also encountered some very passionate staff but heard many upsetting facts that have stuck in our memories ever since – these include a guided nature walk on the beach at Seal Bay, Kangaroo Island, Australia in Spring 2019. Walking amongst sea lions and seals the naturalist explained their unique breeding cycle and the ongoing research program at the center but sadly said that more plastic than fish is retrieved from the world's oceans; also abandoned over heated car batteries left at the roadside had been responsible for starting some bush fires – truly horrifying as the consequences can be devastating and could have been avoided if people had taken their rubbish home and disposed of it properly. During our stay at a ranch in Arizona in 2009 when asked to use water sparingly, we were upset to learn the ranch had recently sold off many cattle due to lack of drinking water for them and diversified into a Dude Ranch with paying guests to survive. The simple habit of turning the tap off instead of cleaning our teeth with running water has stuck with us every day ever since wherever we are. Whilst only a small gesture if everyone adopted this initiative it could make a real difference. As the saying goes “mighty oaks from little acorns grow”. Even buying a raffle ticket will help.

People may wonder where to start. There are so many ways to get involved and it can be surprisingly affordable and these days there are so many good causes all in need of additional funding

C E R T I F I C A T E O F

ADOPTION



This is to certify that

Derek & Karen Bryant

adopted

Ocean Summer



Exp: 18-Feb-2022 #183668

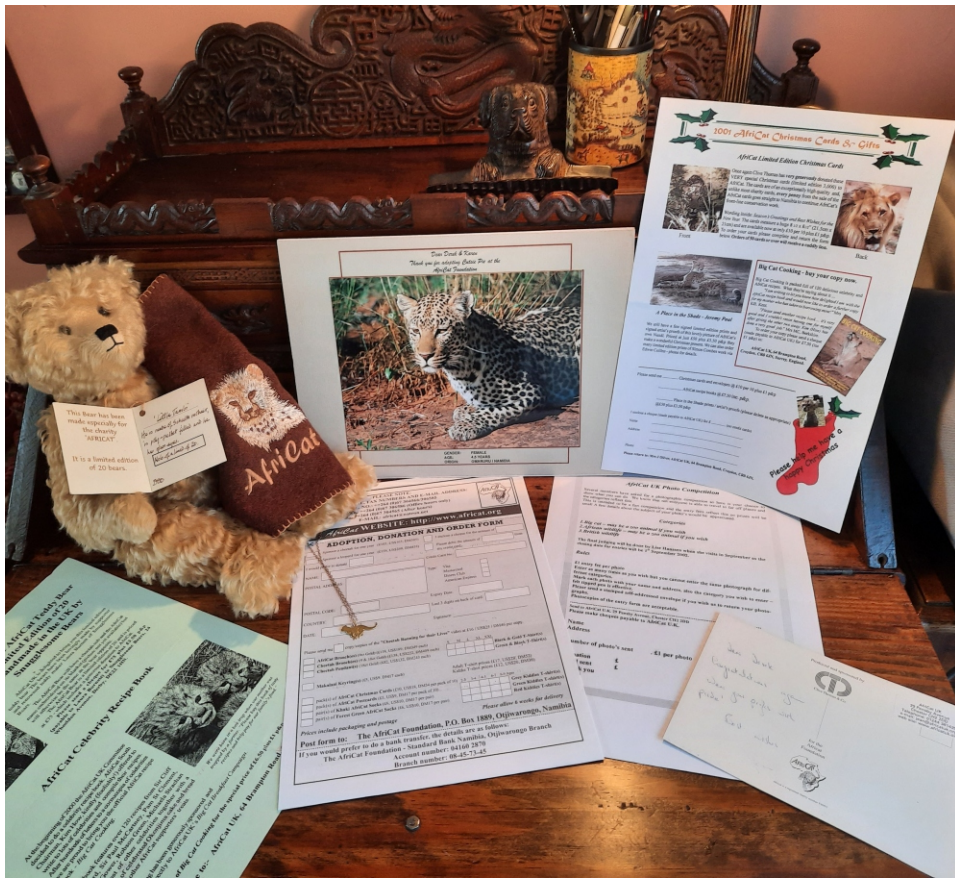
President *Sue Ashton*

PORT MACQUARIE
KOALA HOSPITAL
Koala Conservation Australia Inc.





Koala adoption certificate for Karen and Derek, wilderness parks have lot more to innovate.



Sponsorship related documents' display at Karen's home in UK

that every donation makes a difference so do not be deterred. Even saving used postage stamps from letters! The year after our stay at the ranch in Arizona we learnt one of the communal buildings had been badly damaged by fire so to aid the rebuild they came up with the unique idea of sponsoring a brick with your name or message on it - we were only too delighted to get involved.

Many organizations offer animal adoptions in return for a photo/certificate and regular newsletters.

For nearly 30 years I've collected used postage stamps (and encouraged family, friends and work colleagues to do likewise for me) and sent them to some of my favourite animal charities such as Canine Partners, Brans by Horse Charity, and the British Hedgehog Preservation Society. Unfortunately, the frequency of the parcels has reduced over the years due to the internet but nevertheless, charities still welcome these donations from companies, schools, and individuals. For example, Canine Partners receives £12 per kilo for UK stamps and £20 per kilo for foreign stamps (www.caninepartners.org.uk/get-involved/fundraising/recycle-used-postage-stamps).

My love affair with Big Cats started

after watching a TV documentary. So in November 1992, I became a custodian member of Cheetah Watch conservation program run by Whipsnade Wild Animal Park & Friends of Conservation in the UK and received a certificate and baseball cap with my membership. Next, I adopted a tiger at London Zoo as a Christmas present for Derek. In 1999 we stayed at Okonjima Guest Ranch – home of The AfriCat Foundation in Namibia where they tended and raised wounded and orphaned cheetahs until they could be returned to the wild or relocated cats caught on farmland.

This visit was life-changing as guests were treated to behind-the-scenes close encounters with cheetahs – some sadly having sustained such serious injuries they could never be returned to the wild. Before leaving we signed up to sponsor our first cheetah and bought lots of merchandise from the on-site shop – the first of many annual subscriptions – comprising a certificate and photo, and regular newsletters in which your name would feature. As well as the usual merchandise such as t-shirts, baseball caps, pendants, broaches, AfriCat also offered smaller items such as a pack of Christmas Cards. Once they conducted a photo competition with entrants paying £1 per photo submitted – this proved very

popular, and Derek was lucky enough to win 3rd prize with one of his submissions of a lion taken during one of our many African safaris.

AfriCat proved so successful that AfriCat UK was set up and some well-known sports people and television personalities approached to be Patrons so more fund-raising initiatives were possible including limited edition hand-made teddy bears, gold necklaces depicting a cheetah, and a Big Lion cookbook – all of which were affordable and I readily bought. (www.africat.org).

In 2003 we visited The Cheetah Outreach program at the Spier Estate in South Africa and were thrilled to sign up for a personal encounter with Modjadji and Graca, two of their extremely rare King Cheetah Ambassadors.

At the time only 28 cheetahs were thought to exist in South Africa that had this King coat which is caused by a recessive gene. They also did Eagle encounters but sadly for Derek time did not permit to do both options so there was no contest!

Last year we were upset watching news of the forest fires burning out of control in Australia. One image stayed with me, that of a distressed and badly burnt koala on the road surrounded by flames. He was rescued by a passing driver who carefully wrapped him in a blanket and took him to a nearby koala sanctuary. They named him Lewis (my maiden name!) and we followed his progress in the ensuing days but eventually, his wounds were so bad he died.

We have many happy memories of some fabulous wildlife encounters from our time in Australia in 2019. We were so moved that we wanted to help from afar so we visited Port Macquarie (www.koalahospital.org.au) website and adopted Anwen as a Mother's Day gift for my Mum – thus doing two good deeds in one.

The photo of her in little pink boots protecting her burnt paws melted our hearts.

I am pleased to report that she was a tough little bear and since made such a good recovery and has been returned to the wild. This year we have done an e-Adoption and chosen a little koala called Ocean Summer who is blind and therefore unlikely to be returned to the wild.

TOURISTS, ART, AND THE BUSHMEAT TRADE

By David Kabambo

Founder and Director of Peace for Conservation

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Students learning painting wild animals to sell the art to visitors, Responsible Tourism in Tanzania

The writer is working for Responsible Tourism in Tanzania and has created a first of its kind project with the local community.

