

#Gingershope
#RabiesElimination
#StopK9Distemper
#DogSterilization

GINGER'S HOPE VACCINATION AND STERILIZATION CAMPAIGN

Ginger came into the Action for Cheetah's in Kenya family in 2004. Ginger's energy and intelligence led us to train her as our first scat detection dog through consulting with a local security company (KK Security) for training tips. As a part of the field team, Ginger beamed with excitement every time she smelled cheetah poop. She camped with the team during parts of the first national cheetah survey outside of Tsavo East and at Mbirikani along the edge of Chyulu Hills. She took a boat across Lake Baringo to stay at Island Camp and she flew in an airplane to the coast to visit friends in Nyali Beach. But, we did not have adequate staff to make Ginger the best scat detection dog, so she became our camp companion animal. She made everyone feel welcome! We took her to schools to talk about dog intelligence - Ginger loved entertaining people. But if a stranger approached the vehicle she would become very defensive. It was just before the second distemper outbreak in 2019 that Ginger took her last breath. Ginger had been diagnosed with liver failure some years prior, and her old body gave up.

It is our **HOPE** that other people in Kenya can enjoy the company of their pet even with a fraction of the joy that Ginger brought to us. It is our **HOPE** that rabies can be eliminated through the joint national efforts and that people who are bitten by a dog –through whatever fault- will never again need to fear rabies. It is also our **HOPE** that by adding the Distemper and sterilization campaigns into the program that we can add to improved health and husbandry. As scientists we do want to do more than just hope – we also want to prove that campaigns like this can make a difference in the lives of the animals and the people. Thus we not only need to fund the campaign but the testing and interviews that will show the impact of our efforts.

Rabies in Kenya

On a field trip in 2016 in Samburu while working in the Meibae Community Conservancy Mary was petting a friendly local puppy when it suddenly became aggressive and bit her - Ginger was getting older and remained at the project base office in Nairobi. The puppy bite drew blood so Mary knew to go for a rabies booster as soon as possible. A couple days later, we were told that the puppy became more aggressive and then suddenly died. The local practice is to burn a dead dog, so there was no way to test for rabies. This prompted Mary to ask around about the level of vaccinations in the area. Almost no one vaccinated dogs (or cats) for rabies or for any other diseases.

Nearly 2000 people died annually in Kenya due to rabies and there were cases of human rabies deaths in the Samburu region. The Government of Kenya declared a development goal of rabies eradication by 2030 through mass vaccination campaigns. The Samburu region, however, was not one of the pilot areas for the launch of the vaccination campaign, thus, it

could be several years before it would reach the area. The ACK team organized professional veterinary consultants, government representatives and conservancy managers who agreed that a campaign in this area would complement the government goals. We initiated the campaign (August 2016) with interviews to determine how many dogs and cats were around, and what people knew about rabies prior to new education efforts associated with the planned campaign.

Distemper Outbreaks

In November 2017, the first vaccination campaign successfully vaccinated nearly 700 dogs reaching the goal of 70% of the areas estimated dogs. Unfortunately, in April of 2018, another disease - Canine Distemper- broke out in the area and within less than a month it killed over 60 dogs. Sadly, the people in the area believed that the vaccinations given in late 2017 were to blame. Still, the group conducted a second campaign in November of 2018 and over a bit larger of an area vaccinated about 900 dogs. Cats and donkeys were also vaccinated for rabies with less than 200 shots given.

Testing of dogs in 2019 showed that Canine Distemper virus was in the Meibae area, so the team decided to add in the distemper combination vaccine for dogs. Tragedy struck the wild dogs that moved between the community and the Samburu National Reserve and tests again confirmed Distemper. Joining Ewaso Lions (Kura's Pride Project) to raise more awareness and extend the area of vaccination cover we named our Meibae campaign "***Ginger's Hope***".