



ECO WARRIORS

Never straying far from the front line, the unsung heroes of the environmental battle are the eco warriors selflessly devoting their lives to raising awareness, helping communities and fighting acts of short-termism threatening the world they endeavour to protect.

Though their vocations take them to opposing corners of the globe, these eco warriors stand united as a source of inspiration from which others follow them unto the breach.

Often happy to shy away from the headline-grabbing shock-and-awe tactics employed by activists elsewhere, the contributions of these individuals are quietly promoting positive action around the globe.

Having spent twelve years as a consultant for the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Jill Robinson keeps herself in the firing line on behalf of endangered animals courtesy of her self-founded Animals Asia group.

Kelsey Wilson has progressed from embarking on volunteer abroad schemes in Africa to become an integral part of longer-term projects building and running eco-friendly villages, providing everything from education facilities to healthcare for vulnerable women and children.

The dedication of Allan Thornton, meanwhile, is legendary. As co-founder of Greenpeace UK, he was a vital part of the organisation during its formative days. Now he campaigns to highlight environmental crimes taking place around the world as part of a group which he established in 1982, and is quite literally putting his life on the line for the cause he lives to serve.



JILL ROBINSON

Words by Blair Palese

Having dog entrails hurled at you or seeing a bear tormented with rage from the entrapment of a metal jacket are challenges that animal welfare-worker, Jill Robinson, has personally encountered. Despite these emotional confrontations she has found her campaigns and projects are balanced by uplifting moments.

Robinson says, 'In one day I might shed rivers as I say goodbye to a sick bear so depleted from her time on the farm that euthanasia is the only option, and later I wipe away tears of joy as I watch a previously spurned street dog proudly sporting his 'Doctor Dog' bandana and bringing comfort to children left orphaned by the Sichuan earthquake.'

Robinson has spent twelve years as consultant for the International Fund for Animal Welfare, before later founding Animals Asia. Awarded an MBE in 1988,

she set up the first animal dog therapy program in Hong Kong, 'Doctor Dog'.

Adopting a bipartisan approach between animal welfare and communities is how Robinson has instigated long lasting programs.

'If we hadn't taken 'human welfare' into consideration when promoting animal welfare programs, we would have seen much less progress, and our impact would probably be short lived.'

The campaign, 'Doctor Dog' instills pride in Robinson. Animals Asia works with local governments on developing comprehensive de-sexing and vaccination programmes for stray dogs.

'It is incredible to think back to 1991 and how hard it was to convince Hong Kong's medical community to even consider having a 'dirty, smelly mutt' in the city's hygienic hospitals.

'Finally, the Duchess of Kent Children's



Hospital let me bring one dog, to spend one hour, in the garden.'

'A paraplegic teenage boy lying flat on his bed was wheeled in and Max, my gentle golden retriever gently placed his massive paws onto the side of the bed. The boy's face lit up with a radiant smile. I'll never forget that moment - that's when Doctor Dog was born.

'Now we work with 60 Chinese animal welfare

groups and they can explain the benefits of programmes such as trap, neuter, release to control stray dogs and cats.'

Another major goal that Robinson is working toward is stopping the farming of Asiatic black bears for their bile - referred to as the 'liquid gold' of Chinese medicine.

'One way we are helping is by working with the traditional medicine community at an international level to promote

the use of bear bile alternatives that are harmless to wildlife, as well as being safe, effective and cheaper,' Says Robinson.

Working with communities and organisations is an essential step toward the bears' recovery. Recently, Robinson was thrilled to be approached by the Sichuan

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Forestry Department to work with officials on a campaign to discourage the use of endangered species in traditional medicine.

'We compensate farmers when their bear farms close,' she says, 'so they can still feed their families - we even had a former bear farmer visit 'his bears' at our China sanctuary. He showed genuine concern for their welfare.'

Apart from the horrific cruelty

to the bears, the loss of habitat and the decline of an endangered species that bile farming creates, Robinson is also keen to point out the compelling health concerns from using farmed bile.

'We are calling on the Chinese authorities to look urgently into the possible harmful side-effects of contaminated bear bile, which is often manufactured in unhygienic, backyard laboratories.

'Even more worrying is that farmed bears are highly susceptible to liver cancer. Animal Asia's veterinary team is in no doubt that the bile is infected with cancer cells.'

Gradually plugging away at 'deaf ears', Animals Asia is taking these concerns to various departments in Beijing and Sichuan. For the rest, Robinson's passion for animals continues to assert that animals have welfare concerns just like humans.



