

AFRICA

Travel Magazine



Uganda Scenes: Robert Eilets, 2004

News from 'Uganda – Gifted by Nature', the Eastern African and Indian Ocean region
By Prof. Dr. Wolfgang H. Thome



Uganda News

AIRSTRIP PLANNED FOR KABALE

The south western Ugandan town of Kabale, located strategically near the two gorilla national parks but also close to the border at Katuna with Rwanda, is now finally set to

get an airfield to link it to the international airport in Entebbe or the Kajjansi aerodrome. Apparently the Civil Aviation Authority has approved the construction of the field, which will be located a few kilometres outside the town along the main road to Kisoro, and it is understood that it will be a private initiative rather than paid for by government or the CAA. The new airfield is expected to boost both tourism and business travel by air, as a drive from Kampala can take most of the day for the

over 400 kilometres, and will add a new dimension to upcountry travel when completed.

KAMPALA TO HOST ANNUAL EAC INVESTMENT CONFERENCE

The annual East African Investment Conference will this year take place in Kampala between the 26th and 29th of April, the first such meeting since the East African Customs Union came into effect on January 01st this year. The EAC is presently in a period of final harmonization which must be concluded by the end of June so that the full effects of the customs union can then be felt by the region from July onwards. The conference was last hosted in Nairobi in 2009 and over 2.000 participants from the region, the continent and further abroad attended this showcase event, which annually highlights opportunities for investments.

EAST AFRICAN LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY COMES TO KAMPALA

The present third session of the EALA is in progress in Kampala / Uganda, and will last until the 19th of February. Most significant for this correspondent

will be the deliberations about the East African Community Tourism and Wildlife Management bill, and to a lesser extent the bill about the Lake Victoria Basin Commission. Both legal frameworks, when passed, will deliver the way forward for the tourism and wildlife sectors in the five member states in coming years. President Museveni is expected to deliver a key note address to the East African legislators, while current Chairperson of the EAC, Tanzanian President Kikwete, is also expected to come to Kampala to also address the assembly.

During the session update reports for the tourism and wildlife sector will also be given to the members of EALA to debate, and it is hoped that issues like non tariff barriers, affecting for instance the aviation sector, but also the contentious border crossing between the Masai Mara and the Serengeti at Bologonja, will be discussed openly and candidly, to seek lasting solutions for relatively small problems, which however have been festering like sores in the past and saw passionate, and often totally emotional and bare of facts discussions and squabbles erupt across the political spectrum of the two main protagonists.

SHERATON OFFERS MEETING INCENTIVES

For the 'love month' of February, when Valentine's Day appears the main social highlight event half way through the month, the Sheraton Kampala Hotel has now offered a 5 US Dollar rebate on their published meeting rates, per person, to attract that extra business interest needed to keep their conference facilities occupied. The state of the art small, medium and large rooms available are generally much in demand, as the hotel offers secure and free parking right in the heart of the city and meeting participants can then enjoy the hotel's evening social programmes in a seamless fashion, where every day has its own theme and activity.

At the same time the hotel offers their regular clientele an upgrade to superior rooms for the nominal fee of US Dollars 30 per night, a bargain considering the many extras guest then enjoy across the hotel.

SHILLING INCHES TOWARDS THE 2000 MARK AGAIN

At the height of the global economic and financial crisis, the Uganda Shilling, versus one US Dollar, on one occasion went into the 2.300 territory, but as the recession in Europe, North America and the key Asian powerhouses sizzled out, so did the Uganda Shilling gain strength again.

A few weeks ago it almost broke into the 1700

territory, causing untold suffering for flower, fish and agroproduct exporters, whose earnings in Dollars then yielded substantially less than what their inputs cost them. Subsequently discreet behind the scenes interventions by Bank of Uganda, and restraint by other trading bodies, but also the demand for US Dollars to pay dividends and pay for the import bill of once again dearer oil products, has driven the Shilling downwards again, now trading in the 1975+ range already and eyeing the 2000 threshold once more. Amongst economic observers and those knowledgeable in matters of currency values, it is thought that the US Dollar ought to trade in the 2000 range as a 'fair value' giving Uganda's exporters the income they need to stay in business, the tourist visitors value for money for locally sourced services and extras paid for in country, thereby giving them greater value for their money spent in Uganda and making the destination overall more attractive and affordable.

COMMONWEALTH SUMMIT EXPENDITURE PROBE WIDENS

Members of the parliamentary public accounts committee, traditionally dominated by the opposition, have widened their scope of their investigation into the expenditures ahead of the Commonwealth Summit in late 2007, now looking into the procurement, and subsequent value, of street lighting in Kampala and Entebbe. Many of the street lights are now out of order, and those purchased at high cost working on solar power and through wind propellers, are also 'down and out' as frequently seen when driving after dark. An estimated 70 percent of street lights overall in the Entebbe – Kampala corridor, according to reports from the enquiry sessions, are now said to be out of service.

Parliamentarians have in the past taken a range of matters into their cross hairs, and a number of cases have been referred to the Ugandan CID for further investigations, aimed to eventually bring prosecutions to court.

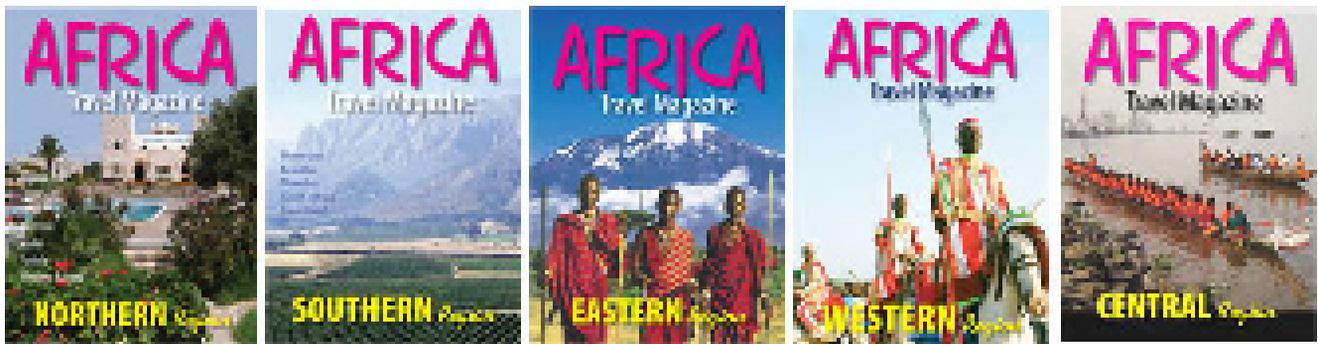
Considering the resources the country has it is always disheartening to see how our city council fails us, how potholes grow into craters and how bureaucrazy – punt intended – leads to project delays. It was so different recently when visiting the Seychellois capital city of Victoria on the archipelago's main island Mahe, where the infrastructure was intact, roads appeared free of major potholes – with evidence that the few opening up were swiftly repaired, no power outages

and the streets, and beaches for that matter, being swept every day, making it a shining example of what can be achieved. HOWEVER, I am not advocating that our city fathers now spend our rates and fees by jetting off for a fact finding mission to the Seychelles at our expense, although individually they are of course welcome to become tourists and get an inkling what 'tourism' can really be about.

