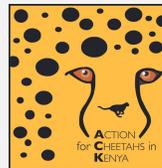


ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA

NEWSLETTER



DIRECTOR'S NOTE MARY WYKSTRA



The pandemic initiated a time of rebuilding, restructuring and renewing relationships strained by lockdowns and social distancing. In the second half of 2021, our team became active in the field again and new visitors visited our camp. The Samburu field team form the pillars of our work in the community. Four staff members who started as interns/students are full time with ACK – Lulu Mandi, Timothy Maiyo, Adelaide Moturi and Jane Wanjira. We are proud of their growth. Our team closed the year with near completion and/or acceptance of scientific publications. Our community programmes are strengthened through support of local and international partners and advisors that make ACK a success!

This was an 'Out of the Ashes' end to the year with a very successful and fun football tournament on International Cheetah Day. We are planning for expansion of our field work and community programmes, growth of our detection dog team, and welcoming at least three groups to our field camp in Meibae in the coming year. We are thankful to individuals who consulted, advised and encouraged our team. A few old friends who were limited by travel joined us at the end of 2021 – Jameson Weston and Peter Barber. These two gentlemen have been rock firm supporters through in-kind, financial and emotional support to me and other members of our team. After nearly three years, they easily picked back up with team members they had known and kindled new friendships with staff they met for the first time. Another long term volunteer, Jessica Watters, visited the field site and forged a new friendship with our team. We are looking forward to more of this in the future.



Left Photo: Adventure Group including Jay Weston (red shirt) and Jessica Watters (brown trouser) visit the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary.



Right Photo: ACK Field Officer Chris Lentaam and Peter Barber pose together in Kenya.

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International Cheetah Day

DECEMBER 4, 2021

In December 2021, we celebrated our first International Cheetah Day in the Meibae Community Conservancy (MCC). Our "Champions for Cheetahs" football tournament celebration was attended by about 200 children, youth and adults. During the event, we shared our success in cheetah conservation as we engaged the community to learn about cheetahs and habitat restoration together. Spectators participated through a 'Pepeta' (ball balancing single kicks) Challenge, a Goal Kick and Cheetah Trivia. The 2021 Champion team was the Lekiji FC Youth Group! Prizes included uniforms, balls, maize flour, sugar and tea, along with a trophy for the winning Lekiji team. Congratulations to all the players for a safe and exciting event.

We thank our partners – the Meibae Community Conservancy, TonyWild, Mitsue All Sports, Alive and Kicking, and all of the volunteers for joining us. We also thank the Samburu East County Government through the Member of the County Assembly's (MCA) office Hon. Benjamin Leitore for facilitating transport for teams to and from the venue.



Photo: Some members of the winning football team, the Lekiji FC Youth Group, with game balls made locally by *Alive and Kicking*.

Birth of an Elephant

It is rare that elephants make their way up the hill to our camp. We often see them at the base of the hill, but the steep climb is only done when the drought is severe. It is also rare that our staff are witness to a new-born elephant calf. This year a number of our staff were present when a small herd made their way up the hill and one female gave birth less than 300 meters from our camp. This blessing is thought to occur when great success will follow!



Photo: A baby elephant stands under their mother in a herd of elephants near the camp



Sterilization & Vaccination Campaign

JULY/AUGUST

In July/August we completed our six-day sterilization campaign to finish our goals for 2021's mass vaccination and population management programme. Participation was high and we had good coverage in the selected areas. Additional vaccinations were administered for puppies, cats and adult dogs that we missed in the previous rabies campaign. A total of 87 dogs and cats were sterilized and 50 vaccines administered bringing the year's total to 1,169.

We thank our partners TNR trust team led by Dr. Desmond Tutu, and Drs. Mohsin Likoniwalla, Ian Ayugu, Shaleen Angwenyi, Gurpreet Sigh, Cecelia Njoroge for their tireless dedication during the entire sterilization period. The Ginger's Hope and Kura's Pride campaign worked with several partners and Samburu County to vaccinate a total of 3,891 vaccinations in 2021. Read more [here](#).