KELSEY WILSON

Words by Blair Palese

we are using methods such as rainwater collection, fish farming, composting toilets and an organic permaculture farm.'

Initially, Wilson encountered defensiveness from the community with these new ideas, but all that is now changing.

'Our workers, who six months ago were telling us to give in and use chemicals on our farm, are now marvelling at the harvest. They are scrambling to learn more about double-dig garden beds and composting and mulching. They are saying they can't wait to tell everyone else about it.'

Moving towards a sustainable way of living for people in developing countries so that they are less reliant on international aid is just what FWS aims for. After all, as Wilson points out, villages in Africa were able to sustain themselves until the rest of the world introduced roads and trade and the idea that 'things' needed to come in and replace village life.

Today, the FWS volunteer base comprises dozens of experts and dedicated volunteers who are working in Australia and around the world. The inspiration, vitality and energy underpinning the project have been maintained by the community as a whole.

'It was important to us from the beginning that the community have a sense of ownership and connection to Kesho Leo - it is their community centre. We planned this project with village elders; the men that we employed to build were subsistence farmers before working with us and the house mamas we chose are from this village.

Our initial aim was to support women and children and we have ended up empowering all of these wonderful husbands and fathers. We really have boosted the whole community,' says Wilson.

For Wilson, access to education and a belief in the future is one of the biggest challenges facing the Kesho Leo children.

'If a child or a young person does not believe in tomorrow, then why should they care for their environment or their health or be good to people around them?'

The process is slow, and making fundamental changes in thinking depends a lot on community acceptance, but as Wilson says, 'soon people will see the good not in terms of money, but in livelihood.'

If you want to contribute financially and help the FWS team get their hands dirty please visit www.foodwatershelter.org.au

Wilson was there from the beginning. 'The challenges turn you inside out, but it's such an intense way to get to know yourself,' she says about her volunteer time. 'I laugh at the irony that people often come here to work to find their virtuosity but in truth an experience like this brings out, highlights and puts on display all of your flaws!'

The first children's village established is called Kesho Leo, located in Sinon in the Arusha region of Tanzania. The village has been built to international eco-design and construction standards.

'In our eco friendly children's village

Volunteering overseas has become appealing for many Australians wanting a break from the comfort zone and challenge their training and experiences in a different context. For Kelsey Wilson, Australian volunteer in East Africa's Tanzania, her unpaid passion led to an inspiring and long-term project.

Formed in 2005, Foodwatershelter Inc. (FWS) was set up by five Australian women who had completed volunteer placements. In short, FWS is an NGO, not-for-profit organisation that builds and runs eco friendly villages (with education, social, health and community facilities) for vulnerable women and children.

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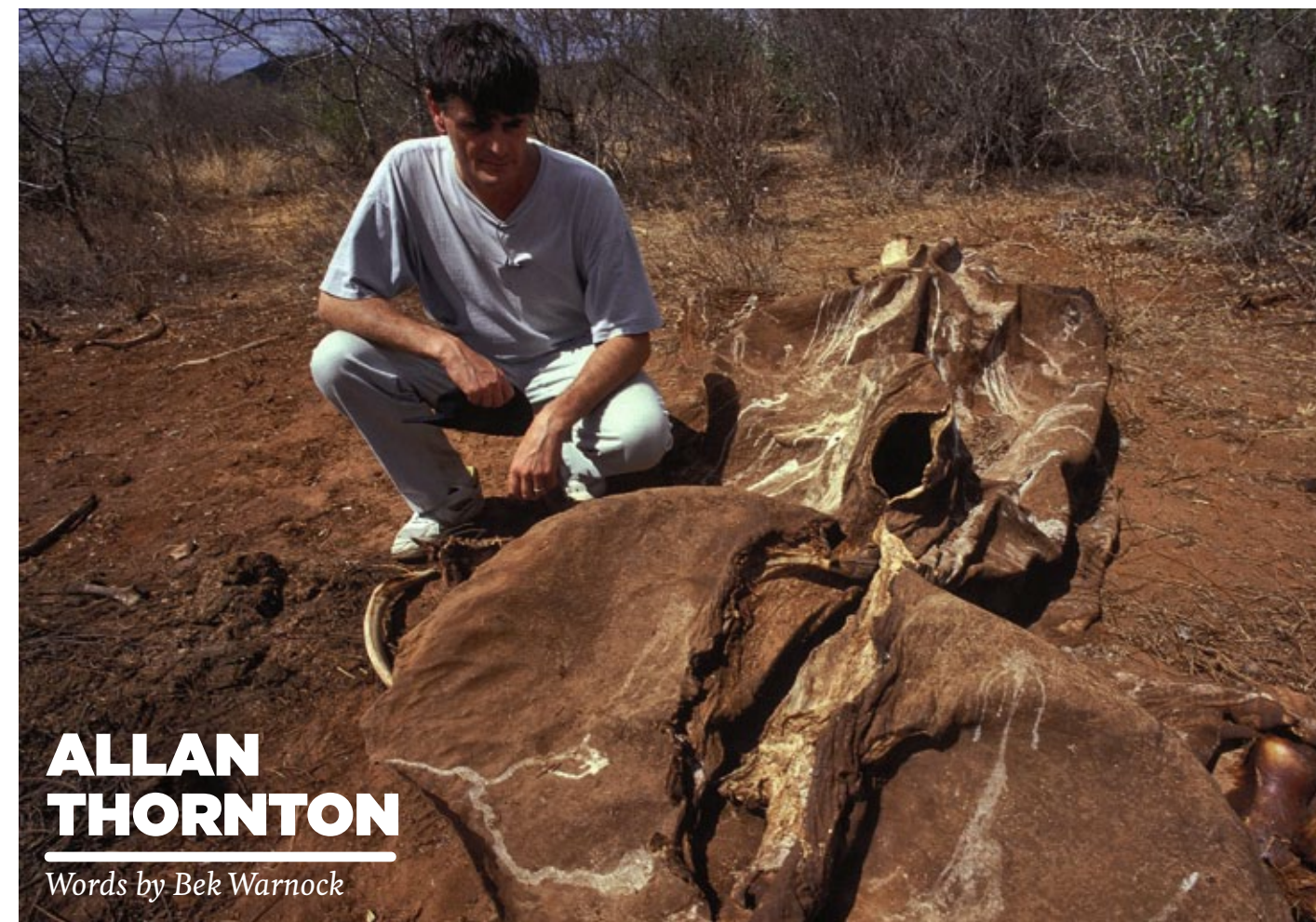
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ALLAN THORNTON