-Editors

It is easy to see why the bush meat trade is such a problem in Africa. Villagers near parks and reserves such as Serengeti National Park have never enjoyed an easy life. However, with the loss of a high number of leaders and bread winners to AIDS and, more recently to the COVID-19 pandemic, the bushmeat trade has become a more severe problem. There are other reasons for the increase in illegal wildlife harvesting, such as greed for the relatively large amounts of money that these illegal activities bring. (One zebra or wildebeest killed in a protected area may sell for US\$ 35 to US\$ 45 depending on the animal's size). However, the main goal in the bushmeat trade is not to make a profit. When people are desperate to put clothes on their children's backs and food on the table, the bushmeat trade rises drastically.

This is one reason that education about why the bushmeat trade is bad will not be likely to reduce the trade on its own.

Until basic needs are met, the villagers' behavior will not change. (It is estimated that 80% of youth living close to protected areas like Serengeti National Park are involved directly or indirectly in wildlife poaching because of limited opportunities for legal employment).

To eliminate this root cause, Peace for Conservation, an African Nonprofit Organization, has initiated the ARTS4Wildlife project. The project will teach primary and secondary

school students how to sketch and paint wildlife-based art. The main goal of ARTS4Wildlife is to empower school children and prepare them for future self-employment. Ultimately, the students will create art and sell it to tourists who visit Serengeti National Park. In Tanzania wildlife art may sell for US\$ 25, US\$ 50, US\$ 100, or even US\$ 150. The program is also designed to create awareness about wildlife poaching through the students' artwork.

Every month an art teacher visits one of the villages to spend five days teaching art to school children after school hours. Currently 35 school children are enrolled in the one-year pilot program, with a target of teaching 100 school children eventually. The 10 best students will be awarded scholarships to attend a certificate course of painting at Bagamoyo College of Arts.

To institutionalize the program and give it a home, Peace for Conservation has purchased a one-acre tract of land near the entrance to Serengeti National Park. There they will construct an arts training center and gallery. When the center is completed, youth living close to protected areas can enroll in a one-year program and learn to create artwork they can sell. This art will not only reflect the biodiversity of the area but will also show conservation practices with messages about wildlife protection, anti-poaching efforts, climate change effects and human-wildlife conflict mitigation. These works of art will be offered for sale in the gallery to tourists visiting the park. Peace for Conservation has set a goal of creating 100 profitable jobs for youth through the artwork training and sales program.



Peace for Conservation, an African NPO, in service through ARTS4Wildlife Project. Photos courtesy David Kabambo.

LIVELIHOODS TO TRADITIONAL HUNTING COMMUNITIES

By Archana Sharma

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Bull riding, the Pardhi family on the move.

The writer shares her experience with promoting ecotourism among the Pardhi community, building on their traditional skills, culture and values. -Editors

Pardhis are a community of traditional hunters who live a nomadic life and hunt predominantly for meat. They also help farmers against crop raids by wild herbivores, cull man-eaters on behalf of communities and governments, and in the past helped royalty on hunting expeditions. These hunting practices had an important role in ensuring food security when agriculture was in deficit. No specific efforts for rehabilitation of the Pardhis were made by the Government post-nationalization in 1972. As a result, the Pardhis continue to ply their traditional livelihoods.

The Pardhis in Madhya Pradesh have not been able to benefit from Government's affirmative action because of them not being listed under scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, or Other backward caste lists. They aspire for dignified lawful livelihoods. But, they are unable to shift to dignified lawful occupations. To add to the problem, the boom in international trade in wildlife products has propelled some members of the community into

large smuggling rackets. The unique skills of the Pardhis have enormous demand from connoisseurs of wild meat, wildlife smugglers, and traditional healers.

A small group of Pardhi families collectively own a forest plot in a village in Obedullganj Block of Raisen District of Madhya Pradesh. An ecotourism project "Oosera" was initiated in 2019 on this plot of land with the support of Aranya, an NGO based in Bhopal. The project has been supported by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development – NABARD (India's apex regulatory body for overall regulation and licensing of regional rural banks and apex cooperative banks) and Inspire Network for Environment (a national NGO working in the area of environment).

The project had the following objectives:

- 1) help Pardhi community secure a safer and dignified future for themselves and their children through lawful and sustainable livelihoods;
- 2) help the community showcase their culture, tradition, and skills to create more awareness about themselves to

mainstream society;

3) create alternate livelihood options for the population associated directly with the project as well as for those who are living in surrounding villages in terms of availability of market and visibility; and,

4) conserve a highly threatened piece of private natural forest.

Building trust in the community. The most difficult part of the project was to sell the idea – both to the community and a grant maker. Initial discussions met with a lot of suspicions. The community was not sure if it was a way to deprive them of their land. They were worried if guests would intrude on their privacy and if activities in the forest would lead to more harassment from forest and police personnel.

Building on the community's existing strengths. Alternative approaches are imperative to help the Pardhis with other livelihoods. The project looks at the problem as an opportunity. The Pardhis have for centuries accumulated a vast knowledge of wildlife behavior. They needed this knowledge to track animals, to design their traps, snares, and nets, and to keep the animals alive till sale. Except for a few sub-tribes, Pardhis trap almost all animals alive. They know how to accurately calculate patterns and schedule of territory marking to lay traps, they know calls and camouflages to snare, and they know to befriend birds and animals to trap others. They know the speed, strength, stamina, flight span, and seasonality of behavior of many species. These skills and tools that have evolved over hundreds of generations could be of immense use in wildlife research, education, and tourism. The project decided to build this initiative around these skills by replicating a Pardhis' Dera - a hunting camp.

Income and employment generation.

The part of the forest owned by a farmer from Bhootpalasi has been taken on lease creating some income for him, from an asset that was providing no returns. All the camp staff is from the Pardhi community. Young people, who have good knowledge of wildlife, are articulate and were willing have organized themselves into a group and manage the tourism activities. Service providers such as taxi people, milk suppliers, carpenters, electricians, etc., are all locals. Assets created are being transferred to the community through a

society of the Pardhis. The majority of the earnings from the operation belong to the group members but a share of profit will be used for village development work. Towards this objective, a tap water supply system for all families in the hamlet has been provided by Oosera. The community has full control over the funds.

Training to Pardhi Youth: A very big challenge was to train the participating youth. Pardhi youths have been trained in conducting forest walks with tourists, explaining various elements of nature, such as plants, animals, animal signs, birds, etc. The walk includes a focus on tracking animals based on the signs encountered on the walks. Apart from indicating the limits to which they can go in tracking animals, the training also involved basic communication skills, etiquettes, hygiene, the use of binoculars, and other basic equipment.

Promoting sustainable practices: All construction activities used local material and were undertaken by the community. Not just Pardhis but other locals participated too. To promote sustainable practices, most of the articles used on the site are pre-used. The destination is totally powered by solar energy and the power generated is also shared with the community.

Attracting visitors: The Oosera team is preparing an inventory of all the resources that will be used for making the explorations more interesting and engaging. It is listing all the features of the forest, such as animal and plant species of interest, the soil, land, and vegetational features such as caves, dens, rocks, dead and fallen trees, snags, animal burrow etc., as well as the signs, sounds and smells that the Pardhis use to locate and track the animals. This will help expand the list of activities comprising an exploration walk in the forest. Traditional arts and culture of the Pardhis are showcased to the guests through cultural shows, cuisine, orientation talks, etc. This includes the 'gatha' singing traditions and other forms of folk art. The team is responsible for patrolling and protecting the forests. Eight youths earn a monthly wage.

Partnerships: The project budget as planned is much larger than what could be raised. But Aranya decided to start the journey with selected activities and expand over the years. NABARD was the main grant maker. Out of the



Oosera's dry deciduous forest offers exciting walks.

NABARD support, the entire crucial infrastructure for the 'dera' was developed. It included some basic landscaping, tented housing facilities, common facilities such as dining, pantry, etc. NABARD also funded some of the trainings for the community youth. The total support was around INR 23,00,000.

Inspire Network for Environment, a national NGO working in the area of environment, supported a solar power unit for the destination. The power is also shared with the community. Inspire Network raised funds for Oosera from the Global Greengrants fund which was approximately INR 800,000.

The project is now trying to raise funds under National Rural Employment Guarantee Program for forest enhancement and water conservation. A partnership is being explored with the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Board for skill up-gradation of the team.

Sustainability and Scaling Up: Oosera was developed and is operated by the most marginalized of social groups and people with complex developmental issues. It is on a piece of land which is highly prone to encroachment attempts. Yet the project has shown positive potential. The model is fully scalable. The project also has proven that communities can plan and manage a group enterprise and has turned out to be a positive impetus for conservation.

