

THERE IS A DARK SIDE TO conservation that commits shocking human-rights violations. It's the outcome of a colonial-era conservation model that still persists today.

Dubbed 'fortress conservation', it assumes that indigenous people can't be trusted to look after their own land and the local wildlife. Its proponents believe that biodiversity is best protected in ecosystems that are isolated from human disturbance, and consider local people as merely a 'nuisance' to be 'dealt with'.

A good example is the Tanzanian government's recent attempts to create a 1,500km² game reserve out of ancestral Maasai lands next to Serengeti National Park. The aim, in blatant contravention of a 2018 injunction by the East African Court of Justice, is for this vast wilderness to have no permanent residents or grazing livestock.

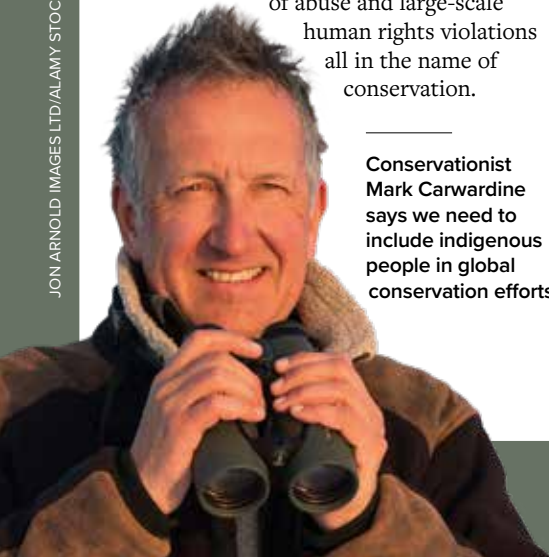
This summer, no fewer than 700 police officers, park rangers and military personnel forcefully evicted thousands of Maasai people from the region. At least 30 were shot, and 13 wounded with machetes. Despite reported video footage, the Tanzanian government denies the attacks. But it's just the latest episode in a long-running effort to replace nearly 150,000 Maasai (out of some 400,000 in the country altogether) with trophy hunters and high-end tourists.

A company in the United Arab Emirates, which operates hunting safaris for the UAE's royal family and special guests, will control commercial hunting in the area. Meanwhile, a US-based high-end safari outfitter will manage the wildlife safaris.

It doesn't sound like conservation to me – it smacks of the Tanzanian government trying to boost revenue (tourism is the largest foreign exchange earner and third largest employer in the country). But whether or not this is about conservation or money is a moot point. It's blatantly wrong. It's also just the tip of the iceberg.

The global environmental movement has been heavily criticised by the UN, and many others, for causing – and continuing to cause – chronic and widespread patterns of abuse and large-scale human rights violations all in the name of conservation.

Conservationist Mark Carwardine says we need to include indigenous people in global conservation efforts



JON ARNOLD IMAGES LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO



Thousands of Maasai people have had to leave their homes and flee into the bush

“The Massai must be included in conservation planning”

MARK CARWARDINE

OPINION

There are two diametrically opposed schools of thought on how to manage protected areas – and, in my opinion, both are seriously flawed. One is fortress conservation, which draws lines around protected areas to separate raw, unpopulated nature from all human activity. This erroneously assumes that indigenous people always use natural resources in ways that are irrational and destructive.

The other school of thought is the equally fanciful idea that indigenous people always understand and manage their environment better than anyone else. Of course, there are many examples of them doing just that – studies in Brazil, in particular, show that indigenous people defending their territories from encroachment, invasion and exploitation are more effective in safeguarding forests and biodiversity in the Amazon than traditional

conservation efforts. But this erroneously assumes that all indigenous people are gold-star conservationists (if they were, there would be no poaching, for a start).

The solution has to be a compromise. We must acknowledge that indigenous people are an intrinsic part of nature. Therefore,

they should retain the right to practice their traditional ways of life and must be included in conservation planning. But they must also benefit from conservation efforts – as an incentive to be conservation-minded – and this means providing alternative sources of income through sustainable community-based enterprises.

With governments looking for easy and cost-effective ways to meet international conservation targets, there's a very real risk of many more human-rights violations in the inevitable battles for land. We need to take down the wall of fortress conservation as a matter of urgency. **W**

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