After the reversal of the failed business policies introduced by what turned out to be a bunch of hapless 'managers', Air Uganda is now seemingly flying into better territory again. After losing multi millions of US Dollars in less than two years, during which two CEO's and two Commercial Directors came and went, new CEO Hugh Fraser upon his arrival last year promptly returned to the original business plan upon which the development of

AIR UGANDA ADDS FREQUENCIES, ROUTES

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the company was originally based, and brought in Bombardier CRJ aircraft, a move which permitted the company to fly more economically on their scheduled routes. The aged MD 87's, which were used by U7 following a disastrous start with stone age DC9's, are reportedly on the way out now [apparently only one remains at present but is also due to be offloaded], making way for the arrival of more CRJ aircraft in coming weeks and months. Industry sources blame the initial financial mess also on a board with shaky aviation credentials, which let management run riot with the company's financial situation, before eventually bringing Hugh Fraser on board, whose own credentials in the region are beyond doubt, considering his excellent run as Commercial Director at Kenya Airways some years ago.

The company will, according to reliable sources, move from four flights a week between Entebbe and Dar es Salaam to five, while Zanzibar will get a third weekly flight, as will Mombasa. The airline is also readying to commence operations between Entebbe and Kigali, initially six flights a week, the latter ones commencing around the 23rd of February. Happy landings!

Kenya News

KENYA TOURIST BOARD GETS ISO CERTIFICATION

In what is clearly a pointer towards the direction KTB intends to take in coming years as the country's principal marketing tool for tourism and overseas PR, the board last week received the formal certification for ISO 2001 : 2008. At the same time a revised service charter was also launched and published spelling out the direction KTB intends to take in coming years to deliver the high expectations of bringing as many as 3 million visitors to the country in the near future.

With the ISO certification KTB has broken new ground in the Eastern African region and the challenge is now clearly on the counterpart bodies in Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda to follow in these footsteps and equally introduce similar schemes, subjecting them also to quality audits of internationally recognised standards so that internal administrations can be streamlined and the most funds and emphasis really be given to promotions in existing, new and emerging markets, plus the domestic component of course, making the most use of scarce resources.

KENYA AIRWAYS RELEASES QUARTERLY RESULTS

Recent information received from sources in Nairobi show that the 'Pride of Africa's bottom line results and flight performance stats are progressively returning to the pre-crisis levels. In particular traffic across

Eastern Africa rose by an impressive 20 percent likely due to increased frequencies into Bujumbura, Moroni, Seychelles, Kigali and other destinations, West Africa recorded a 19 percent increase, while traffic to Southern Africa also showed improved performances with an over 15 percent rise compared to the same period last year. All figures correspond to the October – December quarter. European flights are still somewhat below par although a recovery is said to have begun there too, while flights to the Middle East, India and the Far and South East have added 3 percent.

Domestic operations are 'down' but only due to temporarily taking Kisumu off the schedules, when runway repairs and extension was underway last year, while flights to Lamu and Malindi were taken off the schedule too due to lack of suitable aircraft, after the Saab turboprops suitable for landing in Lamu and Malindi were retired from the fleet.

SAFARI LINK SUPPORTS COLOBUS TRUST AT DIANI BEACH

SafariLink, the scheduled 'safari' airline operating daily flights into the main national parks from Wilson Airport, but also between the key national parks, is for some time now flying also to the Ukunda airstrip, providing a direct link between Nairobi and the 'south coast' of Mombasa, sparing passengers the worries about having to cross the ferry at Likoni, often in the news in recent months for shortcomings and operational troubles. SafariLink is sponsoring the Colobus Trust with 2 US Dollars for each passenger flown to Ukunda on their service, which operates daily in the afternoon. In addition the airline donated a 'tuk tuk' to the trust, which will be used to transport tourists from their hotels to the trust's visitor centre, where they can find out about the work to protect the colobus monkeys frequently seen along the main road and in the adjoining forest.

The Colobus Trust is a Kenyan registered NGO, founded about 14 years ago with the aim to reduce the then frequent deaths of the rare monkeys, who often were run over by cars. Another challenge emerged when high voltage lines reached this stretch of the coast, adding to the woes of the monkeys who are of course keen to climb any pole in sight. Well done SafariLink for this commitment to conservation. Besides Ukunda SafariLink also serves Lamu and Kiwayu along the Kenyan coast with their fleet of 7 aircraft, which are seating between 13 to 37

passengers. The workhorse aircraft is the Cessna Caravan, of which SafariLink operates 5, besides a De Havilland Twin Otter and a Bombardier Dash 8.

EAST AFRICAN SAFARI AIR ADDS SOMALILAND TO SCHEDULE

It was learned during a visit to Nairobi last week that East African Safari Air has commenced twice weekly flights directly from Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport to Hargeisa, the nominal capital of the self declared 'Somaliland', a breakaway region from the failed Somali state similar to 'Puntland'. Previously did passengers have to transit via Djibouti, Addis or even Sana'a to travel to the Eastern African heartland, spending as much as a day travelling. This time has now been cut to just over two hours flying time on the nonstop service. The flight back however is routing via Kenya's north eastern airport of Wajir, only recently expanded, where all flights coming from Somalia must land according to Kenyan security directives, to screen inbound passengers at the

earliest possible entry point before allowing them to proceed either to Nairobi or else be turned back.

'TWEDE' TO GO QUARTERLY?

One of Kenya's premier travel and lifestyle magazines, Twende – which incidentally merged with former competitor TN some time ago – appears to be undergoing changes, resulting in the likely cut of the monthly editions and only appearing quarterly on the shelves.

