**A quick guide to *The silence of the pandas* documentary**

**The discredited documentary *Der Pakt mit dem Panda* was initially shown in Germany on the ARD network in June 2011, and pirated versions of the German programme were posted on YouTube. From September 2011, copies of the English language version *The Silence of Pandas* also became available on YouTube.**

For a programme supported and broadcast by a major public broadcaster, The Silence of Pandas falls astonishingly short of basic norms of journalism. The main shortfalls are:

* **Poor substantiation of assertions and allegations.** Much of the programme is based on assertions taken at face value. There is little evidence of attempts at corroboration.
* **Poor fact checking.** Programme is replete with errors, many of which could have been easily checked with readily available material online or simple queries. In some cases documentary team was in possession of factually correct material but chose not to use it.
* **Poor background research** The programme displays little familiarity with the background of even some basic elements of the topics covered.
* **Lack of balance.** The programme set out to vilify WWF. Material that did not fit into this story line was avoided or ignored.
* **Distortions, possibly deliberate.** Decisions made by governments were linked to WWF. WWF was held responsible for the practices of unassociated companies. Interviews in Indonesia were described in false contexts and grossly mistranslated into German and English. Descriptions of the film-makers approaches to WWF were false. The roles of WWF personnel were misrepresented.

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<http://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/press_releases/silence_pact_pandas_wwf.cfm>

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| **Silence of the Pandas allegation** | **The reality** |
| WWF raises money under false pretenses, collecting money for orang-utan projects in Borneo although it has no such projects | This was the centerpiece of television station WDR’s pre-publicity for the Pakt mit dem Pandas documentary. This claim had to be dropped before the programme was shown, after WWF demonstrated that readily available information showed it had substantial programmes to protect orang-utans and orang-utan habitat in Borneo. The programme was amended to say “WWF raises money across the globe to save the orang-utan and it does in fact work to preserve existing national parks”. WWF does more than this, but the abrupt about face - before the programme had even been shown – underlined the poor quality of its journalism and should have served as a warning to WDR. |
| WWF collaborates with companies that destroy tropical forests | *Little actual evidence is offered in the film to support this sweeping assertion. WWF is committed to working towards a future in which humans live in harmony with nature. It collaborates with some companies to improve the sustainability of their forest operations, is in dialogue with others about improving their operations and is prominent in exposing and opposing some companies that appear to have little interest in improving their operations. WWF initiatives have helped create markets for sustainably produced timber products and create legal barriers to trade in illegal timber.* |
| WWF supports damaging “ecotourism” which brings in money for tigers but disturbs them | *WWF-India is seeking better regulated tourism and benefit sharing with local communities. In some cases eco-tourism does have a positive role to play in valuing tigers and providing income and employment to local communities but it is only part of the answer to protecting tigers. However WWF-India does not work on tourism in Kanha, the tiger reserve where this documentary footage was filmed.* |
| The context implies that WWF was involved in removal of Adavasi village from Kanhar Tiger Reserve, India, | *WWF played no role in previous forced relocations in Kanha (or anywhere else in India). WWF-India has helped communities that have given their consent to voluntary relocation ensure that due process is followed and they are not deprived of their rights or cheated by outsiders.* |
| Millions from tiger campaign end up in camera traps – “a PR stunt” - so that tigers can be watched live on WWF website | WWF uses camera traps for scientific purposes, in India working on tiger population estimates in some reserves (not including Kanha) in company with the Wildlife Institute of India and others. This does not involve the expenditure of “millions”. |
| WWF’s Project Tiger is a failure. | *Project Tiger was an Indian government project not a WWF project. Tiger numbers have declined in some areas due to poaching and habitat pressures, but India still holds around half the world’s surviving tigers. The latest estimated shows an increase in tiger numbers in India.* |
| Tiger related money only serves to make forestry officials and scientists very rich | *WWF has a zero tolerance policy on corruption. WWF tiger project funds are used for conservation activities including provision of essential infrastructure and equipment to the forest department on the basis of written contracts. Direct payments are never made to forestry officials. WWF accounts are subject to audits.* |
