



# Wilding, urban demand key for preservation



FRANCIS VORHIES

WHEN we celebrate our rich diversity of fauna and flora on World Wildlife Day, marked yesterday, let's also spare a thought for policymakers who have been grappling for decades with the nexus between the preservation of biodiversity and its sustainable utilisation.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Strategy released in 1980 set out sustainable utilisation as a key objective for conservation "to ensure the sustainable utilisation of species and ecosystems, which support millions of rural communities as well as major industries".

This global commitment to sustainable utilisation was reaffirmed in the 1992 Convention on Biological Diver-

sity (CBD). In 2018, the 14th CBD Conference of the Parties focused on the wild meat sector with the adoption of Voluntary Guidance for a Sustainable Wild Meat Sector.

The guidance explains: "Wild meat has long served as a source of nutrition for millions of people in many regions of the world, in both developed and developing countries. In Central Africa, it is estimated that more than 4 million tons of wild meat are consumed each year, most of it supplying urban areas."

The guidance also aims to: "Ensure that the supply of wild meat is sustainably and legally managed at the source; reduce demand for unsustainably managed and/or illegal wild meat in towns and cities (and) create an enabling environment for the sustainable management of wild meat."

In support of these aims, the African Wildlife Economy Institute (AWEI) at Stellenbosch University has set up the Sustainable Wild Meat Research Group, that focuses on two key topics: urban demand and rewilding.

Interestingly, the CBD Wild Meat

Guidance has a view that wild meat should predominately be consumed rurally where it is produced and the demand for wild meat from urban communities should be reduced.

However, this may not be realistic. In light of the rapid urbanisation and the increasing purchasing power of urban dwellers, notably across Africa, as well as acknowledging the capacity of markets to meet consumer demands with supply – whether legally or illegally – the AWEI Research Group is exploring what is needed to ensure a sustainable wild meat sector that supplies urban and rural areas.

Meeting urban demand for wild meat also has the potential to enhance rural livelihoods and promote sustainable land management.

Thus, our research will build on the CBD Guidance to investigate the possibility of ensuring a legal, accountable, regulated, and sustainable supply of wild meat that can meet urban and rural demand.

Regarding meeting the urban demand for wild meat, the CBD Guidance includes several particularly

relevant steps which require further research, including rights over land and rights to manage and benefit from wildlife are clearly defined and recognised and defended by the state and a rationalisation of wildlife laws to focus on sustainability with due consideration to both food security and conservation concerns.

A second focus of the research group is the role that wild meat can play in restoring ecosystems and habitats.

There is increasing interest globally in landscape or ecosystem restoration, or in what is often increasingly referred to as rewilding.

Across Africa, rewilding projects are under way. Peace Parks, headquartered in Stellenbosch, has a large ongoing Rewilding Africa Project which explain: "By reintroducing wildlife to ecosystems where the species once thrived, biodiversity is once again restored, while the potential for securing the future of the protected areas through nature-based tourism is increased exponentially.

"At the same time, the process

relieves pressures of overpopulation at the capture location, thereby halting what could evolve into devastating habitat degradation. The project started in 2001 when the first 25 elephants were moved to Limpopo National Park. Since then, thousands of animals have been translocated to parks all over southern Africa."

Rewilding has a potential array of economic and environmental benefits in which there could be a strategic role for wild meat.

Looking at the experiences in countries such as Namibia, South Africa, and the UK, what barriers need to be addressed to enable a wild meat sector as an outcome of rewilding and what policies need to be put in place to encourage sustainable use of wildlife for the benefit of ecosystems and biodiversity?

Unlocking the wild meat sector could be a way to align the preservation of biodiversity with its sustainable utilisation.

*Vorhies is director of the AWEI at Stellenbosch University*



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