TN – a magazine this correspondent long wrote for, was merged, if not taken over outright by Twende, and the publication was for some time then called 'Twende & TN' before, after fully absorbing the client base of TN, then dropping the popular name. However, changes at the helm and in the editorial team, which saw the former publisher and editor-in-chief of TN leave the joint team, only to be followed by other professionals too when the apparent direction, or lack of direction by the South African owners became clear.



Scenes of Uganda
Photo: Abigail Lubliner

Readers thirsting for travel information from across the region will indeed be sad, and worse off, should the magazine only appear four times a year from now on.

AKAMBA BUS COMMENCES ROUTE TO KIGALI

Early February saw the launch of another set of city connections from Nairobi by Akamba Bus, when the company introduced Kigali / Rwanda as a new destination. Akamba has a better than average road safety record, a reason why so many budget travellers opt to use them. The information available at this time also indicates that Akamba is set to extend their services to Bujumbura, at which stage they will have comprehensively covered the Eastern African region. It is understood that presently two 'city pairs' are operated, and to ensure scheduled operations the company also stationed a 'spare' bus in Rwanda, just in case. The busses stop enroute in Kampala, where passengers can in fact disembark from both directions, with empty seats then sold on site for passengers standing by for a place on the bus.

CHELI AND PEACOCK TAKE OVER LEWA CAMP

It was confirmed to this correspondent while in Kenya last week, that Cheli and Peacock, a well known safari camp and tour operator in Kenya, has recently taken over the existing camp on the Lewa Downs conservancy, adding further scope to their reach across Kenya. Visit www.chelipeacock.com for more information about the locations the Cheli & Peacock camps are found and how to get there. Thank you Liz Cheli for taking your time and talking to me on the flight from Nanyuki to Nairobi's Wilson Airport and the prompt email.

NDERE ISLAND TO GET LODGE

Following the report of last week, that KWS was preparing to spend big bucks in revamping some of the parks and reserves in Western Kenya, which included the Ndere Island, news have now emerged that Serena Hotels is set to commence construction of a lodge on the island, further widening their reach as one of the leading hotel, resort and safari lodge companies in Eastern Africa.

Across the lake Serena has taken on the management of a lakeside resort between Kampala and Entebbe and the new development is increasing focus on the many opportunity for tourism purposes Lake Victoria offers, but which have not hardly been sensibly exploited.

KWS meanwhile has given indication that they intend to relocate game onto the island to increase its attraction for visitors, who when coming to East Africa can now see new parks and reserves hitherto little known to anyone else but experts on the ground.

Tanzania News

FRANKFURT ZOO DONATES EQUIPMENT TO TANAPA

The Frankfurt Zoological Society has recently handed over a major gift to the Tanzania National Park administration, when a total of 11 vehicles were given to the park managers. The donation is aimed to improve mobility of rangers between the Serengeti and Ngorongoro, where as a result added patrols can now be instituted.

Frankfurt Zoo has a long history of cooperation with Tanzania, going back to the days when the late Prof. Dr. Grzimek immortalised the Serengeti in Germany with his television series and films about 'The Serengeti must not die'. He is buried in the park together with his son, who died in a plane crash while filming a documentary.

The donation comes in handy at a time when an increase in poaching has of late been reported and ahead of the relocation of rhinos into the Serengeti, which too requires increased surveillance and monitoring to protect them from poachers while still adapting to their new home.

TANAPA officials expressed their gratitude that in these days of economic challenges the Frankfurt Zoological Society still managed to raise the funds while many others of their regular supporters had to reduce donations due to the financial crunch over the past two years.

NATIONAL TOURISM COLLEGE DUE TO OPEN SOON

A newly constructed tourism training facility, the National Tourism College, is due for its formal opening in May this year. The tertiary institution will facilitate studies relevant to the tourism and hospitality industry, and would have opened by the end of last year were it not for a shortage of funds to equip the new buildings. The construction was funded by the French government as a gift to Tanzania and when in full swing the college will teach courses equivalent to a bachelor's degree level, while also offering diploma and certificate courses. Foreign languages too will be taught, notably French and German it is understood. It was also confirmed that the Kempinski Hotel in Dar es Salaam has awarded three fully funded scholarships to deserving students wanting to make a career in the

hospitality industry. Well done indeed.

Rwanda News

BIRDING NEWS RWANDA

Information was released last week about Rwanda's plans to further establish itself as a 'birding' destination during 2010. Towards that end intense bird guide training is now unfolding, supported by the RDB – Tourism and Conservation, as well as safari companies sponsoring some of their guides to attain better qualifications and knowledge about the many birds found. Major 'birding hot spots' are the Akagera National Park, the Nyungwe National Park but also in the Parc de Volcanoes, normally visited for gorilla tracking but where a large number of birds are also found in the forests sloping up the mountains.

NEW HOSPITALITY TRAINING FACILITY OPENS

A few days ago a new privately owned hospitality and tourism training centre was opened in Kibagabaga outside Kigali, and training is expected to commence any time now. The institute is mainly aimed to provide vocational training for young women aiming to make a career in the hotel or tourism sectors. A new purpose built campus is expected to open sometime in 2011, where up to 250 students can be on campus at any given time, compared with presently only 50 enrolled in courses. The opening was witnessed by the head of the tourism and conservation division within the Rwanda Development Board, Mrs. Rosette Rugamba, in the company of the American Ambassador, giving support to the initiative.

RWANDA DEVELOPMENT BOARD NEEDS TO SOURCE MEGA BUCKS FOR TOURISM

The recently developed tourism master plan for Rwanda's tourism sector is likely to cost over 40 million US Dollars, in order to implement and achieve all the objectives the board set its sights on for the next 10 years. Under the plan several key locations in Rwanda will be earmarked for further development, starting with the capital Kigali, but of course including the Parc de Volcanoes (gorillas), the Akagera and Nyungwe national parks, as well as the areas around Gisenyi, Lake Muhazi and Kibuye.

One of the aims of the master plan is the increased engagement with and cooperation from local communities bordering tourism attractions, whose goodwill and conservation efforts are considered a key to the future of tourism in Rwanda. No information was available at the time of going to

press where the funding would come from or in what tranches money would be released, if secured in the first place, so keep watching this space.

RWANDAIR STEPS UP PROMOTIONS

The Rwandese national airline has now started to offer special companion fares, which when purchased give a second ticket for free, discounting a journey by 50 percent. The fares are aimed to add loadfactors to the recently re-launched flights to Johannesburg, and are available from Nairobi, Kilimanjaro / Arusha and Dar es Salaam, but notably not from Entebbe. Travellers from Kigali itself too can take advantage of this special deal. Meanwhile, lower fares were also introduced for the flights to Tanzania, with a return ticket to Kilimanjaro only costing 299 US Dollars return, while a trip to Dar es Salaam now goes for 399 US Dollars.