| WWF wants to drive Adavasi out of Indian forests | *WWF opposes forced relocation and with other NGOs has worked to see that the legal rights of adavasi’s and forest dependent people are protected.* |
| WWF is involved in seeking the removal of “the tribe of honey collectors” in Nagarhole National Park. | *WWF has not ever worked in Nagarhole National Park* |
| Huismann was unable to talk to WWF International about its tiger policy | *Huismann approached WWF International regarding his intention to make a programme on WWF’s 50th anniversary. Specifics of WWF’s tiger policy or issues of forest people relocation in India were not mentioned at any point.* |
| WWF has a consultation contract with (palm oil producer) Wilmar corporation on sustainability/WWF has a partnership with Wilmar/the partnership has improved Wilmar’s image but not its methods. | WWF does not have a partnership with Wilmar.   Wilmar is a member of the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO) and has had some production units independently certified as producers of sustainable palm oil. WWF is a founder member of RSPO, and is involved in this leading initiative to reduce the environmental and social impacts of palm oil production with other NGOs such as Oxfam. WWF-Indonesia has trained some employees of palm oil companies including Wilmar on dealing with High Conservation Value Forest. The training is covered by a Memorandum of Understanding with companies and does not involve payments to WWF. |
| Purely on the authority of its interviewee, the programme asserts that WWF accepts money to greenwash destructive palm oil production practices.  WWF functionaries have joined forces with the industry lobby to propose that palm oil plantations be recognised as reforestation, to get emission credits as a profit bonus | This bland assertion is completely false, and no effort was made to check the statement.  A key WWF initiative in reducing the environmental destruction associated with palm oil is the RSPO. WWF does not receive money from the RSPO with the exception of some reimbursement of travel expenses for attendance at working group meetings.  Again, totally false and showing only a hazy understanding of the topic. WWF has opposed the attempted definition of palm oil plantations as "continuously forested areas" in a number of contexts, including the EU directive on the promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources. WWF's position, communicated directly and emphatically to the European Commission, is that Palm Oil plantations need to remain defined as "Agricultural production systems", in line with accepted practice and existing UN FAO definitions. |
| Farmers have been dispossessed of their land to make way for Wilmar’s palm oil plantations. | *WWF has no knowledge of these specific allegations. Land tenure and customary rights are difficult issues in Indonesia, with uneven legal recognition of title or customary rights, and difficulties getting even recognized rights enforced. Conflict between individual, community and customary rights and concessions granted to companies for timber extraction, plantation development or other activities is regrettably frequent. RSPO rules require clear tenure and consultation on customary rights issues and provide avenues for dispute resolution which have seen customary rights recognized and disputes resolved in favour of communities. While such rules are not a substitute for effective land planning and management at local to national government levels, they can still be significant ways to address and redress the unequal bargaining position of communities.* |
| WWF-Indonesia employee Amalia Prameswari is responsible for the palm oil partnership with Wilmar | *There is no partnership with Wilmar. Amalia Prameswari does not have such responsibilities.* |
| With the green stamp of approval of the RSPO, Wilmar can cash in on European subsidies for regenerative energy. | It is possible this is a confused reference to the false allegations on WWF support for counting plantations as continually forested areas dealt with above. |
| WWF managed to protect only 80 hectares of a 14,500 palm oil plantation. Two orang-utans will die of starvation or be killed by plantation workers as a result. | 4961 hectares of the 13,970 hectare PT Rimba Harapan concession have been set aside for protection and analysis of recent satellite images show these areas remain forested. Clearing of primary forest would have rendered this plantation ineligible for independent certification under the RSPO standard. WWF’s only role here was to develop a concept for High Conservation Value forest which includes primary forest and secondary forest with significant biodiversity, importance for ecosystem functioning or of livelihood or cultural significance to local communities. WWF conducted a pre-examination of the area but the assessment was carried out by assessors independent of WWF or Wilmar. |
| WWF offers industry green certificates for tropical wood, corn, soybeans, fish, sugar cane and palm oil. | *WWF does not certify any commodities as green or sustainably produced. WWF has worked with stakeholders including industry and other NGOs to form bodies that independently set standards for environmentally and in many cases socially responsible production. Certification is a process of independent and audited assessment against such standards. WWF, like other stakeholders, can raise issues during the certification process or seek independent review of decisions.* |
