

Famine threat to wildlife survival

STEVE HODDER

Dubbo's famous icon, the giraffe, is being slaughtered for food as a man-made famine sweeps across Zimbabwe.

As Zimbabwe's economic climate lurches from disaster to catastrophe, former Western Plains Zoo animal keeper John Lemon fears the embattled African nation's wildlife will be totally annihilated.

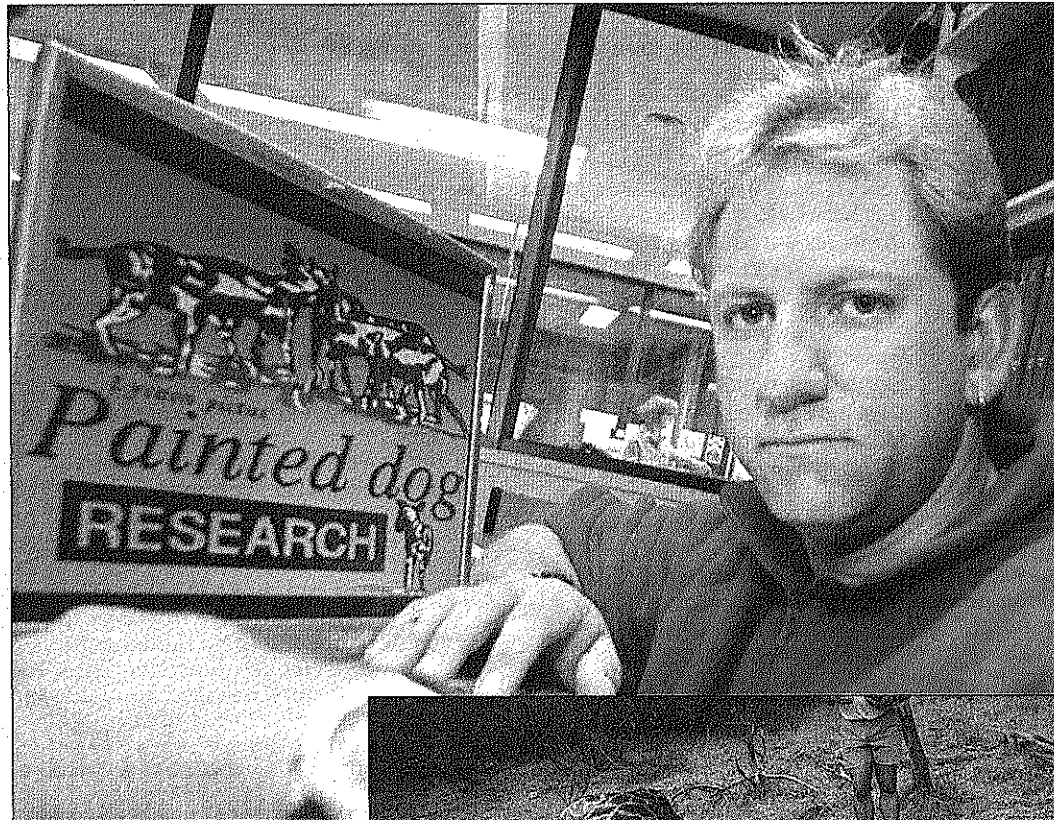
Having moved to Zimbabwe last year to save the remnants of its painted hunting dog population from extinction, Mr Lemon is spending most of his time chasing poachers and dismantling snares.

"I originally went to Zimbabwe to establish a refuge for the painted hunting dogs but now the poachers are attacking everything including giraffe and elephants," Mr Lemon said during a brief visit to Dubbo yesterday.

"The eviction of the white farmers over the past two years has created a man-made famine, which is driving the locals to kill whatever they can to survive.

"You can't blame them, they are just trying to feed their families but unless something is done now I doubt there will be any wildlife left in Zimbabwe in three years."

Mr Lemon said in some



AT RISK: John Lemon is battling to save Zimbabwe's wildlife, including giraffes (right) from being eaten.

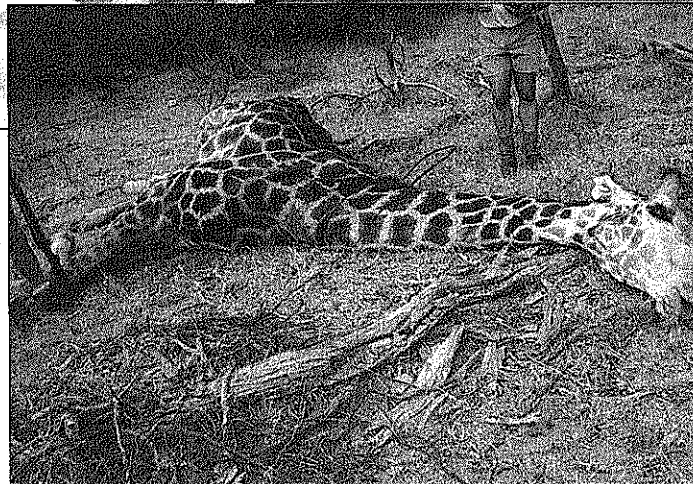
areas up to 80 per cent of the wildlife had already been wiped out.

"The white farmers have been evicted by President Robert Mugabe's men and replaced with locals," he said.

"But they have been unable to sustain the farming practises and the nation's food supply has all-but dried up.

"The official inflation rate is 250 per cent but in fact it's a lot higher.

"A loaf of bread, if you can get it, costs twice the average daily wage."



After a short fundraising trip to Sydney, Mr Lemon and his wife Angela are returning to the strife-torn country to continue work on their animal sanctuary.

Aware of the extreme danger facing them, Mr Lemon

said the welfare of the animals is far more important.

"I've been beaten, intimidated and warned to keep my nose out of it but unless someone is prepared to make the effort the country's wildlife will be destroyed."

Pokie tax will 'erode' city spirit

Don't think pokies - think footy jumpers, swimming pools and special chairs for disabled kids. Dubbo councillor Dawn Fardell said the city risked losing all that and more if a planned hike in poker machine tax went ahead.

Last night she convinced council to write to the Premier and NSW Treasurer reinforcing the clubs' concerns about the proposal.

Council will call for a review before the changes are implemented to ascertain the full impact on clubs and their communities.

"The impact on our children, sporting clubs and charity groups will be dramatic," Cr Fardell said.

"As a small example the Railway Bowling Club donates jumpers for the local PCYC football club."

Cr Fardell serves on a community committee which distributes about \$70,000 of club takings to local charities every year.

But she said a decision to raise the tax, combined with the loss of a GST rebate, could see many community supports eroded.

"We are talking about 15,000 club members in the Dubbo area," she said.

"Our local clubs are an industry and employ more than 300 ratepayers - they would be one of the largest employers in the region. I've been advised that the payroll figure would be about \$10 million."

Cr Fardell said a pre-election "understanding" to conduct a review prior to introducing the tax was not honoured.

While she said it was not a gambling issue, some of her colleagues disagreed. Megan Duncan and John Neville said poker machines were detrimental to Dubbo families.

Cr Neville said the 'one-armed bandits' pulled in a "ridiculous amount" of money, meaning "our ratepayers are losing money".

But Arthur Mortimer said without clubs picking up the tab for sporting groups and community organisations council could find itself under increasing pressure to foot the bill.