These increased marketing activities are aimed to prepare the ground for later in the year, when RwandAir expects to receive a B737-800, likely to be deployed on higher density routes and probably to South Africa, as the B737NG offers superior baggage and loose cargo uplift compared to the CRJ. Around the same time, but still within 2010, does the airline expect their first long haul plane, a B767, which is then expected to commence services into the Gulf. Watch this space as an exciting year for RwandAir unfolds.

RDB UNDERGOES FURTHER RESTRUCTURING

Information was received earlier in the week that the Rwanda Development Board was set for yet another restructuring. ORTPN, the Rwanda Office for Tourism and National Parks, was during the last round of public service restructuring absorbed into RDB, and the then ORTPN Director General became one of the Deputy CEO's of RDB while continuing to oversee tourism and conservation issues in the organization. It appears that the new 'reforms' have now abandoned the titles of Deputy CEO's altogether but the organisation was a little coy to discuss the measures as apparently no final decision has been made as yet.

Late last year a change took place at the helm of the organisation too when former CEO Joe Ritchie retired from the organization and John Gara took over from him at the beginning of December. Gara has previous working experience with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the DFID, the UN and the World Bank.

Seychelles News
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT ISSUES STATEMENT ON
TOURISM

The following statement was received from the Press office of State House in Victoria in regard of the tourism sector in the Seychelles and I have the pleasure of reproducing it here for our readers:

Press Secretary, Office of the President
P O Box 55, State House, Victoria, Mahé, Seychelles
Website: <http://www.statehouse.gov.sc/>
Republic of Seychelles
Office of the President

PRESS RELEASE 27th January 2010

TOURISM INDUSTRY TEAMWORK HAS BEEN THE KEY
TO OUR SUCCESS

President James Michel has called on the Seychelles tourism industry to continue to work with a unity of purpose, teamwork, determination and focus in order to maintain the momentum gained in last year's marketing campaigns and strong arrival figures.

"I firmly believe that we can develop even more fruitful partnerships between the public and private sectors to make training in the tourism sector even more effective. This is one of the challenges that I ask that we take up today," said President Michel.

President James made the remarks during his opening address of the 2010 Seychelles Tourism Marketing Meeting at the International Conference Centre this afternoon.

The President noted that the marketing meeting was a key event for building partnerships, adding that "it means we believe that Together, we are ready for the future!"

The President said that last year's tourism 'Affordable Seychelles' campaign ensured that the country maintained visitor arrivals while also increasing the bed occupancy level for the small, Seychellois-owned establishments. President Michel added that with the reopening of the Seychelles Tourism Board UK Office; the strengthening of all other Seychelles Overseas Offices; and the repositioning of Seychellois nationals in our overseas offices, the tourism industry was experiencing a revitalisation.

The President also welcomed the new level of cooperation between Seychelles diplomatic missions abroad and tourism offices.

"The heightened cooperation between the Seychelles Tourism Board and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is opening new avenues for our country overseas, maximising our resources, and opening doors for our nationals to proudly represent our country. I will continue to champion Seychelles' tourism credentials as part of our foreign policy."

Last year the President travelled to China, South Korea and the Middle East, where tourism promotion formed part of a key component of his discussions and visits.

Meanwhile, in a different development on the islands, President James Michel has applauded the decision by FIFA to invite a Seychellois referee to be part of the upcoming World Cup refereeing team in South Africa, saying that the government and people of Seychelles were proud of this achievement, while wishing the ref all the best of success for his matches.

NEW RESORT OPENED ON MAHE ISLAND

Shortly after leaving the Seychelles' main island last week did a new resort on Mahe Island open its doors with initially 24 suites operational, located near the marine park and Ramsar site mangrove forest at Port Launay. The hotel, set amidst a staggering 120 hectares of tropical forest and gardens, will in due course offer 184 suites and villas to its guests, alongside a handful of variety ethnic restaurants, sporting facilities and a Spa so large I am told just has to be seen to be believed. The final number of rooms, suites and villas however is thought to reach nearly 350, which if correct would make it the largest resort complex on the entire Seychelles islands.

The balance of the suites and villas will open ahead of the Easter season at which time all building work will have been completed. The 'Constance Ephelia Resort' details can be accessed via www.epheliaresort.com while pictures can be viewed via www.constancehotels.com

It was also learned that there were misgivings and opposition towards the building of the resort on this location due to the potential impact of building activities, and the inevitable fallout, in



The Land of Kilimanjaro, Zanzibar and The Serengeti

regard of the marine park and the adjoining Ramsar site, where an extensive mangrove forest is located, across which the access bridge to the peninsula has been constructed. While an EIA and mitigative measures may well have been agreed between the developers and the respective governmental bodies, the concern is nevertheless to be taken seriously as mangroves are proving to be more sensitive than previously thought, even along the Eastern African shore lines, and tampering with a Ramsar site or developing nearby is never being passed over by the international watch dogs and NGO's. Watch this space.

VISITOR NUMBERS TO REACH 300.000 PLUS, BUT NO MORE BEYOND THAT

While in the Seychelles recently it emerged in discussions with leading stakeholders and tourism planners that the island is considering a 'cap' of tourism arrivals, probably by 2017 or slightly later, when overall arrivals reach a mark of between 300.000 and 350.000 tourists, the final figure to be decided upon by the country's tourism planners in the near future.

Planners are concerned that in order to reach that capacity most suitable places on the main islands would have to be developed for beach side resorts and felt that capping arrivals at that stage would be the best way forward, if tourism is to be sustained long term and the environmental impact to be dealt with and be mitigated accordingly.

This laudable policy will at that stage of course also result in existing properties likely going at a substantial premium, if sold, while any surplus demand for holidays to the archipelago will need to be regulated by the market through higher tariffs. However, considering the natural beauty of the islands, and the challenges of delivery electricity and water to the resorts, hotels, other businesses and the residential areas, the move is probably the best way forward and will keep the Seychelles away from any form of mass tourism and yet offer intact nature and beaches to those visitors opting to go there.

The message for investors is equally stark, that they should invest now or else miss the proverbial train, as the year 2017 comes nearer and arrival numbers reach the magical marks. Watch this space.

