

In the course of the twentieth century, and especially during the unprecedented economic boom following the Second World War, corporations began to use an ever greater share of the world's natural resources.¹ Any conservation organisation with a global agenda was thus faced with the question of how to deal with business and industry. According to Luc Hoffmann, the corporate policy adopted by WWF differed significantly from that of other environmental organisations. Instead of being 'antagonistic' the fund 'can cooperate with industry and commerce, even in areas where approaches do not match, and the business world perceives WWF as an equal partner'.² Given the business ideal of the founding fathers the choice of a cooperative attitude towards corporations is not surprising. Yet as the interests of companies geared towards making a profit and the goals of an environmental organisation trying to save life on Earth are not necessarily compatible, it is remarkable that this attitude should have worked out in the long run. An analysis of WWF's well-documented interaction with the oil industry can shed light on the complex way in which the fund's special relationship with the business world developed over time.

Unlike environmental organisations rooted in the protest movements of the late 1960s and founded after the '1970s watershed', notably Greenpeace, which originated in Vancouver around 1971 in opposition to US nuclear arms tests, the conservative, upper-class naturalists who founded WWF ten years earlier did not have a problem with approaching oil companies for funding.³ While Greenpeace raised the funds for its first campaign through a rock concert and to this day refuses to accept money from corporations, WWF's earliest corporate sponsor was the petrochemical giant Royal Dutch/Shell.⁴ In 1961 it gave WWF-UK the remarkable sum of £10,000.⁵ The person responsible for this deal was Guy Mountfort. The advertising executive quickly had to learn that accepting money from a multinational was far from easy and straightforward. A precondition for Shell's gift to WWF-UK had been the fund's promise that no other national appeal might approach a Shell subsidiary in any other country. Mountfort told WWF's PR executive Ian MacPhail: 'Shell happen to be clients of mine in my business capacity and I would be embarrassed if there were any hitch in this, having given my personal assurance that we would respect the stipulations.'⁶ It was probably because of a second personal link between a high-ranking WWF