

# The Wildlife Cake

*H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, KG, KT*

In a short and succinct address of welcome at the WWF International Congress in London, in November 1970, the proceedings of which have now been published,\* HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, President of the British National Appeal, summed up the world situation for wildlife and the task for conservationists.

If the support of distinguished people could solve the problems of the world's wildlife, then the whole campaign would be over, bar the cheering. I do not know of any other subject which has gained such universal approval from leaders in all countries. On the other hand, I know of no other international cause which has such meagre official support, either from governments or from the United Nations.

It would not be so bad if only, for instance, some more of the national parks or nature reserves which are already in existence were properly managed. Unfortunately, as anyone concerned with this problem knows only too well, the stories keep coming in from all over the world about lack of funds, mismanagement, insufficient wardens, encroachment by ruthless developers, and the operations of commercial poaching gangs.

However, the trouble is really very simply explained. We want our cake, and we also want to eat it. We want our wildlife, but we also want the land it occupies. We want conservation, but no one wants to pay for it. In the long run, of course, we will have to pay a much higher price for ignoring the problems of conservation now.

It is virtually impossible for a political government, dependent on the will or the wishes of the people, to say 'No' to an increasing population when they ask for land, and to say that it is reserved for animals and plants. In a poor country it is virtually impossible to say that you cannot exploit *that* source of wealth because it will disturb the animals. Nevertheless, this is precisely what World Wildlife is attempting to do. We all know that it must go on doing so, no matter what, if the wild plants and animals are to stand a chance. People may be disappointed at the rate of progress but, all things considered, World Wildlife has some very important achievements to its credit, in the face of very great obstacles.

Fortunately, of course, many nations are finding out that wild places are becoming so scarce that people will travel a long way, and pay good money, to see wild country unimpaired by human intervention, and wild animals free in their natural surroundings. This may not be so immediately rewarding as, for example, a gold mine, or a deposit of iron ore, but it has the merit of being a great deal more durable. Given the chance, the asset will go on renewing itself indefinitely.

The problems are prodigious. The number of people who appreciate that there is a problem at all is very small indeed, and support, where it exists, is more vocal than practical. Make no mistake, it is going to be a long, hard, uphill struggle, and better not attempted by the faint-hearted.

*\*All Life on Earth Wildlife, Plumtree Court, London E.C.4., 50p*