Lessons Learned: The project presumes that the Pardhis will abandon hunting only if an alternative gives

them better income and more respectability, through a vocation based on their traditional skills, culture and values. As tracking and capturing game is their traditional profession, a new vocation which uses these skills has a better chance of success than any other activity that requires the acquisition of new skills.

Leasing forest owned by the farmer from Bhootpalasi and employing local youth has resulted in creating a premium on conservation as against stealthy conversion of their forests to agricultural land. It demonstrates that small forest patches can be conserved by being used for ecotourism and they can contribute to conservation.

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VISITING OOSERA

-Editors

Oosera is a new destination in Responsible Tourism in India. It is a wilderness habitat teeming with Pardhi tribals being assisted by Aranya, a Bhopal based NGO.

Its Director, Archana Sharma herself will lead you to a variety of trails, from jungle walk to a chat with tribal family members. Oosera also provides visitors with a rare experience of a non-agrarian non-pastoral culture.

The package can include wild mammals, migratory and resident birds, night-walk in forest, boating and organic food with extension to ancient Buddhist caves.

Interested to visit Oosera, contact <aranyaloknyas@gmail.com or birdfair1@hotmail.com>

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

6 WAYS TO BUILD BACK BETTER

By Julian Matthews

Chairman of TOFTigers

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The writer is an experienced travel expert in Britain and has floated a new global partnership with hotels and tour operators: TOFTigers. - Editors

It is not really such a long time ago that I first visited Ranthambhor Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan. In fact, it was 1998, just 23 years ago. I checked into one of only two small hotels, the Maharaja Man Singh's old hunting lodge on the bend of a tree-lined road, not far from a small sleepy town, and backing onto the reserve itself. I had heard there was a good chance of seeing a tiger here, the only place in the world where this was a really good possibility.

The place is unrecognizable today. A revolution has happened. Sawai Madhopur is a large bustling town that has spread across the landscape and for miles down that tree-lined road. This strip bordering the reserve is now dotted with expensive resorts, lodgings, and bed and breakfasts of every conceivable design and shape, from the ubiquitous concrete monstrosities to fake forts and mini palaces, complete with bulbous domes and minarets, designed to attract the new moneyed Indian fraternity on their holidays and weekends away.

Wow – so is this good for tigers I hear you ask? Yes and no would be my answer.

Yes, because having declared in 2003 that the Royal Bengal Tiger was about to go extinct with only 11 left in this area, India's most famous park, now has over 70 wild cats. The park's borders have expanded, many locals have benefitted hugely with thousands of jobs and new livelihood opportunities in this once remote marginal farming community. Great schools and hospitals have been built with visitor income. Furthermore, the park's finances had never been better (before Covid!) from the 500,000 visitors each year, allowing better protection, community support, and compensation for livestock loss. Today the vast majority of visitors are domestic - a sea

change from when I visited in 1998 – all wishing to see their own natural heritage - and this is the only sure-fire way to ensure nature conservation remains at the top of any politician's agenda in this fast-developing nation.

No, because none of this was really planned. No thought was given to the key infrastructure needed for such wholesale change, no town or park long term planning, no carrying capacity thought through, no developmental plans which allocate land to use - and land not to use - that may be injurious to the park and its wildlife, no understanding as to aquifer drawn water needs and damage in this desert land, no thought on the incentives and disincentives for poor buildings, poor operations or waste and other pollutants beside a world-famous park. Without this, the real benefits of this new nature-based tourism sector have probably failed to materialize in the best, most judicious, and just way for both wildlife and communities – and certainly not sustainably.

Sadly, the Indian tourism sector is very unsustainable at the moment. This is not just me saying it – having predicted this 20 years ago when I first started TOFTigers - but both UNWTO and Euromonitor Research put India at or

near the bottom of the sustainability global travel and tourism ranking. So, what needs to happen to change this. Here are my six key needs for a building-back better strategy.

Recognize that tourism can be beneficial: To destinations and communities, it can incentivize conservation and support protection and enrich all our lives, economically, socially, and culturally. Yet irresponsible and unsustainable actions can do the exact opposite, so better planning and understanding of it is needed by Forest Departments, key ministries, and the private sector.

Need to move away from Quantity to Quality: Manage tourism for the quality of the experience and its value to the host, the local communities, and nature. This requires active/intensive destination management. Today this may even need to contain or stop tourism's land use.

With today's social media great places and destinations highlight themselves – so federal and state tourism boards need to move away from simple promotion and far more into destination management, alongside park services, private sector, area authorities, civic society, and panchayats.

Redefine success:

This should no longer be on simple numbers of visitors, but favor customer satisfaction, community development, small business development, job creation, fair income distribution as measures of success. Set an early baseline and then monitor it. There is a



*What 'responsibility' do they register while clicking Tigers in wild?
A usual tourism scene at Tiger Reserves in India.*

need to ensure investment in destinations. It will be a net positive for communities and environment with monetary incentives and tax advantages.

Set Sustainable Standards:

Set minimum standards of operations, using international standards like those of Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) and Sustainable *Tourism* Criteria for *India* (STCI), and then incentivize and encourage monitoring of these standards in destinations. Use taxes, awards, visitor benefits, or special passes to encourage and maintain best practices.

For the benefits of tourism to be

materialized, it needs endless collaboration and partnerships between all stakeholders – but it also needs good and judicious policies, regulations, and laws that both incentivize the encourage best practice – but also discourage and dis-incentivize the worst practices.

Governments should not be the sole arbitrators:

It is critical to realize that everyone can conserve nature, it should not just be a mandate for governments.

We need to allow communities to collaborate with the private sector to protect, restore, reforest, and conserve lands bordering or connecting parks,

around towns and cities, or in rural areas too.

We have all become accustomed to the idea that tourism is a basic human right. It is not – and if it were - more than just one in five of the world population would be doing it.

Travel and tourism are an undoubted privilege for a small part of society – and so it is all travelers' ultimate responsibility to demand that tourism is better, fairer, and more sustainable.

Travelers need to be prepared to pay for it. The pandemic may well have highlighted this to an extent that we could never have done without it.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM BENEFITS?

- Editors

The Cape Town Declaration, 2002 stated a definition: “Responsible Tourism is tourism which:

- *minimizes negative social, economic and environmental impacts

- *generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities

- *improves working conditions and access to the industry involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances

- *makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage embracing diversity provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues provides access for physically challenged people

- *sensitive, encourages respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence, etc.”

United Nations World Tourism Organization outlined another segment: “Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building.

“Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts.

“Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.”

What next:

Tourism swaying travelers as well as revenue, albeit profits! So where Responsible Tourism (RT) or Sustainable Tourist (ST) shall land itself? Only a small number of persons have set up organizations to portray objectives of RT to try to engage interested companies or individuals and gang up in this name. ST finds it difficult to maintain its face in face of general tourism.

Nation-wide approach to RT and ST is nowhere in existence, alas. Rather limited number of companies practice such an approach, sentimental as it is. It is owing to their own belief and strong commitment for conservation of natural resources and attempt to give back to a habitat, its stake holders and employees at a reserve.

Only India and Nepal:

A research by Conservation Times Editors revealed not much new details. Knowing that RT and ST practices will offer greater revenue and more number of visitors, companies all over globe are less than inclined to embrace such practices.

Nepal has taken up homestay as part of Responsible Tourism and gains are loud and clear.

In India, the Southern state of Kerala happens to be the lone leading player and has demonstrated strong bent for such new idioms.

Its RT Mission says: The objective is to "make better places for people to visit and better places for people to live in."

The RT Mission is the nodal agency formed by the Government of Kerala to spread and implement much called for ideologies and initiatives.

Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister of Kerala, launched it on 20th October 2017. He was re-elected to same position in 2021 and re-emphasized it as a catalyst to healthier economic growth in that region swept by the Arabian Sea.

Three-fold benefits:

The Mission is envisaged with a 'triple-bottom-line' objectives which comprise

- *economic

- *social and

- *environmental responsibilities.

The mission aspires to provide an additional income and a better livelihood to farmers, traditional artisans, and marginalised people along with creating a social and environmental equilibrium. Like to

AFRICA ALIVE: AN ECO DAY OUT IN ENGLAND

By *Martin Goodman*

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Rhino and Giraffe



A huddled pair of Blue-eyed Black Lemur

The writer is a novelist and ardent wildlife supporter known for his ecological advocacy. He is based in Britain. - Editors

On the eastern tip of England, where East Anglia bulges into the North Sea, a sampling of Africa's wildlife is spread across sixty acres. As the UK's third Covid-19 lockdown ends I head for its reopening. What has kept me away till now? Perhaps worry about being corralled into a tourist experience. The chance for a glimpse of a post-pandemic world and shared human activity is suddenly touching.