Words by Bek Warnock

Canadian-born, London-based environmental crusader and co-founder of Greenpeace UK, Allan Thornton stands as a shining example among his peers. He is a green James Bond whose tales impress and inspire.

Born in Windsor, Ontario, Thornton grew up just across the river from the US motor city Detroit, and as a result he had an appreciation of the impact humans have on the environment from a young age. 'Everyone works in a car factory or a factory that makes parts for cars. It was a very polluted environment; swimming in the Detroit River was banned when I was eight, and an acidic brown ash would float down over the city from the foundries in Detroit and eat into the paint on people's cars – so, of course it was far from great for people's lungs.'

As a young adult, Thornton aspired to be a novelist, and to this end moved to Vancouver, BC. Whilst there, he began volunteering with the fledgling Greenpeace organisation in 1975 when it consisted of one small desk, no full-time staff, and just one office worldwide (they are now

in more than 40 countries). The pull of his environmental sensibilities trumped his literary dreams for the time being, and the next year he relocated to London to set up the first Greenpeace office in Europe. After 18 months of scrimping and saving, the newly formed Greenpeace UK office (together with the French office) purchased the now legendary Rainbow Warrior. Together the team launched Rainbow Warrior campaigns against whale hunts in Iceland and Spain and radioactive waste dumping in the North Atlantic Ocean. Greenpeace experienced explosive growth, driven by the success and worldwide publicity generated by the Rainbow Warrior campaigns and crew.

It's difficult to resist the inclination towards hero-worship when reading accounts of Thornton's first close-up encounter with whaling boats 80 km off the coast of Iceland: 'Everything went into slow motion, and I could see the beautiful pinkish skin of the whales and the fine mist shooting from their spouts against a perfect blue sky dotted with small, wispy clouds. I sensed death about

us; then the harpoonist slammed the safety catch back onto the harpoon, and we slipped back into real time. The Rainbow Warrior crew had saved its first whale.'

In 1982 Thornton left Greenpeace to found EIA (Environmental Investigation Association), a nonprofit environmental group with offices in Washington DC and London. EIA campaigns to protect the natural environment using investigation, often undercover, to document and expose environmental crimes around the world.

From throwing himself between harpoons and whales off the Norwegian coast, to going undercover in the illegal ivory trade in South Africa during Apartheid and having to check underneath his car for bombs, Allan Thornton exemplifies 'walking the walk'. So what does the man himself think about the whole 'changing policy' political approach versus the 'changing your lifestyle' individual approach to environmental awareness? 'We need both – urgently. We need to demand real action to protect the environment and we also have to reduce our mindless consumerism and waste of resources.'