



Black rhinoceros

# A Quandary

**Audley's Marketing Manager, Jim Millward, discusses a dilemma facing many travellers.**

The dilemma is a simple one, 'What's the effect of my trip on the wildlife I'm going to see? Am I hastening the demise of that rare animal or fragile habitat, or will my trip help preserve it in some way? If you were looking for a black and white answer then you may be disappointed, but first of all lets get the 'bias' issue out of the way. Here's the marketing manager of a travel company weighing up the pros and cons of going to see wildlife, he's not going to say 'don't go'. You're right, but what I hope to present you with are a reasoned argument for travelling, and what you can do, as ultimately it's your trip. I also profess to having a foot in both camps, I have a degree in biology and a keen interest in wildlife and conservation issues.

One of my major points of reference when researching this article was a very dry document by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), their Policy Statement on Travel for Tourism, an enlightening read for those who want to delve further, you'll find a link at the end of the article.

The major pressures on wildlife come from global warming and habitat encroachment by humans, be they subsistence farmers or multinational

companies. Tourism plays a small part, but none-the-less it can be a negative one, for example, nesting turtles disturbed by uncontrolled viewing, or worse, their sites disappearing under a hotel development. But I would argue that tourism as a whole is a force that encourages local communities to protect wildlife and habitats, because of the jobs and benefits it brings. Would Kenya's Masai Mara or Nepal's Chitwan national parks be as we find them today if there wasn't the pressure to preserve them for visitors? They would undoubtedly exist, as there are many individuals and organisations out there championing their cause, but I believe that they are better preserved because of tourism, but only when it is tightly controlled. I'll take an example in Namibia from the WWF document referred to earlier, as it's a popular destination for Audley travellers and one of the most clear cut examples of where tourism has made a difference. The Kunene region was subject to poaching in the 1980s which had devastated the populations of black rhino and desert-adapted elephant, but community led eco-tourism projects were introduced providing alternative income and placing value on preserving the wildlife, but also setting aside areas where visitors weren't permitted.



## Gorillas in Rwanda

Tracking gorillas in Rwanda's Virunga Mountains is an amazing experience. Permits cost US\$500 which entitles you to one, carefully controlled, hour with the gorillas. The money goes towards conservation of habitat, anti-poaching efforts and education of local communities.



Spirit Bear – Photograph taken by Chris Darimont, Raincoast



Mountain gorilla, Rwanda

### How do I know whether my trip is having a positive effect?

We only work with boat owners, lodges and operators that behave in a responsible and sustainable manner, with good environmental practises and careful wildlife observation. They tend to be in the business because they have a passion for wildlife themselves and it's inherently in their interest, both from a business and personal perspective, to have good conservation practises. Many go far and beyond the call of business such as Governor's Camp in Kenya which runs a number of it's own projects to educate and involve local communities in conservation, or are run by the communities themselves such as many of the lodges we use in Ecuador. We also rely on feedback from Audley clients, telling us about good practises they've encountered and bad ones they've seen.

### What is Audley doing?

As well as only working with responsible partners overseas we also support a number of environmental, as well as social, projects and charities around the world. These include the World Land Trust and Raincoast (in Canada) who both work to preserve and extend habitats; and Friends of Conservation, who specialise in community-based conservation projects; the Royal Society for Nature Conservation in Jordan who have been instrumental in creating reserves in the country; and Tour Operators for Tigers in India. Each of our regional teams has a responsible travel co-ordinator charged with highlighting responsible travel issues in their part of the world and co-ordinating fundraising. We carbon offset all our business travel.



Audley has sponsored a bio-gas project on the fringes of Kenya's Masai Mara. The unit, which produces cooking gas from the fermentation of cattle dung, lowers the village's reliance on fire wood and hence reduces deforestation. It will also serve as a demonstration unit for the region, encouraging other communities to install similar ones.

### What can I do?

There's plenty you can do. Use accommodation that has high 'eco' credentials, these are not always the most luxurious (although some are) but usually offer the best experience (see Harsha's article on page 40 for a prime example). Don't just tick the box, by which I mean if you've travelled to Indonesia to see orang-utans, why not make a donation (ideally a regular direct debit) to an organisation like Friends of Conservation, the World Land Trust or the WWF. Spread the word: chances are you will have friends and family with similar interests to your own, so encourage them to travel in an environmentally friendly way as possible, or give a talk about your trip at a local club or school highlighting conservation issues you've seen on your travels.

### The CO<sub>2</sub> Dilemma

Jet travel produces CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gases, so are the positive effects of your trip to Rwanda or Tanzania outweighed by your flight? Carbon off-setting certainly helps, and we run a scheme through Friends of Conservation to allow you to do this.

### Finally

As I said at the start, there isn't a black and white answer, and I hope I haven't clouded the waters even more. I firmly believe that a wildlife trip with Audley has a positive effect but we can all choose to do more.



Audley's James Pook ran the 2010 London marathon for Friends of Conservation, raising £1,333 which will be put towards conservation projects in Kenya.

### WEB plus

You can find links to all the organisations mentioned at [www.audleytravel.com/rt](http://www.audleytravel.com/rt) as well to our Traveller's Code and responsible travel policies. To read the full WWF policy statement on Travel for Tourism visit [http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/travel\\_tourism\\_update.pdf](http://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/travel_tourism_update.pdf)