The Park known as Africa Alive belongs to the charity Zoological Society of East Anglia (ZSEA). A trail from the entrance leads you past some of Africa's most iconic great beasts – cheetahs and lions in separate grassed enclosures. You then find the zoo is making the most of what can be sodden ground. Enclosures hold a herd of aquatic antelope: the Sitatunga, the lowland Nyala, and two endangered species of Lechwe, the Kafue Flats, and the Nile. If like me, you are encountering these hoofed beasts for the first time, that first sight triggers a question and answers are nearby. Explanatory boards name each species, show where they come from, how they breed and what they eat, and how endangered they are. Most animals on display are on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List. Many belong to European breeding programs (EEP). 'These programs aim to ensure a genetically variable breeding strategy for

individuals within zoos,' explains Sarah Lee, ZCEA's Living Collections Co-Ordinator. 'It's a management tool used alongside wild conservation programs for a particular species.

Follow the paths around the wet areas and you meet examples of Africa's domestic animals: buffalo, a flock of Cameroonian sheep, Ankole cattle with their wildly large horns – all across a stream beyond which Suffolk cattle munch the same marshy pasture.

Particularly innovative are the islands set inside a small lake. Each houses a pair of a threatened species of lemur, the water providing a natural barrier. The lemurs have their own wooden houses for sleeping but have trees to explore in their own island patch. A pair of blue-eyed black lemurs are outdoors in the chilled sunlight, curled into one ball, the eyes of one with the brightness of sky. Back in their Madagascan homeland these creatures, the only primates other than humans to have blue eyes as adults, are critically endangered.

One function of the zoos' drawing on the 350,000 a year that visit their two sites, is to fund and support partner conservation projects in-country. For the lemurs, this is the Lemur Conservation Association, AEECL. They help manage a protected area in Sahamalaza (northwest Madagascar) to include community support and education.

Around 98% of all lemur species are considered to be threatened, notes Sarah Lee. Part of the AEECL strategy

is to experience the incredible lemurs in their natural habitat through guided tours and a complete immersion in the amazing nature surrounding them. They have a purpose-built camp for visitors to stay in and an incredible array of wildlife is to be found in the surrounding forests.

To want to visit and help save these animals, you first need to know of their existence and bond with them. Meeting the lemurs in this English setting is a good first step in that process. A recent initiative is a conservation fund to help save fifteen species from extinction over the next five years. Professor David Field, the former CEO of this zoo charity, explained: "What we are trying to do is to help inspire people coming to our venues by our animals, so they form an emotional attachment and want to donate."

Near the lemur islands is a small herd of Addax. These are white horned herbivores, the horns twisting out of their black crown and a bright white stripe hooding their eyes. Creatures of the Sahara, they gain the moisture they need from the desert's plants. Largely due to illegal hunting, their numbers keep plummeting. As recent as 2013, fewer than 300 were thought to survive in the wild. Now that number has crashed to below 100. The only sustainable wild herd is thought to be on a reserve in Niger. The 600 animals in these captive breeding programs hold the hope that one day the wild will be kind enough to receive them back.

More than a thousand species of UK flora and fauna share the site, including twenty species of dragon and damsel flies. As a fabulous showpiece, the central acreage is given over to the 'Plains of Africa'. White rhinos stud the rocks of the hillside. Ostriches race around the rim. Giraffes reach their necks over the boundary to munch the grass on the raised surrounds. Zebras and blesboks (antelopes with a blaze of white on their faces) complete this gang of remarkable herbivores.

We human primates keep to the paths, often in groups with toddlers. On the way out, I converted my day ticket into an annual pass.

This outing in a managed natural world, with its focus on conservation, energized me so much that I have already dipped back for four refresher visits.

WE TO DO IT RESPONSIBLY

By Manoj Vardhan

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Rajasthan Governor, Pratibha Patil handing over Khaki uniform to a Forest Guard, next to her is Manoj Vardhan, who made the gesture for Ranthambhore Tiger Reserve.

The writer is a tour operator in India and his company has been among the pioneers of responsible tourism in India. - Editors

My trousers had become wet that morning from the dew. A Tiger was licking water below the terrace where I stood at the dreamy forest rest house, Jogi Mahal, Ranthambhore. I was six and along with my elder sister. I was visiting the park to live a wilderness life. What I saw there got etched in my brain: good and not-so-good! The die for my future was sort of cast: Try to make a change in wildlife conservation if I could.

The venture needed money. So, I dared to float a tour company in the early 1990s. Thanks to the overseas wildlife experts, my guests, and fellow tour operators my learning about wildlife and conservation-based tours and travel spiralled. Let me remember some of my early guests: General John Watts, Lady Di, Bernard Price, Lord Abernethy, John Playfair, Karen, and Derek Bryant, and yes, a score more. So, through caring for my guests, my approach to tourism also evolved. In the process of working with overseas visitors, I learnt how to support tourism

stakeholders. In the 1990s my tour company started contributing a small percentage of its revenue to the needs of stakeholders. It would turn to be a win-win-situation, indeed.

One project was pretty novel. Thanks to Royal Society for Protection of Birds that started giving to me used binoculars, annually, received from its members (it has more than a million members!). As a result, my company started offering binoculars to Forest Guards, Nature Guides and Volunteers. Most of them had never sported one. It transformed their bird identification skills. They became adept, some, as good as the overseas guests. Some even better, as they lived around forests and so knew their birds, animals, and, most importantly, their behaviour. My company organised the presentation of Khaki uniforms to forest guards of Ranthambore National Park. Thanks to Ms. Pratibha Patil, the then Governor of Rajasthan, who kindly agreed to formally present the uniforms to 124 Forest Guards. These forest guards were "casual employees" so were denied of such a facility. As a result, intruders in the forest took the guards lightly as they were not wearing khaki! She was bemused to know facts and

asked: why are you bearing the cost, Manoj? And I wanted to say that I am doing my bit in a hope that the forest officers, present there, would join hands. Sponsoring is a big word and I shudder to use it. However, I could do my bit. For instance, in 1997, my company decided to help the start-up now called the Indian Birding Fair. It turned 24 in 2021. I saw how my fellow countrymen were apathetic, while overseas people and institutions came forward to support, often without asking. I was lucky to have experienced first-hand, the British Birdwatching Fair and borrowed the idea of companies supporting the fair from there. For continued attendance to the fair, I am grateful to Bernard Price and his wife, Debbie. Not only are they ace birders and expert mammalians but also top-of-table tour operators making my attendance of the fair an aficionado event.

Thanks also to Graham Jones, who has become a life-long mentor for me. He cited the case of the Binocular project to Simon Rowland, managing director of WILDFOOT in UK. A new chapter started. Simon sponsored an Indian expert to fly to the UK to lecture on Tigers and Great Indian Bustards. Through him emerged my partnership with OPTICRON, a binocular manufacturing company. Its UK Manager, Pete Gamby handed over a suitcase-load of binoculars and spot-scopes. New, I asked? Pete humbly explained, the binoculars had a minor manufacturing defect, so the company is donating them for charity! Another opportunity pocketed.

More than a hundred nature friends from the Gir Lion Park, to Kaziranga, and in the Sundarbans too, Nature Guides sport these binoculars, around their necks, like steely garlands. This has added to conservation value across India. Can I label this as responsible tourism?

Thanks also to David A Ferguson, and to Edward J McCrea who gave me tips on how to be a responsible tourism steward. They represented the US Fish & Wildlife Service and were leading conservation projects in India for a couple of decades. Knowledge at no cost to me, yes, and I got enriched. My gratitude to all of them who, often without being asked, offered the truth on sustainable, responsible tourism to me.

REMEMBERING PRINCE PHILIP AT PROJECT TIGER EVENT

By Samar Singh,
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The photo shows (from left to right): H.S. Panwar as Director, Project Tiger, Samar Singh, Joint Secretary, for Wildlife, and Director, Wildlife, as well as Member Secretary, Indian Board for Wildlife, and T.N. Khoshoo, then Secretary, Department of Environment, Government of India, in a dialogue with Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh in New Delhi in 1983 when the first decade of Project Tiger was celebrated.

This picture courtesy Samar Singh, New Delhi.

