

Pets and Game Reserves

I am vehemently opposed to domesticated animals being within or in close proximity to wildlife sanctuaries.

There are 3 main angles to this principle:

- 1. Why would any rational human being genuinely have an interest in wild fauna and flora and yet want to bring their pets with them?!**
- 2. Many pets lose their lives in Nature Reserves because they are vulnerable, unwary, an intrusion easily detected by wildlife and their food acts as bait**
- 3. Wild animals have no resistance to domestic diseases and can not only face a serious health threat and extinction but some cross-breeding may occur to the detriment of certain wild species**

People need to decide whether they wish to reside in the city with their companion animals or enjoy the pristine bush but, from a pet-ownership perspective, one cannot amalgamate the two without creating problems in the short-term and long-term. It is also the height of discourtesy by intruding on others, who cherish the sounds of the bush, by having to hear dogs barking and parrots squawking. It is aesthetically displeasing to have to encounter a domestic cat in and around a game lodge.

My evidence and comments are based on scientific proof.

An intact domestic tomcat or queen may readily cross-breed with the African Wild Cat. Obviously pet sterilisation prevents this occurrence. However, the mixed-breed product is the start of the road for extinction of the African Wild Cat which is already a rare sighting.

In Miami USA, where the highest density of pet cats are found the sewerage systems are contaminated with cat faeces contain parasites such as Toxoplasmosis and Coccidiosis. These protozoal organisms are inadvertently picked up by the manatees and sea otters. These infections in the sea wildlife are bringing these creatures close to extinction – resistance is poor and treatment impossible.

In the Serengeti ecosystem, Tanzania, where the tribes living on the borders with their domestic dogs have been culpable in transferring fatal Canine Distemper to African Wild Dogs – the latter being one of the most endangered carnivores on the continent.

Many infectious diseases cross the species barrier when exposed on a regular basis e.g. bird 'flu in humans, SARS virus in China from ingesting Civet Cats so causative agents are more likely to cross over from domestic to wild as is noticed with African Swine Fever jumping from domesticated pigs to warthogs and bushpigs.

King penguins are found to be dying of avian malaria.

Meerkats are highly susceptible to Toxoplasmosis where domestic or feral cats exist in close proximity to zoos.

Lions in the Serengeti are becoming victims of the Canine Distemper virus having reduced their population by 30%.

“Recent outbreaks of rabies and canine distemper in wildlife populations of the Serengeti show that infectious diseases constitute a significant cause of mortality that can result in regional extirpation of endangered species even within large, well-protected areas.” Effective management is required and more research into cross-species transmission.

There are already concerns about dolphins contracting Canine Distemper off the coast of Namibia where carnivores are regularly feeding off seal carcasses.

Parvovirus, once only a domestic cat-borne disease crossed into the canine in 1978 and is now being found in the white tiger and African lion.

Tuberculosis in wildlife in the KNP was sparked by allowing Kangwane cattle to graze in the southern border of the reserve during lean periods and with an easy transfer to buffalo, kudu, lion, vultures, hyaena etc., etc, there is hardly a mammalian species in the KNP free of TB.

Equine sarcoids (a locally aggressive, fibroblastic skin tumour is the most common skin cancer reported in horses) is now being found in Cape mountain zebra.

The most serious concern emanating from the Department of Tropical Diseases at the Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort is rabies.

Rabies is 100% fatal to humans once symptoms develop and the worst disease known to man. People who disobey the ethics, code of conduct and constitution they have bought into by feeding wild animals because they themselves suffer from some kind of inadequacy need to realise that they are not going to be able to discern whether the wild animal conditioned to their feeding is in fact habituated or is a rabid animal. A wild animal becomes tame with rabies. They are putting themselves and their family at risk.

Further to this they are creating a dependent nuisance that can be a regular intruder and dangerous. These animals will approach all houses if only one sets up the habit.

A kidney infection associated with a bacterium *Actinobacillus equuli* was diagnosed in the near extinct Cape Mountain Zebra in 1979. Four such cases were diagnosed on post-mortem. The organism is responsible for arthritis and nephritis in horses. Many people ride horses through areas close to the Mountain Zebra National Park.

A paper was presented by Richard A. Kock, based in Kenya, from the Epidemiology Unit, Pan-African Programme for the Control of Epizootic Diseases (PACE), African Union Inter-African Bureau for Animal Resources and this lecture was delivered at the Faculty of

Veterinary Science, University of Pretoria, Onderstepoort, on Faculty Day, 16th September 2004 on the topic “*The Wildlife/Domestic Animal Disease Interface – should Africa adopt a hard or soft edge?*”. The following bulleted paragraphs are quotes from the presentation:

- Diseases at the interface between livestock and wild animals have been observed and studied for many decades but recently there has been an upsurge in interest with so-called emerging zoonotic and other diseases and improvement in our understanding of the epidemiology of multi-host infections and better diagnostic tools.
- In many countries recognition of the problem of disease at the interface has led to landscape management to reduce the risks.
- These interface diseases will remain a concern as the potential for spread has been enhanced by the “global highway” which allows rapid movement of animals, people and products across borders and continents. Recent epidemics involving West Nile virus, and emergence of monkey pox in the USA as well as the influenza outbreak in ostrich in South Africa and the tuberculosis epidemic in the Kruger National Park illustrates this point.
- Africa will need to take greater heed of interface diseases under these conditions and as social and political changes take place on the continent with the imperative on development.

Further examples to this topic of domesticated animals being in close proximity to wildlife include:

- Tuberculosis in the Cape Kudu due to close proximity with cattle
- Acute disseminated Toxoplasmosis in a smuggled juvenile cheetah in Dubai

In summary, there is no ethical, logical and conservational basis for bringing pets to game reserves!!!!

The wildlife sanctuaries are shared by other people who care about the welfare of the animals. This needs to be respected.

If anyone cares about the future of the wildlife in pristine areas they must make a mature, unselfish and responsible decision: If they cannot bear to be apart from their beloved pets and will develop acute separation anxiety and emotional disturbances then the best remedy is to stay at home and watch Animal Planet.