| The basis of the interview with WWF’s Dorte Bieler was whether WWF could call it a success if only 0.5 per cent of a plantation created “with the approval of WWF” was preserved and 99.5 percent destroyed. | *WWF does not approve plantations – land use planning is a matter for governments. There is no factual basis to the question – 36 per cent of the plantation referred to was set aside for protection on the basis of independent assessments of conservation and community values. Bieler’s answers should be viewed in the context of her ambush on this completely fabricated premise.* |
| “The world’s largest bank provides financing for the palm oil industry and the WWF isn’t left empty handed.” | *HSBC has or is engaged with partnerships with WWF to achieve specific objectives on climate and water issues. Public reports are available on the outcomes of this partnership. WWF is not in any partnerships with HSBC in relation to palm oil.* |
| Indigenous people are having awful problems with the penetration of petroleum companies, mining companies, biofuel companies and a number of companies give money to conservation groups and they tend to stay away from criticism of them. | *WWF in 1996 became the first major conservation organization to recognize the rights of indigenous peoples. In recognizing the special plight of indigenous peoples WWF works to ensure their rights are respected, that their livelihoods are protected, that development on their lands proceeds only on the basis of their free, prior and informed consent and that they benefit from development. WWF’s statement of principles on indigenous peoples is a public document. WWF has criticized companies on the basis of their treatment of indigenous peoples. WWF does not accept donations from fossil fuel producers.* |
| WWF funded armed anti-poaching commandoes in Zimbabwe | *This does not correspond to anything in WWF’s knowledge – such allegations have been discounted by an independent historian who had full access to former WWF personnel and archives.* |
| WWF “deployed” a mercenary unit to go to Southern Africa and find out who was poaching rhino horn and kill them. WWF financed this venture. | *What is presented are gross distortions of an anti-poaching intelligence operation, originally proposed by a private security company to some persons associated with WWF and financed privately by then WWF president Prince Bernhard. WWF was not advised of this venture, did not authorise it and did not finance it. WWF unreservedly accepts the findings of a comprehensive inquiry by Mr Justice Kumleben of South Africa who found the venture naive and misguided but that WWF involvement was limited. Huismann had access to comprehensive research drawing on both WWF archives and the Kumleben inquiry reports but made no reference to this material.* |
| WWF has collaborated with Monsanto “the secret ruler of Argentina” to make the Monsanto model of agriculture socially acceptable. | *WWF has no collaboration or partnership with Monsanto on any matter in Argentina or anywhere else. Huismann was accurately advised of the non-relationship with Monsanto in an interview with WWF’s partner organization in Argentina, the Fundacion Vida Silvestre. Ignoring this, the programme used a former president Dr Hector Laurence – who does not speak for FVS – to represent the organisation’s views* |
| WWF is ensuring that Argentina and European public opinion accept Monsanto Genetically Modified Soy. | *The allegation is fanciful. WWF has long sought to reduce the environmental damage associated with soy cultivation. It was instrumental in developing the 2004 Basel Criteria for Responsible Soy Production and was a founder member of the Round Table on Responsible Soy (RTRS) envisaged in the Basel Criteria. The Basel Criteria excluded GM soy. Around 70 per cent of the overall production now uses GM seed material and the RTRS standard for environmentally and socially responsible produced soy does not discriminate between GM and non-GM soy. WWF has, however, been instrumental in having RTRS provide a certification module for non-GM soy so it can receive due recognition in markets. WWF is not and never has been an advocate of GM soy.* |
| WWF has “greenlighted” soy expansion in the Chaco region of Argentina by deeming forests substandard and degraded by human occupation. | *Neither WWF nor FVS has any category of degraded forest or savannah. FVS is working with other partners to preserve important dry forest in the Gran Chaco by preparing detailed land use plans and advocating protected areas and working with local populations on the development of sustainable livelihoods. Huismann was offered the opportunity to inspect this work during his interview with FVS but did not take it up.* |