The author served in the Indian Administrative Service and had opportunity to rub shoulders with many an eminent persona. - Editors

HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, who passed away recently, was a leading figure in the conservation movement which gained ground in the second half of the twentieth century. In a televised interview that I had the good fortune to do with him for the Doordarshan (India's Public Television Broadcaster) in 1983, I asked when and how he got interested in conservation matters, whereupon he disclosed that he was always interested in nature, particularly in birds, and then gradually wider issues concerning the degrading environment got him more involved. This coincided with the setting up of the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Prince Philip was among its founders.

In 1961, the WWF International was formed with headquarters in Switzerland. The same year the WWF-UK was established, and Prince Philip became its first President, a position which he gave up on becoming the President of WWF International in 1981. He remained in that pivotal position till 1996 and in that capacity, he was also the Vice President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Initially, it is at the meetings of the IUCN Council, which I attended as a Regional Councillor from 1981, that I was able to meet and interact with Prince Philip. He usually enquired about forest and wildlife-related matters and especially about the progress of Project Tiger. So, when the tenth anniversary of Project Tiger came in 1983, my proposal that Prince Philip should be invited to the main event was approved by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who was then the chairperson of the Indian Board for Wildlife. It was then decided that as Prince Philip would be accompanying Queen Elizabeth to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to be hosted by India at New Delhi in November 1983, the Project Tiger event should be held at that time. Finally, the function was held on 22 November under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister and Prince Philip was the chief guest. It was a historic event in which the success of Project Tiger was highlighted and those responsible were recognised. Besides, on that occasion the National Wildlife Action Plan, the first such action plan for the country, was released by the Prime Minister and the National Wildlife Conservation Award, the first such award instituted by the government, was conferred on the legendary Dr. Salim Ali. Two days later, Prince Philip visited the Gir National

Park in the company of Maharaja Fatehsinhrao Gaekwad, then President of WWF India.

Another unforgettable memory of my association with Prince Philip is his week-long visit in November 1994 on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of WWF India. Having joined WWF India as Secretary-General a year earlier, I made all preparations for the anniversary events. The Governing Body of WWF India headed by Dr. MS Swaminathan decided to invite for the occasion Prince Philip in his capacity as the President of WWF International and he was the chief guest at the main function held at the WWF India head office in New Delhi on 27 November, the foundation date of WWF India. The Union Minister for Environment and Forest, Shri Suresh Prabhu, also attended the event, which witnessed the start of the Indira Gandhi Conservation Monitoring Centre set up by WWF India in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and Forest. A fund-raising event was organised the following day and Prince Philip's presence helped in making it a success.

The rest of the Prince's itinerary, also drawn up by WWF India, included a day in Mumbai, where the Cricket Club of India (CCI) under the presidentship of Raj Singh Dungarpur organised a function in which Prince Philip opened a WWF India Nature Shop in the CCI premises and addressed a well-attended gathering of CCI and WWF members. The next day we flew to Bangalore and then proceeded by road to Mysore for the field trip to Bandipur and Mudumalai National Parks. On behalf of WWF India, I accompanied Prince Philip throughout this period. Air travel to Mumbai and Bangalore was in the private aeroplane in which Prince Philip had travelled from England and I noticed that he piloted it himself when taking-off and landing. Once the plane was airborne, he would hand it over to his co-pilot and come out of the cockpit to sit with the passengers. He told me: "It is not much fun flying an airborne plane".

Flying was one of several hobbies and interests of Prince Philip, such as polo, riding, driving, sailing, photography and, of course, birdwatching. However, it is in the field of conservation that he attained the stature of a world leader. I was fortunate to be associated with him on a few occasions that will always remain memorable for me.

DUKE OF EDINBURGH AS A CRICKETER

By *Hartley Anderson*

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The writer is a cricketer of yore and based in Australia.



Prince Philip batting

The Duke of Edinburgh was an active servant of the WWF International and on his recent death, the WWF International issued a statement: "Prince Philip was a pivotal patron of WWF, serving as a passionate voice, advocate, and champion for the organization's work from its creation and particularly as WWF International President from 1981 to 1996.

It should also be noted that in his youth Prince Philip was a cricketer, and he was Patron of the British Forty Club since 1961. Some years ago, he said in an interview on the radio "The important thing about team games is it's really part of social education.

Because it's fun, you learn to cooperate, you learn to sublimate your personality into the team. You learn how to win and lose. You learn how to get through society very easily through games, which is very difficult to learn in any other way."

The Conservation Times acknowledges his great contribution to our cause and his desire to educate the world to observe our guiding principles.

CAN A \$ BE SPENT RESPONSIBLY?

-Editors

The hotel industry is consistently growing, with over 700,000 hotels around the world and contributing over \$3.41 trillion to the global economy. In 2019, the global hotel industry was worth \$570 billion USD. In 2018, the hotel company contributing the most revenue was the Marriott chain which generated \$20.8 billion USD. -Editors

The rise in purchasing power, the desire for travel experiences and the increasing number of digital influences are fuelling the growth in the travel industry. Travelers are spending well over \$840 billion a year on hotel stays worldwide and the most expensive room comes in at \$100,000 a night!

Sector at a glance:

- There were over **700,000 hotels and resorts worldwide in 2019.**
 - The industry is thriving and worth over **\$570 billion in 2019 (pre-pandemic period).**
 - The global hotel market has over **4 million hotel rooms** worldwide.
 - The **average room rate** in the US is \$120.01.
 - The travel industry is worth around **\$1.6 trillion globally** and accounts for one-tenth of the world's GDP.
 - There are over **91,000 hotels and motels** in the US, generating over **\$194 billion** a year.
 - The hotel and motel industry had a total industry revenue of **\$206 billion in 2019**, outperforming the wider economy for the last 5 years in the US.
 - There are **100,535 businesses within the hotel industry**, with more consistently being added to the industry landscape.
 - In 2018, there was an **increase of 669,460 rooms** in the US.
 - Over **173 million people** are employed in the hotel and motel industry.
- ## Sustainable goals
- **58%** of travellers chose their hotel based on whether the hotel contributed to the community and gave back to the planet.

- **7%** of people will pay \$10-\$15 extra a night if the hotel is more environmentally friendly.

- **81%** of people surveyed travelled green by using recycling facilities in their hotel.

- **70%** of travellers said they would be more likely to book hotels and accommodation knowing it was eco-friendly.

- Over the past few years, the concept of going green has seen huge growth and this is no exception in the travel sector.

Mexico earns honour:

Global tourism accounts for 8% of greenhouse gasses and some hotels are starting to take notice and implement environmentally friendly practices to help them become more sustainable.

There are thousands of eco-friendly hotels around the world to choose from, but America was considered as one of the most environmentally friendly countries based on Expedia traveller reviews.

Sandos Caracol Eco Resort, Mexico was labelled as the most eco-friendly hotel around the world.

Can a dollar be spent responsibly?

If so, this sector will become the new economic darling in the world.

Sources:

Responsible Travel, Statista, Balance Holidays, Country Living, Aventri

<https://www.condorferries.co.uk/hotel-industry-statistics#:~:text=HOTEL%20INDUSTRY%20STATISTICS-,How%20many%20hotels%20are%20there%20in%20the%20world%3F,over%2016.4%20million%20hotel%20rooms>

A Definition?

The Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism was taken at an event in Johannesburg in 2002. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) came out with a more user-friendly text in 2005 through its World Committee on Tourism Ethics.

HOW I BECAME A BIRD PHOTOGRAPHER

By *Wendy van der Eijk*

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Wendy van der Eijk

Wendy has developed an amazing hobby and is stepping up the conservation ladder around The Hague in the Netherlands. - Editors

My name is Wendy van der Eijk. I am an amateur photographer from a village near The Hague in the Netherlands, Europe.

In 2018, my father passed away. He was a retired professional photographer. When we had to clear out his house, we found several Nikon DSLR cameras (with mirrors). I never was very interested in photography, but I was curious if they would still work, and so I bought an old-fashioned roll of film. That was a fiasco. The camera apparently did not transport the film, because there were no pictures on the film when I got it developed. However, I had so much fun using the camera, that I decided to invest in a digital one. In May 2019, I bought a Nikon D7200, a so-called APS-C camera, with an 18-300 mm lens.

I started hiking in the forest at a 10 minutes' walk from my house. My images were not that great, so I decided to register for a photography course. It was so much fun, and I learned a lot about the settings (ISO, shutter speed, and aperture) and composition. After the beginners' course, I also did an

advanced course. It was with the same group of people, and we all had a great time. Even now, we are in contact and do photography trips together.