TOURIST OFFICES ACROSS THE ISLANDS TO BE FRANCHISED

Through interaction with key personnel of the Seychelles Tourist Board two weeks ago, while in

Mahe, it was learned that in order to widen their reach across the various islands, the board has decided that a new modus operandum was needed to meet the challenges of today's tourism business.

For both cost reduction as well as better servicing tourists only the key locations in Mahe, at the International Airport and the Praslin aerodrome will remain in the 'hands' of STB, while added locations will join under a new franchise agreement or else will be 'privatised' to selected applicants wanting to join hands with STB.

The 'new' style offices will then also function as general booking offices, earning commissions to the owner / operators, while STB's main focus can then be on providing operational guidelines, describe policy and do the generic marketing for the country while leaving the tourist information services largely to the private sector. This cooperation is a result of the new focus of STB on becoming a strong business oriented organisation serving the private sector while also fulfilling their public mandate. Watch this space.

A VISIT TO PRASLIN, SO DIFFERENT AND YET SO SEYCHELLOIS

I am tempted to say that Praslin is 'the real thing' I saw during my visit to the Seychelles, although that would of course not do full justice to the many good experiences I also had on Mahe, the main island and home to the country's capital, the international airport and the archipelago's main sea harbour, nor the many other islands like La Digue, Denis or Bird which I could not visit due to the limited time available. Praslin can be reached by ferry from the main port on Mahe, but also by air through Air Seychelles inter island flights, offering a choice of transport to visitors. I was doing the morning departure to Praslin with the 'speed boat' a catamaran with both open veranda's as well as enclosed cabins, offering a bar service for those in need of extra coffee or tea in the morning, since the ferry leaves at 7.30 a.m.

The view across Mahe, and then as getting nearer to Praslin, is best to be described as idyllic, while the smaller islands, although within sight of the bigger ones, bring the term 'Robinson' to mind. Landing at the Praslin harbour is 'picturesque' with yachts, fishing boats and speed boats dumpling on the mooring, while the quay is a hub of activity, with lots of people lined up to take the return trip to Mahe.

A number of smaller, and Seychellois owned hotels for that matter, are available on Praslin but international hotel groups, like the Kingdom Hotels 'Raffles' brand

are also present, offering a mix of different variety accommodation, including guest houses which seem to spring up everywhere and can now only be owned by Seychellois' up to 10 available rooms – which means foreign investors must build at least 11 or more rooms to be licensed.

(a view from a vantage point on Praslin across the crystal clear ocean towards other islands)

The Seychelles Tourist Board's website at www.seychelles.com offers a wide variety of information about Praslin, where to stay, what to do and what the budget might be.

What is clear is that Praslin is more laid back than Mahe, which itself is not running at the high speed seen in other capital cities, probably because only about 20,000 inhabitants live there – and while there is now even a traffic jam in the morning and evening, as cars try to get in and out of the city on the only routes across to the Beau Vallon side, it is nothing compared to the jams I found when returning to Nairobi.

However, Praslin is distinctly 'calmer' and this translates into a mindset visitors tend to acquire when experiencing the islands' long white beaches – no hassles with 'beach boys' there, or sit by the pools in their resorts enjoying the sun, the staff's outpouring of friendliness and hospitality and the good food, here more than elsewhere based on seafood of course. According to tourists 'sampled' at the Praslin aerodrome, some of whom has stayed on the main island on previous vacations, they could not be complimentary enough about their respective resorts, in particular those with children. Said one mother of two: 'we never had to worry about the kids, with so many others around and all the supervised activities they had every day', adding 'they loved the food, the fruits and all, in the UK we of course also have many of those fruits but eating them sitting in the sand and it is so warm all the time, nothing compares.'

And finally, some say most importantly, the island is home to one of the country's terrestrial national parks, part of which is the fabled 'Vallee de Mai' where the famous 'coco de mer' grows and where the black parrot is found, all of which can be seen with ease on day excursions from any of the hotels on Praslin.

AIR SEYCHELLES CEO ATTENDS IATA – US TALKS ON AVIATION SECURITY

Capt. David Savy, the Executive Chairman of Air Seychelles attended the recent talks between IATA

and the US government about aviation security, on behalf of several airlines in Africa and the Indian Ocean region. The 'summit' meeting was held in Geneva at the IATA headquarters and brought together the US Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano, the top brass of IATA and CEO's of 12 airlines, with another dozen airlines represented at senior management level.

Following Capt. Savy's presentation the airline released the following details: 'Capt David Savy of Air Seychelles representing the African and Indian Ocean region acknowledged that his particular geographical area had a number of challenges that needed addressing urgently otherwise Africa risked becoming a 'soft target' in this mounting security threat. He feared that Africa would be the 'weak-link' in the chain and this may well be exploited by those intent in causing maximum destruction.

"Africa has to identify funding sources and develop more meaningful mechanisms in providing training, technology and better infrastructure to those that are entrusted in making sure that the travelling public are safe and secure," Capt Savy said.

Furthermore, Capt Savy pointed out that a significant number of African Governments and national security agencies do not have the financial resources to meet U.S requirements in the short term. He suggested that if funding was to be made available by the US Government it should be used primarily on training and technology.

Responding directly to Capt Savy's intervention, Secretary Napolitano expressed her appreciation of what had been said and once again reiterated the US's commitment in helping those who were committed to ensuring better and more effective security.

CULTURE AND HERITAGE TO BE PART OF TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Following the recent appointment of a new national arts council, and in line with the declaration of the Seychelles Tourist Board to add heritage, art, culture, crafts, music and fashion to their list of 'promotable' attractions, yet more activities are unfolding to aid and support those goals.

Work is now underway to restore the main plantation house at 'La Plaine St. Andre' into a tourist attraction, which upon restoration and infrastructural work will offer restaurant and bar facilities, besides being turned into a 'living museum'. Also available is gallery space for exhibitions and shows by local artists, giving them a first showcase to promote their creations. A

herb and medicinal plant garden is also to be restored and guided walks across the extensive estate will be possible for tourists and local visitors alike. The project, which will also provide visitor centre services, is expected to be finalised by August this year at which stage a Creole festival is being hosted on site, to be followed by regular other such events. At least 20 young Seychellois will be finding employment at the project. The plantation house was reportedly first built in 1792, when the estate produced spices and sugar cane, before shifting to copra and coconut oil production in the 19th century.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES RATE HIGHLY IN THE SEYCHELLES

A new environmental project was launched late last week aimed to promote partnership between government, governmental bodies, civic society and NGO's in all matters concerning environmental protection. Termed 'Capacity Development for Improved National and International Environmental Management in Seychelles (CB2)' the project will be carried out by the Department of Environment with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funding of US \$400,000 from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), an international funding body, which is regularly funding such projects in the archipelago. Environmental management capacity on the islands is expected to be boosted substantially upon completion of the project and in particular Seychellois environmentalists and researchers will be targeted for skills transfer.