| In an unprecedented fight for land, WWF has taken Monsanto’s side. The two sides came to an agreement at the RTRS in 2010 for Monsanto’s GM soy to bear the produced sustainably seal. | *WWF has made no agreements with Monsanto. RTRS is a multi-stakeholder body to promote economically viable, socially equitable and environmentally responsible soy production which operates independently of WWF. Monsanto and another biotechnology company were accepted as members by RTRS in 2009. Soy can be independently certified as responsible if it meets an RTRS standard which among other requirements protects forests and biodiversity, safeguards the rights of communities and traditional land users, uses water responsibly, observes safeguards on agricultural chemicals and observes fair labor conditions. The origin of seed stock is not a major factor in these dimensions of environmental and social responsibility – however WWF has been instrumental in having RTRS establish a certification module for non-GM soy.* |
| WWF vice president Jason Clay is in charge of the (Monsanto) partnership. | *Dr Jason Clay is Senior Vice-President of Market Transformation for WWF-US. There is no partnership with Monsanto* |
| Monsanto boss Hugh Grant was at a secret summit meeting with WWF-US in summer 2010. | *There was no secret meeting. Mr Grant attended WWF-US offices in October 2010 as an invited panelist for one of a number of regular panels held in conjunction with WWF-US board and national council meetings. Other panelists on the same panel were Dr Dan Nepstad of Amazon research institute IPAM and the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and a representative of the Packard Foundation.* |
| An excerpt of a speech by Dr Clay to agribusiness lobby Global Harvest Initiative is presented as “a clear commitment to the brave new Monsanto world . .. Agribusiness is busy apportioning the planet earth with the WWF right by its side.” | *Dr Clay is recognized as a leading thinker on the challenges of feeding a world expected to reach a population of 9 billion by 2050 while safeguarding the natural resources and life support systems of the earth. The excerpt misrepresents his position which stresses eight strategies for increasing food availability in a responsible and sustainable way – genetics (in the main accelerating traditional plant breeding particularly for neglected tropical food crops), better farming practices, increasing returns on inputs particularly water, bringing degraded land back into production, slashing food waste, securing property rights for farmers, cutting overconsumption, increasing soil organic content and valuing the carbon stored in soils. WWF is not a member of the Global Harvest Institute.* |
| In West Papua, up to nine million hectares have been earmarked for oil palm plantations, according to (1) a contract which the industry has signed with WWF (German language documentary) (2) an agreement between WWF and the provincial government. (English language documentary) | *No such contract or agreement exists with either industry or government. Land use planning is not in WWF’s power. The nine million hectare figure does not correlate to anything in WWF’s knowledge except perhaps speculative 2006 Indonesian government projections for oil palm expansion in Papua, Kalimantan and Sumatra with by far the largest area in Kalimantan. This Papuan portion of the documentary was largely lifted from another documentary shown on German television in 2007.* |  |
| WWF mapped the tribal land itself and is helping to choose the sites for the plantations. | WWF worked with nine tribes in the Merauke area of Papua to map sites of significance to them. WWF then worked on having this mapping incorporated in government land use planning concepts. This was part of a WWF project to reduce social and environmental impacts of a presidentially decreed integrated food and energy project and drew on WWF experience of a notorious failed mega-rice project in Kalimantan. WWF is proud of its efforts working with indigenous peoples to help safeguard their interests. |
| The voiceover relating to the nine million hectares accompanies imagery of a WWF employee pointing at a map. The employee appears to provides an answer to the question “Do they (local communities) know that 9 million hectares are going to be planted with oil palms?”. | *Because this was lifted from an earlier documentary, WWF has been able to note the actual context and what was really said by translating from Bahasa Indonesia not distorted by the voiceover. The WWF employee was pointing at a map of the area of a planned oil palm plantation in Eligobel and Muting in the Merauke area and answering the question “Who is the owner that area?” His answer is significantly mistranslated and the additional question relating to the nine million hectares has been inserted between elements of his response to the ownership question.* |
| We visit one spot on the WWF map. One million hectares of oil palms will be planted here in the tribal homeland of the Kanume. They do not yet know that their time is up. | *The Kanume people did know about the development proposal for the region as they were one of the nine tribes participating in the mapping exercise with WWF. The Kanume are, however, secure in their traditional homes within the Wasure National Park.* |
| Interview with Chief Kasimurus Sangara of the Kanume, where his statements appear to relate to a context of resisting soldier and surveyor linked attempts to take land away. | *The interview is significantly mistranslated. Kasmirus Sangara talks generally of events and how he permits various uses of the forest. The references are to soldiers and a bishop, not surveyors. The “conflict” phrases “They cannot take our forest away” and “If I want, I can cast a spell on them” are not in the chief’s words.* |