My hikes became longer, and I learned a lot by just going out with my camera and practice taking pictures. Soon I discovered that I preferred to photograph birds. But most of the birds were just out of reach for me to focus on with the lens that I had. By the end of 2019, I decided to buy a Nikkor200-500 mm lens. That was such an improvement! I loved how I could make clear images of buzzards, common kestrels, and lots of other birds.

My father-in-law, a long-time bird lover, is surprised about how many different birds I see and photograph on my hikes. I guess that it has to do with how I hike. I do not have a firm quick pace, but every time I hear a bird sing, I keep looking until I find it, and then I try to photograph it. I also look at everything that moves. This method has proven quite successful.

After I have taken images of the birds, I come home and then I import them to my computer. I adjust some things like light, size, and saturation, and then I use

a special website (waarneming.nl) to identify which bird I have photographed. It is a Dutch website not only for birds but also for animals, insects, and plants. On the site, I read about the bird that I found and so I learn a lot about them. I recognize a lot of birds by their song now.

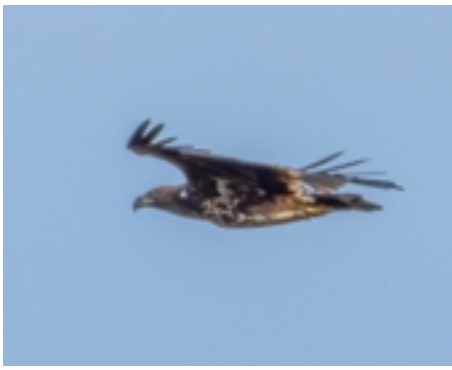
For me it is a relaxing time when I can get out of the house for one of my hikes and just walk, no route planned, but just wander about. It often happens that I have hiked many kilometers by the time I get home again. And, of course, the bonus is when I have found a new bird.

I love to hike alone, but my husband joins me often as well. He helps me to look for birds. It is fun to do that together. We try to find new nature areas every time. And to our surprise, we do not have to travel very far to discover beautiful new nature. There are different kinds of nature in the Netherlands. We have forests, dunes, beaches, polders, wetlands, and lakes. So, there is a lot to choose from. There are several preservation services that each manage their own areas. Some parts are closed to the public, usually because of the breeding season. In other areas you must pay a fee to get in, but there is a certain number of people allowed in per day. But most nature areas are free to use for the public.

At the moment our national bird is endangered: the black-tailed godwit (*Limosa limosa*) or as we call it in Dutch: grutto. Because farmlands have



Our national bird: The Black-tailed Godwit



White-tailed Eagle



Sunrise at Biesbosch national park



Windmills in the polder



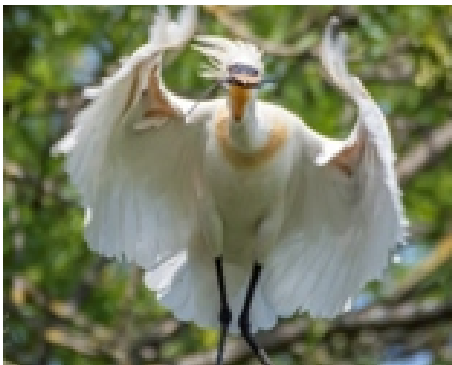
Great Tit



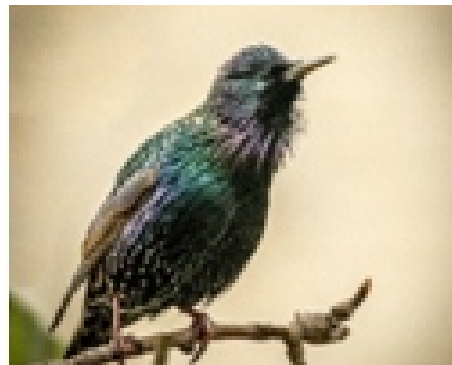
Robin



Great spotted Woodpecker



Spoonbill



Starling



Bohemia waxwing

no flowers and herbs anymore but only protein-rich grass for cattle, the birds cannot feed their chicks with enough insects. And often the grass is cut before the chicks can fly. There is a campaign going on at this moment to create awareness with farmers to leave some areas for the birds like the godwits. We hope that it can save these birds. The godwits are very special. They are in our country from February to July/August. By then they will migrate to Africa in one flight, no resting. They can fly non-stop for three days and I think that is amazing.

We sometimes get special birds visiting our country or parts of our country where they normally are not found. Like the bohemian waxwing a few months ago. A beautiful bird that normally only is found on the other side of the Netherlands. But now there was this one bird close to our area. It attracted a lot of people that wanted to see this special bird. Too many people

to my liking, so I did not want to go. But after a few weeks, we decided to go to see if it was still there, no expectations. The crowds were gone now. And to our surprise, the bird was still there! And I was able to photograph it quite clearly.

Or a few weeks ago I went to the Biesbosch, a beautiful nature area in the southwestern part of the Netherlands. It is known that the white-tailed eagle and the osprey are found there. Not many, but each year there are more, and they are nesting here too.

As we were getting ready to conclude our visit, I suddenly saw a white-tailed eagle, and I was able to photograph it in flight. And less than 5 minutes later I saw an osprey and could photograph it in flight as well.

Such a happy feeling it gave me! Such impressive birds. The eagle is called 'the flying door' in the Netherlands, because of its wide wingspan (193-244 centimeters). The osprey only eats fish.

It builds its nest near water. In our country, they are nesting since 2016. There are just a few pairs nesting here. So, it is very exciting that I got to see one of them.

I post my images on Instagram ([wendyvandereijk_photography](https://www.instagram.com/wendyvandereijk_photography)), and I like it very much when people comment on my photos. Recently one of my images of a flying mute swan was published in a book that teaches how to photograph birds.

It belongs to a course of a popular photo magazine in the Netherlands. It is nice to know that my images are appreciated by other people.

Some more common birds in the Netherlands are great tit, blue tit, robin, sparrow, blackbird, starling, and great spotted woodpecker. We see them often in our backyards.

It is a shame that my father did not live to see me using a camera now. He would have loved it, I am sure.

BERA SAFARI LODGE: RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

- Editors



Sundeep Bhutoria,
writer of
The Bera Bond.



Shatrunjay Pratap Singh, his wife, Katyaini Singh with both kids and the Bera Safari Lodge in background.

The Bera Bond is a new book, one person's startling discovery of a so far non-descript leopard cluster in scrub and gravel land of Rajasthan, India. Sundeep Bhutoria's love for wildlife took him to this countryside where leopards and shepherds live together. Hardly any natural prey available for this predator there. So, it picks up a sheep or a goat from any herd which shepherds lead. They do not mind. And take it as God's will!

Sundeep states, "While across the globe, the coexistence of big cats with humans is marked by conflicts, the leopards and the villagers in Bera have not attacked each other for decades, Leopards are intensely private creatures, not given to flamboyant displays of magnificence as the tiger often is. My book captures not just the thrill of close encounters with leopards but also the challenges of preserving their habitats."

The 170-page book offers to readers an incredible journey and a new experience, called "Responsible

Tourism." Is it? Sundeep introduces Shatrunjay Pratap Singh and his wife, Katyaini Kumari, as practicing "responsible tourism" at Bera. The book is a novel product to weave a so far unseen tapestry of hospitality hinged with wild mammals, birds, reptiles, etc., few would imagine attaining.

"Only 5 rooms at my safari lodge. Yes, I do not wish to increase tourism here." asserts Shatru. He is a fierce conservationist. He has dug his heels here "to add value in lives of leopards and shepherds, offering to each one what they had been denied so far; hoteliers pocket tourism money and seldom spend it for those who are responsible to draw them here."

He does not wink to elaborate his ordeals and pleasures. Fighting legal battles in courts to try to ban illegal stone quarrying that ultimately alters leopard-habitat, training villagers as 'leopard-guides' giving them binoculars and enabling them to live better! The list of his responsibilities can be

endless.

Shatru's maternal grandfather, Rana Chander Singh was the Ruler of Umarmkot in Pakistan. Umarmkot happens to be the place of birth of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, who ruled India. Shatru shuns family luxury and is happy to smell Bera's arid soil. The Bera Safari Lodge is a rustic luxury with homecooked recipes that leave one wanting for more, thanks to Katyaini Kumari's personal touch. The couple runs the lodge with help from their twins.

Sundeep calls himself a 'social activist' working in fields of international cultural cooperation, social welfare, promotion of Indian arts, and wildlife conservation. He hails from Churu, an extremely arid region in Rajasthan, but is based in Kolkata. His other books are *The Safari*, *Aap Bity Jag Bity*, *My Life My Travels*, *China Diary*, and *Calcuttascape*, *Musings of a Globetrotter*. The Bera is published by Macmillan. (www.sundeepbhutoria.com).