AIR SEYCHELLES SCHEDULE UPDATE

The management of Air Seychelles in Mahe has now confirmed that their Frankfurt stop, enroute to London Heathrow, will only be shelved after the forthcoming Easter season, and not before as has initially been confirmed to this correspondent. That will be good news for German travellers to the archipelago who prefer to travel nonstop rather than flying via one of the Gulf hubs operated by Emirates or Qatar Airways.

And in closing today, as 'normal service is resumed,' some useful information picked from Gill Staden's 'The Livingstone Weekly' and also some of her travelling reports:

From Zambia Ornithological Society

Dates to Remember

Tuesday 2 February: World Wetlands Day – the theme will be Wetlands, Biodiversity and Climate Change and the slogan is "Caring for Wetlands"

Friday 5 February : IBA Schools Bird Day.

February 5, 6 and 7: Birding with Robin Pope Safaris in the Luangwa Valley, booking through gerald@robinpopesafaris.net.

Sunday 21 February: Bird and tree walk – Walking the tree trail – Ian Parsons' farm, Mazabuka, led by Rory McDougall and Mike Bingham.

Tuesday 23-27 February: ZOS hosting Birdlife Africa Partnership Annual Planning Review Meeting / Project Steering Committee in Lusaka.

Saturday 6 March: ZOS AGM.

Sunday 7 March: Bird walk – Lusaka Park

RAMSAR AND THE WORLD WETLANDS

The Convention on Wetlands (which was born in Ramsar, Iran in 1971) - called the "Ramsar Convention" - is an intergovernmental treaty that embodies the commitments of its member countries to maintain the ecological character of their Wetlands of International Importance and to plan for the "wise use", or sustainable use, of all of the wetlands in their territories.

Zambia has 8 Ramsar sites as listed below:

Bangweulu Swamps – 1,100,000 hectares and home of the shoebill

Busanga Swamps - 200,000 hectares in northern Kafue where you will see the wattled crane

Kafue Flats- 600,500 hectares – this includes Lochinvar and Blue Lagoon which are both outstanding birding venues

Luangwa Flood Plains – 250,000 hectares – good for waders

Lukanga Swamps – 260,000 hectares – good breeding and hiding place for many species.

Mweru wa Ntipa – 490,000 hectares – wonderful

swamp – needs more information to be collected
Lake Tanganika shoreline – 230,000 hectares of
lakeside birds
Zambezi Floodplain in Western Province – 900,000
hectares – an area where birds and agriculture
successfully mix.

With World Wetland's Day on the 2nd February we
need to remember that we should look ahead into
keeping these important places conserved. www.ramsar.org
And here the travel report by Gill, as she was going to
Sua Pan and Nata

It was an early-ish start to Sua Pan in Botswana. We
managed to leave at around 8am, only to arrive at
the pan by 5pm. 9 hours to travel 400 km. The time
was taken up crossing the pontoon at Kazungula and
shopping in Kasane.

The pontoon was busy but much, much tidier than
the last time I crossed. The Livingstone Tourism
Association seems to have had some influence as one
of their signboards is on the ferry. There were three
ferries running, some with just one heavy truck, but
they were shifting from side to side regularly. There
must have been over fifty trucks queuing on the
Zambian side and about forty on the Bots side. We
really must get a bridge over there soon. We shopped
in Kasane because it is cheaper there. Also, because of
the foot and mouth control no-one is allowed to take
over meat, milk, etc.

I was interested to see the road from Kasane to Nata.
For the past few years the road had been deteriorating
badly and I wanted to see what was happening. They
were repairing it! And what a job they were doing of it
too. Even the diversions were tarred. Signs up all over
the place giving directions and apologising for the
inconvenience. Such a difference from the work we
do here in Zambia.

The road was fun too. There were elephants all along
the road munching on the grass. They were generally
bachelor herds of 3-7. They didn't bother about the
traffic and the traffic didn't seem to bother about
them. And then we met a family of ostrich crossing
the road. The male ostrich came onto the road and,
following the highway code, looked up and down,
gave the signal and the whole family belted across.
Magic.

We had planned to stay at Nata Bird Sanctuary. It is a
community project. The local farmers in the area had
agreed to move off their cattle from an area of Sua Pan
so that the birds and animals could have free range.
This happened in 1999, so the sanctuary has had time
to mature. It sounded like a great place to stay but
we were disappointed. The campsite was very close
to the road and all we heard constantly was cars and
trucks passing on the road. What a shame. Why on
earth hadn't someone given them some advice on
where to site the camp? The other drawback, because
of the nearness of the road, was told to us by the
security guard: don't leave anything out at night; it's
not safe.

So, after our night in the camp we packed up and
took ourselves off to Nata Lodge, about 10 km north.
Shame.

We had tried to get onto the pan before we left but
there was water everywhere. I went through several
waterlogged patches because I could see where the
vehicle tracks had gone in and where they came out.
But then we reached a place which was a small lake. I
could see where the tracks had gone into the water
but couldn't see where they came out. Knowing that
the pans can be a bit treacherous I decided that I
wouldn't risk it. I know I am a wimp but ... what can I
do ... I admit it ...

I decided that we would take a guided tour from Nata
Lodge if it was not too expensive, so that is what we
did. And it definitely was the best course of action.
No worries, no stress and free just to enjoy the ride.
And I will show you pics and tell you about that next
week ...

Uganda News

ECLIPSE DARKENS THE SKIES OVER UGANDA

(The moon, perfectly centred in front of the sun
– picture courtesy of Catherine D. Thome)

An early morning near total eclipse of the sun last
Friday, 15th January 2010, turned a fledgling day
into almost night again, and in spite of the media
having warned the population ahead of the event
to be prepared, panic apparently gripped some
parts of the country, when in particular in rural

Uganda superstitions came into play.

The eclipse, calculated to be the longest this millennium, was watched by a couple of researchers and observers who have come from abroad for the event, and tourists presently in Uganda too enjoyed the spectacle.