Photo: A group of school children watch as a dog is sterilized by the vet team.

Camera Trapping

This year we began a camera trapping exercise to monitor the usage of the wildlife corridors in the Meibae Community Conservancy. A total number of 28 camera traps were set up in two different locations. These cameras were monitored on a daily basis to check for their security and ensure they were running well. While the acceptance rate for initial installation was high in the locations where we set up, we had to take them down after some time due to tampering from young herders.

Our goal now is to increase acceptability of camera installation in the coming year through community engagement. We will share the value of using cameras to monitor wildlife that we are unable to see during the day and raise awareness of their existence in the area.



Wild Dogs Return

Wild dogs are very rare to see during game drives unless you are lucky. Recently, our community shared the good news of wild dogs returning to the area. It was a pack with litters in their den. Wild dogs are known for their hunting stamina and cooperation. While they can be very destructive to the wealth of the pastoral community, we continue to create awareness about their positive presence in the area. Our staff are following up closely to ensure that both livestock and the wild dogs are protected. Herders are advised to keep vigilance and avoid the area until the pack leave on their own.



Photo by:
Daniel-GZT

Adventure Safari

NOVEMBER

Jay Weston led the first post-pandemic Adventure Safari to our camp. Due to a limited number of seats, volunteer Jessica Watters and Director, Mary Wykstra, joined the safari in one of the ACK vehicles. The group traveled to the Masai Mara and Lake Elementaita together. Mary and Jessica caught up with Dr Chelysheva from the Mara Meru Cheetah Project and with Kat Combes, former conservation manager for Soysambu Conservancy. Jay's group spent a couple of nights at ol Pejeta while Mary and Jessica traveled to Meibae to prepare for the group to arrive. Everyone enjoyed spending time with our staff in Meibae before visiting the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary and Samburu National Reserve nearby.

We look forward to threegrups joining us in 2022 – Jay leading a group in May, Kalamazoo Chirsitan High School in July and Jessica leading a group in November.

Conflict Mitigation Workshops

JULY & OCTOBER

In July and October, we organized two workshops, one in Salama in Makueni and one in Choke Ranch in Taita Taveta County. In both workshops we reached out to 18 community scouts and rangers. Our engagement was targeted to field officers who are actively involved in predator conflict mitigation. We distributed our draft of 'Human-Carnivore Conflict Mitigation Toolbox,' which is a comprehensive guide to investigating and preventing livestock loss from predators.

The scouts are expected to use this guide in their day to day conflict mitigation and, in 2022, they will give feedback that will contribute towards the improvement of the toolbox to enable its completion for wider distribution.



Waste Mangement Program

NOVEMBER

We continued to create awareness on the importance of safe waste management practices to help prevent livestock losses from feeding on plastics. We embrace the recycle method in which we use plastics to make eco-bricks around the homesteads and marketplaces using locally available plastic bottles. Youth and women are our focus of engagement in this environmental restoration program to help ensure safety for livestock, wildlife and people. So far we have constructed two sizable eco-benches in a common meeting place for the community.



We thank all our community youths for the commendable job and Jay Weston Safari group for their invaluable manpower during the construction process (see photo above). We aim to empower the youth on creative ways of utilizing waste and also improve their skills through the construction procedure and more importantly, we emphasize on responsible waste disposal.

K9 Searches

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

Our K9 research team was excited to be back in the field again after pandemic restrictions. A brief acclimation period for the dog and handlers ensured that they were well prepared for cheetah scat searches. In November and December the team conducted field trials for research on the variables and efficacy of using dogs in detecting cheetah poop in conservation as a follow up to our previous publication. Read more about our research [here](#).