COMMUNITY HOMESTAY TOURISM IN NEPAL

By **Binita Pandey**

Email: binita.p862@gmail.com



Ghale Gaun Homestay in Nepal

Binita is an educator and conducts research on the pollinators of Nepal. She lives in Kathmandu, Nepal -Editors

Tourism is not a new concept in a developing country like Nepal. In Nepal, tourism is considered the most attractive and effective means for economic growth and development. Nepal ranks 103rd out of 136 countries in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017 (World Economic Forum 2017). The country holds a comparatively better position in terms of natural resources with the 27th position. With the advent of globalization, Nepal has been promoting beautiful villages as destinations for tourism.

The concept of homestay tourism in Nepal evolved with the Sirubari Gurung village tourism model in Syangja district in 1997. Homestay by its definition means staying in someone's home as a paying guest hosted by a local family. In the Nepali language homestay is "Gharbas" a word that means to live in a home. According to Brohman 1966, Community-based tourism development would seek to strengthen

institutions designed to enhance local participation and promote the economic, social and cultural well-being of the popular majority. In Nepal, it is evident that poverty is widespread; its acuteness is even higher in the rural/mountain areas. Nepal is a country where over 85% of the people live in rural areas. Community-based tourism is designed to uplift the service provider, employees, and the local community on several aspects of well being. These well being factors can be financial well being, community attachment, finding their community the best place to raise a family, feeling about the meaning of life, and subjective well being. In homestay tourism, both the environment and culture are commoditized; market value is created with the demand of visitors.

Initially, homestays in Sirubari in Syangja and Ghalegaon in Lamjung were the first places to start this approach to trekking. Later, other places in Kathmandu, Kavrepalanchowk, Chitwan, Makwanpur, Gorkha, Illam, Palpa, Kailali, Kalikot, and Nuwakot started to facilitate visitors with homestays. In 2011, the Government of Nepal

introduced the community homestay to promote tourism. It was initiated to provide lodging to the one million tourists that were expected to arrive in the country that year.

Homestay tourism in Nepal is divided into two types- Community and Private Homestay. These two forms of homestays indicate the usage of either community-owned buildings or private houses to provide lodgings. As of the end of 2019, a total of 281 homestay units (187 community homestay units and 94 private homestay units) were registered at the Department of Tourism (DoT), Kathmandu. Homestays registered at DoT belong to 14 districts viz. Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Kavre, Lalitpur, Makwanpur, Chitwan, Ramechhap, Kaski, Saptari, Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Pyuthan, and Mugu and have a total of 507 homestay rooms and 878 homestay beds (Nepal Tourism Statistics, MoCTCA 2019).

The Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA), the line ministry responsible for registration, regulation, facilitation, and promotion of various tourism establishments currently regulates and promotes the homestays under the procedures set by Homestay Working Procedure 2067 (MoCTCA, 2010).

Homestay trekking enables the local families to earn by working at their home and at the same time allows tourists to enjoy the hospitality of the local people while learning and exchanging cultural elements. It provides a financial reward to the local indigenous community for conservation of the environment and their culture (Laurie & Radcliffe, 2005).

Home-stay tourism plays a vital role in uplifting the economic condition of families in rural areas and reduces rural poverty. It also integrates all activities of tourism such as trekking, cultural tourism, agro-tourism, health tourism, and ecotourism (Devkota, 2010). Moreover, homestay is a good source of earning foreign currency.

With the current COVID-19 situation, homestays have ended in Nepal. However, it is expected that at the end of the pandemic, the local homestay industry will once again flourish and continue its increasing role in preserving Nepal's wildlife, environment, and culture while benefitting rural families and villages.

ORGANIC FARMS INVITE YOU TO STAY AND LEARN

By Rosamma Thomas

Email: rosammat@gmail.com



Organic farming in Pune

The writer is an experienced journalist distinguishing in off beat items especially highlighting cause of down trodden and stake holders. - Editors

How organic farming can yield more to both producers and consumers? Maharashtra has some examples to offer. The four farms I describe here all encourage visitors. At two of them, people are welcome to stay for a few days, at a modest fee.

Afrin Kale studied engineering in college. She came to farming through love – she married a classmate, whose extended family was into farming. She took to farming, eventually moving out of the family farm and buying about five acres of land on the foothills of the Sahyadri Mountains, a range of the Western Ghats, in Ambegaon Tehsil of Pune district.

Afrin's farm runs with no chemical inputs at all – she grows different varieties of wheat, rice, radish, corn, mustard, flaxseed, millets, bamboo, melons, French beans, and other crops. Her farm is about 30 km from Pune city, and she has now a network of 15 other organic farmers who plan what they will each cultivate so that there is richness and diversity in their collective produce. They now have regular customers, to whom they deliver their produce every week. A rate list is circulated over WhatsApp to customers, so they can place orders. "This land was quite marshy, there was

a stream flowing through. That is why I got it relatively cheap some 12 years ago. The stream has been channelled, and in the area, which was low-lying and always marshy, I dug a pond where I have begun cultivating fish. To have a healthy crop, one needs to ensure the health of the soil," this enterprising farmer tells me.

Vivek and Neena Broome run a 16-acre farm to the west of Pune city. This is a farm that now stands like an oasis of

green in a vastly expanding city – just next door, a massive construction project is in the works. The Broomes like to call their space a "food forest" – the trees, many of them planted some 20 years ago, now bear fruit, and the green cover is just allowed to grow as it will. There is a small pond with an abundance of water lilies and lotus, the water hyacinth is allowed to grow too.

There is a small stay facility at the farm, on payment of a fee. Visitors are encouraged to learn about the farming routine when they visit. Many visitors are themselves seeking to learn how to replicate this food forest in other spaces. Some arrive to check out the nursery and take back plants.

At Velhe Road near Pune, Parikshit and Prachi Dhulugade have been trying an important experiment. In collaboration with their friend Abhijeet Wagh, this couple is recycling kitchen waste from the city, using it as compost in the field, and growing a steady cycle of crops that are then sold, sometimes to the people from whom the kitchen waste was taken.

Wagh collects the waste from about 600 households in Pune city and transports it to the farm, where a composting unit has been installed. This drum can be swung around, aerating the contents. After about a week in the drum, the waste is allowed to cook in the open air; the temperature in the compost beds could rise to about 60 degrees Celsius.

Once the cooking process is complete, in about two months, the compost is considered ready to be laid in the field. This unique experiment is something that people from the city sometimes arrive to witness.

"We are thinking of opening a home stay facility too and will welcome visitors to stay once we have that ready," Prachi says. Visitors would also be able to go up a nearby hill, for a short trekking expedition.

Babulal Gandhi's farm close to Phaltan, about 100 km from Pune, is a 100-acre farm rich in chickoo and mango trees; there is also an abundance of tamarind. There are cows and a whole host of other crops – the 90-year-old Babulal is a proud farmer, one who has taught his whole family the tricks of the trade.

This farm lies on the leeward side of the mountain, and soil quality was initially not very good. Babulal Gandhi created a large natural water body in the land that now makes up about 25 acres – this serves as a source of water for the whole farm. Even with this lake, the height of summer can see water troubles on the farm, Madhavi, his niece, says.

On this farm, Babulal Gandhi has erected a space where children from the village can arrive and stay for a few days, learning about natural farming and getting a taste of life on the farm. Visitors are encouraged to arrive in groups of at least 10 since a small program of learning is already in place and doing it with smaller groups is not economical.

If you wish to visit any of these farms, here is the contact information:

For Afrin Kale's farm: 9850917203; For Vivek and Neema Broome's farm: jefarmpune@gmail.com; 9850952359 (whatsapp only); For Parikshit's farm: 89996 71036; Madhavi Gandhi's farm: 9850804940;

More on this subject:

<https://countercurrents.org/2021/04/babulal-gandhi-over-90-years-old-and-still-a-hardy-farmer/>;

<https://countercurrents.org/2021/03/vivek-gour-broomes-food-forest/>

<https://countercurrents.org/2021/02/afrin-kale-how-an-engineer-found-her-calling-in-farming/>

<https://www.newsclick.in/ECOFarm-where-pune-kitchen-waste-turns-organic-vegetables>

RESTORING TRUST

By Emily Weiss

Managing Director and Accenture's Global Travel Industry Sector Lead



As the Global Travel Industry Sector Lead for Accenture, the writer is responsible for driving the growth of Accenture's Travel business across Hospitality, Aviation, and Travel Services through the delivery of transformational industry solutions. - Editors

From the Grand Canyon to the Great Wall of China, the travel industry is at an impasse. On one hand, COVID-19 brought the sector to a near standstill. On the other, the pandemic's shockwaves have made consumers reassess their priorities: more toward health, hygiene and safety than simply focusing on price and destination.