At this correspondent's residence the early morning bird song fell silent again when the eclipse progressed, and a regular flock of Ibis storks normally spending the night in one of the giant trees on the compound returned to perch in the branches, probably confused over the 'short day' before breaking into a second 'morning song' when the full light began to re-emerge. Area residents enjoyed splendid viewing of the eclipse period as the sun rose across the lake just after 7 a.m. before being obscured by the moon moving across the face of it, and the sun then returning 'victorious' an hour or so later. The next total eclipse of the sun visible in Uganda, will according to publications available from the NASA only be taking place in 2125, i.e. in another 115 years, making last Friday's event truly special.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICE UNIT ON THE WAY

The Ugandan cabinet has last week agreed to form a specialised unit within the Uganda Police, dealing entirely with environmental matters and violations of NEMA orders. The new unit will comprise specially trained personnel and likely find members of the conservation fraternity drafted into the force, either on a permanent or an ad hoc basis. Word has it that initially about 150 staff will be used and that one of their priorities will be encroachment of wetlands and illegal occupation of forests, where in particular last year logging has caused extensive damage to forest areas. The news should send chills down the spines of serial environmental offenders, like flower farms which are aggressively expanding into wetlands and swamps, or illegal loggers, as they are now more likely to be nabbed, caught red handed and chances for a successful prosecution are better as the evidence gathered by the new unit can hold up in courts of law. Well done Uganda, a good start for the environment in 2010.

ITALY READY TO BUILD REFINERY

The visiting Italian foreign minister last weekend gave clear indication, that should the purchase

of the shares of Heritage Oil by Italian petroleum conglomerate ENI go ahead, the Italian government would offer support for the construction of a refinery in Uganda, to add value to the crude oil produced in the country and help Uganda control their supply chain to a larger extent.

Some of the exploration companies had pressured government to ONLY build a pipeline to the port of Mombasa and export the crude oil for processing abroad, before then re-importing refined products at substantially higher cost back to Uganda. That however would leave most of the profits in foreign hands and in particular the president has made it clear, that this was neither acceptable, nor desirable in the long run.

Uganda at present estimates has about 2 billion barrels of hitherto untapped reserves, and as test drilling is advancing, ever more reserves are being discovered.

The Italian foreign minister is reported to have said that Italy was ready to invest billions of Euros in Africa and that ENI, in which the Italian government has a substantial stake, too was ready to invest big money. This recent development firmly puts Europe back into the fray of doing oil business in Eastern Africa, after they left for too long the main drive to China, India and other countries interested to exploit the newly found oil riches of Uganda.

In a related development however have Heritage's partners in Uganda, Tullow Oil, at the very last possible moment invoked their right of first refusal, now also offering to pay Heritage 1.5 billion US Dollars for their shares, which may now trigger a bidding war with Italian petroleum giant ENI, as they can now raise their offer to a higher level, if they so wish. However, usually well informed sources have also hinted that the required approvals by the government of Uganda may swing into the ENI direction and the 'first right of refusal' by Tullow may be overruled by government, which retains a veto in these matters. Watch this space as the battle for the oil continues.

SALINI PROMISES BUJAGALI POWER BY AUGUST 2011

Full mouthed promises were made last week by Salini Construction, the main contractors for the Bujagali hydro electric power plant, that by August 2011 the plant would produce electricity. However, the Ugandan public is wary of the company's promises in view of its track record in Uganda, as the so called Northern Bypass, a half ring road around Kampala aimed to decongest the city centre from heavy transit traffic, was over three years late in coming on line, and – you guessed – it was constructed by Salini, which in the process often excelled in making arrogant statements and going on collision course with both government and the main funders, the European Commission, blaming all and sundry and most notably the weather for their failure to complete the project on time.

There is presently little information available about the plans by government to concurrently construct another hydro electric power plant further down the Nile at Karuma but updates will be filed as and when details become available. Watch this space.

FORMER TOURISM MINISTER TO RETIRE FROM POLITICS

The former Minister for Tourism, Trade and Industry, Hon. Janat Mukwaya, announced last weekend her retirement from active politics, come the next general elections in early 2011, when she will be standing down as a member of parliament for Mukono South constituency, and most likely also as a government minister, having served in that capacity for over 15 years in various ministries and postings. Mukwaya, who was shifted to the Prime Minister's office as Minister for General Duties in a cabinet reshuffle, was rated poorly by observers and wide sections of the tourism sector while serving in the tourism ministry, following a sterling performance by previous office holder Hon. Daudi Migereko, and was known to be often absent, skipping meetings even with high ranking visitors while also prompting the former Chairman of the Uganda Tourism Board to resign over unfulfilled promises of funding, alleged lack of support and non-availability for meetings. Oooops...

RECENT AIRPORT FIRE AN ACCIDENT

Investigators have completed their report into the fire recently at the fuel depot at the Entebbe International Airport, and have concluded that the event was purely an accident with no sinister background as some peddlers of ill news have suggested. As a measure to avoid such incidents in the future, a separate parking area for fuel trucks delivery JetA1 and AVGAS fuels has been created away from the main depot, and trucks will have to approach the offloading station one by one now to prevent any further collisions in the future. Drivers' credentials are also due to be checked more stringently in the future to have unqualified personnel excluded from future fuel deliveries.

INSPECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE COMES TO THE AID OF AIR UGANDA

In view of apparently dropping passenger numbers, which aviation observers connect and attribute to the recent threats made against Air Uganda – this correspondent did report about it previously – did the Ugandan Inspector General of Police make a public statement in support of the airline, reassuring potential passengers in a two page press release that the airline was safe and all possible security precautions and measures have been taken. This is an unusual step, that a senior government official apparently has to resort to such a measure, and that the reassurances and statements of the airline's management were apparently not enough for some travellers to take comfort and reassurance from. The full statement is reproduced here as follows:

PRESS RELEASE BY UGANDA POLICE INSPECTOR GENERAL

In the last few days, media outlets, quoting the American Warden website in Sudan, have circulated reports that Air Uganda flights on the Juba to Entebbe route is a target of extremist elements. These reports have caused apprehension within the aviation industry and, unnecessarily alarmed the traveling public. In fact, on the 3rd of December, 2009, Uganda

Security agencies, including the Uganda Police, received an anonymous email that terrorists were planning an attack on Air Uganda flights out of Juba Air Port in Southern Sudan.

While this was a single, unverified source, it was consistent with earlier similar threats to Uganda's security. We, therefore took the e-mail, seriously, and stepped up security around our vital installations, including providing extra protection to the aviation industry, both at Entebbe and Juba Air ports.