Lewa Conservancy Ecological Trip

OCTOBER

We were honored to assist Silango Nanyukie Primary for a sponsored ecological trip to Lewa Community Conservancy. This trip was funded by the Disney Conservation Fund through the Lewa Education Center, who hosted us during the trip. Forty-four students from grades five to eight and five accompanying adults traveled for a two-day experiential learning trip. We are happy that this unique opportunity exposed our students to a different environment where they participated in game drives and practical discussions. Feedback from the school head teacher, Mr. Benjamin Lemeriwias, reports that the wildlife club's students have embraced lessons from the trip through planting local trees and flowers to beautify the school compound. In addition, they are now improvising classroom dustbins to ensure proper waste disposal. Their efforts will go a long way in contributing towards environmental conservation.



Africa Conference for Linear Infrastructure and Ecology (ACLIE)

AUGUST

The second ACLIE virtual conference was attended by ACK Director, Mary Wykstra and Research Scientist, Jane Wanjira in August. Participants from diverse professional backgrounds ranging from engineering, ecology, policy, and finance sectors gathered. The conference encouraged inclusivity in exchange of information and offering solutions to foster sustainable infrastructural development with minimal interference to the ecosystem’s health.

Mary also attended an ESRI East Africa conference on the use of GIS applications in conservation where we have made links to help improve our data collection and analysis.

Elephant Queen Outreach & Conservation Education Workshop

AUGUST

This workshop was held in August at The Creek Club at Kivukoni International School in Kilifi County. ACK Assistant Director, Mr. Cosmas Wambua, represented us in the 3-day workshop where he interacted with educators from different conservation organizations. The workshop activities entailed showcasing ‘The Elephant Queen’ film, familiarization with Elephant Queen (EQ) educational resources and introduction to their Mobile Cinema project.

The Elephant Queen team will be visiting our site in Samburu at the end of May 2022 to share more with our audience through their Mobile Cinema program.

Rabies Workshop at Ol Jogi

The Laikipia Wildlife Forum has hosted rabies campaigns since 2015.

Recently, Vets International has partnered with the Laikipia Rabies Vaccination project to assess its impact in the community. Mary Wykstra was invited to add the Samburu County perspective along with representatives from Ewaso Lions and Sarara Conservancy. The community members that attended from Lakipia shared their understanding of the disease, the role of vaccinations, and their vision for domestic pet management. ACK and our partners have included distemper and sterilization campaigns since 2019 which the Lakipia community would like to emulate.



Photo: Community members share their indigenous knowledge and views about rabies and dog care with researchers and local veterinarians.



Zoo Conferences

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER

In normal years members of our staff attend the American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK) and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) conferences in the USA. In the wake of the pandemic, these conferences have gone virtual. Mary Wykstra presented an update on ACK activities supported by the AAZK Bowling for Rhinos fundraiser. We have received funds through AAZK since 2012 from this group of dedicated rhino and cheetah enthusiasts from the US and Canadian zoos. At the AZA conference Mary presented an update to the Cheetah SSP, thanking the number of zoo facilities for their support of ACK and the Mara Meru Cheetah Projects.

Mary has also become a member of a group called ConsComm which was initiated in 2020 to provide links between consultants, zoos and field conservation. Included in the programme are elements of zoo staff engagement, commerce like our COOL Crafts, virtual engagements and field study community support from zoo facilities. Presentations at the AZA conference initiated the vision and values of ConsComm into the AZA community



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ACK Mission

ACK aims to promote the conservation of cheetahs in Kenya through research, awareness and community participation. ACK works closely with local wildlife authorities and land holders to develop policies and programmes which support wildlife conservation and human livelihoods for the long term development of sustainable human and wildlife zones.

ACK is a non-profit project working in affiliation with: Cheetah Conservation Fund, Kenya Wildlife Service, and the University of Nairobi.

P.O. Box 1611 00606, Sarit Centre, Nairobi, Kenya
www.actionforcheetahs.org