Some travel and hospitality brands have fared better than others in recent months. While many have provided admirable public support throughout the crisis—such as hotels “medicalizing” their facilities to support healthcare efforts—they have not been immune to criticism. The latest wave of Accenture research found one in three consumers expressing dissatisfaction with travel companies' response to cancellations and refunds, for example. Meanwhile, a quarter believe that new health and hygiene measures are not being communicated properly.

In this climate, regaining consumer favor needs to be an urgent priority. Just 19% of consumers feel confident about travelling in the coming months, so clearly communicating the steps that are being taken to protect them is key to reassuring consumers and to rebooting growth.

What is needed: What does this new

world order look like? And how should travel and hospitality companies prepare for the post-pandemic world?

As the crisis begins to recede, brands are looking to reassess their services, realigning core offerings with travellers' changing priorities.

As part of this, they will likely accelerate their digitization activities, shifting to contactless interactions as the norm, such as e-payments only, facial recognition technology to minimize interactions, self-service customer service, and greater use of predictive analytics and automation to personalize experiences.

These decisions and changes will have long-term consequences and may determine the brand's survival so it would be a mistake to think of them as a short-term solution. In fact, the shockwaves of the crisis will be felt for many years to come, marked by long-term uncertainty around cost and business viability, and survival calls for bold, wide scale innovation. With that in mind, we believe that the following actions will be essential:

Customer expectations: As they start to travel again, customers will expect health precautions to be more prominent than ever before. In practice, this may mean brands introducing health screenings in much the same way that airports carry out security checks. Brands should also focus on using passenger and guest information to build confidence, such as by providing practical advice around ensuring personal safety while interacting with other travellers,

allowing the business to show how it is sensitive to public health concerns.

Customer optimization: Not only will operators need to meet new hygiene standards, they will be expected to put customer needs over operational efficiencies. This may not require all businesses to start their operating models from scratch but will force many in the industry to rethink how they accommodate traveller preferences and meet changing hygiene procedures, cancellation policies, and norms of human engagement.

New strengths: While travel and hospitality brands will depend more on technology, they should take pains to prepare their employees for unfamiliar challenges. They could, for example, ensure they have cross-training capabilities and scalable infrastructure to expand training capability in line with changing demand. And they should remember that their customers will, more than ever, expect to see them acting like responsible employers and making their people's wellbeing a priority.

Deeper change: With so much change afoot, brands are adjusting their services at short notice; mergers and acquisitions will likely increase, and the number of competitors in certain markets may decline. Travel and hospitality providers will need to continue providing fair-priced services, while potentially winding down parts of their operations. We could also expect governments to increase their participation and eventually introduce “fair price” regulation. Brands should understand how changes like these might affect them and consider how they might take action in response.

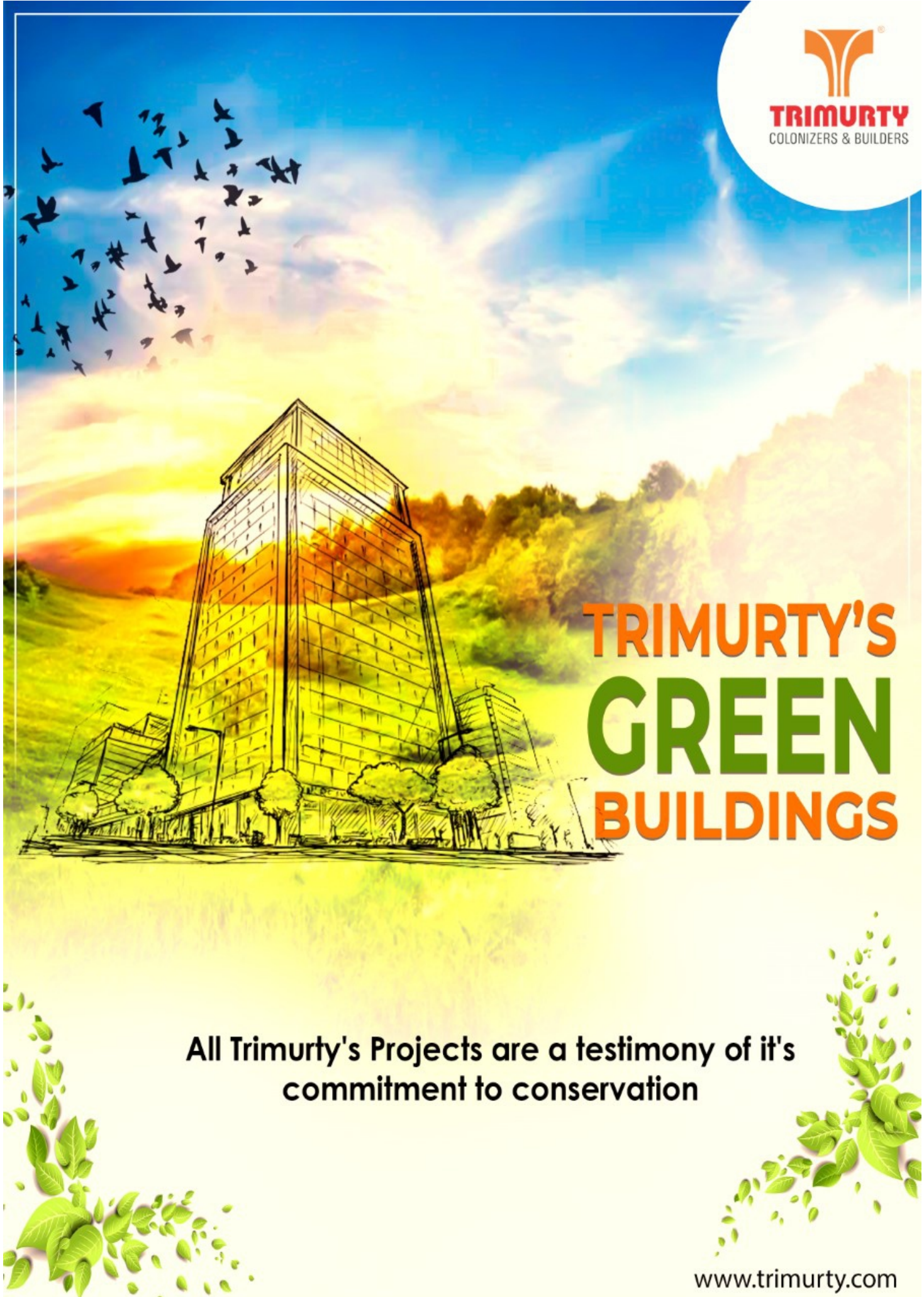
There is no doubt that COVID-19 has changed every aspect of the travel and hospitality sector. In the short-term, companies must continue to make fast—and difficult—decisions to balance consumer confidence with business sustainability.

Courtesy: <https://hospitalitytech.com/restoring-trust-travel-requires-hospitality-take-4-specific-actions>





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Hartley Anderson is a Sydney, Australia resident who, after more than fifty years in sales and marketing roles, has decided it was time to pursue leisure activities. His recent and new activity which is relevant to conservation is beekeeping. He has a strong interest in India.



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Martin Goodman is an award-winning writer and publisher based in the UK. His book *Client Earth* told the tale of eco-lawyers on their global battle to save the planet from environmental collapse. He is Emeritus Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Hull.



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Ed McCrea is President of Environmental Education and Conservation Global, a US nonprofit conservation organization. Over the last fifty 50 years, he has worked in environmental education and biodiversity conservation at the local, state, national, and international levels.



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Amit is an eco-lover based in Dallas, Texas. Believing that a traveler always starts out in his backyard, Amit traveled extensively across India. He kept his passion for nature alive after moving to North America and has traveled extensively around the continent.



Sharma, Satish

Authored 11 books on forest, wildlife management and biodiversity, specialized in ethnobotany and ethnozoology, did PhDs on Plant life of Weaver Birds (1991) and Study of Biodiversity and Ethnobiology of Phulwari WL Sanctuary (2007), former Forest Officer, based at Udaipur.



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Rosamma Thomas is a freelance journalist based in Maharashtra, India. She has worked in radio and print journalism. She has only ever lived in cities, despite being a wild creature at heart. She has supported by writing on a unique cause like House Sparrow ex situ breeding initiatives.