Specifically, we enhanced security at Entebbe Airport, to include, among other measures, increased screening of passengers and luggage, with use of x-ray scanners, metal detectors, CCTV cameras, as well as physical body searches.

In addition, we have deployed sniffer dogs from the Police K-9 Unit at the Airport, and beefed up foot and motorized patrols within the airport, along its perimeter, as well as on the approaches (routes) to the Airport.

The Airlines operating out of Entebbe Airport, in particular Air Uganda, were advised, and they implemented, a wide range of new security measures for passenger screening and baggage handling. We are working with Air Uganda and other Airlines, to support on board security during flights.

We, are, also, working closely with the Government of Southern Sudan to enhance security measures for flights out of, and into Uganda, from Juba, Southern Sudan.

In addition, we are sharing information with our brothers, and partners in the region, to timely detect and mitigate threats of terrorism on Ugandan interests.

In view of the above, therefore, we want to assure members of the public, air travelers and the aviation industry at large, that services and facilities out of Entebbe Airport are safe and secure, and there is no cause for alarm.

The Uganda Police, working with other sister security agencies, shall remain vigilant, to ensure the safety and security of all air travelers.

In particular, we want to re assure the traveling public who use Air Uganda that Air Uganda is safe and secure. Anyone who had doubts should rest

assured by the security measures in place and continue using their services.

Thank you.

Maj. Gen. Kale Kayihura
Inspector-General of Police
Uganda Police Force
14th of January, 2010

Kenya News

KENYA AIRWAYS' 'PRIDE CENTRE' OPENS

A new aviation training facility opened its doors late last week, when East Africa's premier airline finally threw the doors of their new training centre wide open. The 'college' will offer a variety of approved courses and will bestow internationally recognized certificates and diplomas to students, who will attend classes at the 'Pride Centre'. Participants will be drawn from within Kenya Airways but other airlines too can send staff, while individual students can apply as vacancies for courses exist. The fee structure is said to be relatively modest in comparison with overseas aviation courses available so far. The move by Kenya Airways has been hailed as true progress in capacity building, as it will enable Kenyans and citizens of the other Eastern African nations to acquire much needed skills to make a career in the aviation industry.

Meanwhile, financial recovery of East Africa's leading airline had made further progress and was promptly appreciated by the stock market, when the shares of KQ traded sharply higher. From a previous low in early 2009 the shares gained over 25 percent in value by the end of last year and this year's two weeks of trading saw a further appreciation of about 16 percent in the share value, indicating that shareholder confidence has been fully restored and that the cost saving measures by the airline's management have born fruits already. As traffic picks up further, including cargo shipments, and new aircraft are being delivered to KQ to permit long overdue network expansion and increased frequencies on routes with heavy demand, it is expected that Kenya Airways will during 2010 return to the top of economic performers in the Kenyan economy once again.

AVIATION FUEL SHORTAGE NOW HITS WILSON

Last weekend saw a repetition of the New Year fuel shortage at Malindi airport, when Kenya's busiest aerodrome, Wilson airport, reportedly ran out of fuel too. Shell and Total, the two main aviation fuel suppliers in Kenya, remained mum over the shortage, telling air operators to 'wait' for fuel deliveries to arrive from Mombasa. According to aviation sources several hundred flights planned for the weekend by private and commercial operators remained grounded due to lack of fuel, a situation which according to the latest reports from Nairobi extended well into the week. Representatives of the air operators and from the Aero Club of East Africa continued to complain about the situation, which affected revenues and cost of flights, since several of the scheduled departures from Wilson had to fly into the main international airport for refuelling, adding extra landing cost and flight time. Notably, and again showing a lack of understanding and sensitivity, a spokesperson for Shell was quoted that 'there is enough fuel at JKIA' not exactly helpful for the scores of air operators and private plane owners operating from Wilson airport. It is not known at this moment if Kenya Revenue Authority red tape and bureaucrazy – punt intended – were ultimately responsible for the lack of fuel supplies, which affected both JetA1 and AVGAS or if the fuel companies did not provide enough reserves in their main stores in Mombasa and had permitted the tanks to run dry.

BUILD A ROAD TO THE SOUTH COAST, TOURISM REPRESENTATIVES DEMAND

Following the recent repeated stalling of the ferries across the Likoni channel, which link the southern mainland with the island of Mombasa, has the tourism industry at the Kenyan coast once more demanded that government immediately embark on constructing a road, which would link the airport of Mombasa, and the main highway from Nairobi directly to the south coast.

'Tourism depends on this link, when the ferries fail tourists cannot reach the airport and miss their flights and arriving tourists start their holiday with a big disappointment, taking up to half a day to reach their hotels' said one source to this correspondent, then adding: 'even coast residents are affected,

business comes to a standstill, supplies do not reach, students miss classes, workers fail to report on duty! This has been going on for too long and it is high time government comes to our rescue now and build a reliable road. Even when the new ferries come in a few months, the ferry company will mess that up too, so our only hope is a road'.

Leading representatives of the coastal tourism industry also met reportedly last week to discuss this issue and also called for a strengthened disaster response team to be established, probably in the light of the present tragedy in Haiti, to be prepared for any sort of accidents connected to industry, port or aviation and not rely only on foreign assistance should disaster strike.

CITES SECRETARIAT ACCUSED OF BIAS

Kenya, opposed to the continued approval of applications for 'one off' sale of so called 'legal' ivory, has last week stepped up the pressure on CITES, when accusations were floated in the Kenyan media of bias by staff at the CITES secretariat. Kenya is a committed member of the African Elephant Coalition and has been at loggerheads, together with the 20 other states enlisted in the AEC, with other African countries on and off advocating for the sale of elephant products. The accusations made against some of the secretariat staff are now more detailed, and speak of some of the staff taking sides in the argument, instead of being neutral administrators and executors of CITES resolutions. Contrary to this some of the staff are also accused of choosing non independent consultants and experts trying to stack the odds against the countries opposed to the trade in ivory. It was also alleged by the same sources that the text of resolutions was 'faulty' in some cases leaving room for different interpretation, due to the 'loopholes' built in and now seen favouring countries agitating for continued exemptions for selling ivory.

In the past Kenya, and other countries, had proposed a 20 year moratorium, which ended in a compromise of a 9 year moratorium after the last period of sales expired, but it now appears that the secretariat's drafters of the resolution put in a provision that a moratorium would only apply for countries which benefited from sales in