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ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA

NEWSLETTER



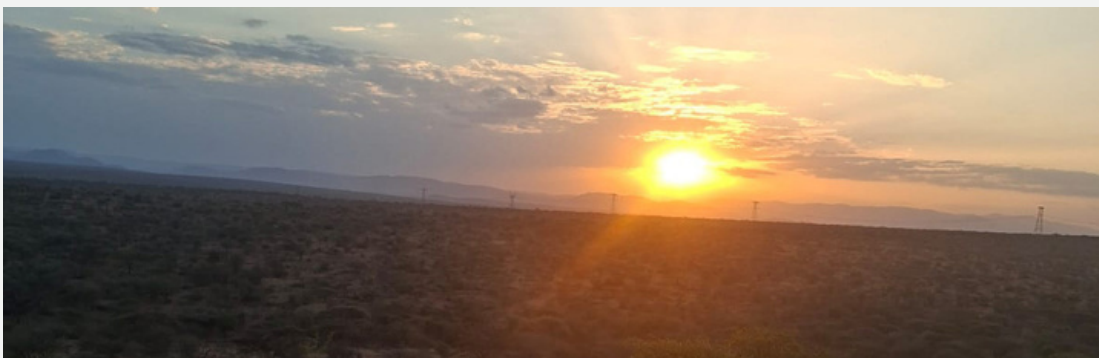
DIRECTOR'S NOTE BY MARY WYKSTRA



Thank you for your continued support in 2024. This has been an exciting year of cheetah conservation, marked by many changes in our team and a steady stream of accomplishments that speak to the breadth and ambition of what ACK is building. Edward Maina joined the team as a technical consultant and Jagnoor Singh was hired as an Administrative Assistant. In the first half of the year alone, we welcomed new staff and consultants, attended the first-ever Global Cheetah Summit, and made important advances in both our canine and research programmes.

The January-June period brought team growth, important field findings, new partnerships, and a deepened commitment to community-based conservation. None of it would be possible without your support. It is because of you that we are able to make this progress, and we are grateful for every one of you who is part of this journey.

Mary Wykstra
Founder and Director



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Fieldwork

The first half of 2024 covered an impressive range of fieldwork: routine patrols and transects, canine scat searches, camera trap monitoring, conflict mitigation activities, and an important exploratory visit to a potential new national survey site. Each of these activities contributes to a deepening picture of cheetah health and distribution across the landscape.

January set the tone. Each year, ACK's field officers complete over 700 patrols and 360 transects – totalling approximately 10,000 kilometres walked annually. This extraordinary commitment forms the bedrock of ACK's cheetah monitoring work, enabling long-term trend analysis of population health and distribution. In January, the canine team also conducted scat searches in Machakos County, though heavy rains cut the deployment short. The dogs performed well on test samples, demonstrating their readiness, but no wild cheetah scat was ultimately found in the area.

February brought a welcome discovery: camera traps positioned at a play tree in the Lpus area confirmed a coalition of two male cheetahs looking healthy. Play trees – where cheetahs gather to scent-mark and socialise – are invaluable monitoring sites, and this confirmation added important data to the team's understanding of local cheetah activity.

March was more difficult. Two sub-adult cubs were lost to vehicle collisions – offspring of a well-known mother from Samburu National Reserve. Staff worked with rangers and other partners to monitor the mother and her two remaining cubs, keeping a close watch to ensure their safety. Separately, four adult lions moved into the conservancy, and the team collaborated with Ewaso Lions to monitor them until they relocated to a safer area. In a more positive development, staff received new phones and training on CyberTracker, a significant upgrade for digital data collection in the field.



Meeting rangers in Melako

April arrived with the rains and a beautiful green landscape for the second consecutive season, alongside continued community support work. Field staff helped locate lost livestock and assisted in bringing newborns home, directly preventing conflicts before they could arise. Camp renovations were also initiated during this period, with new restrooms and showers upgrading the ACK facility in Meibae. June rounded out the half-year with a reconnaissance visit to Melako Conservancy in the far north of Samburu County, led by Timothy Maiyo, Chris Lentaam, and Mary Wykstra, as a potential site for a future national cheetah survey.



Scat Dogs

The first half of 2024 was an active and rewarding period for the canine team, combining field deployments, educational engagement, and the arrival of a new Senior Research Scientist who will strengthen the science underpinning the programme.

The year opened with field searches in Machakos County, where the dogs demonstrated strong performance on test samples despite the weather preventing a full deployment. This kind of readiness is the product of consistent training and is a mark of a maturing programme. In March, the team took on a community-facing role when staff accompanied new Education and Outreach Coordinator Benard into the field for visits to local schools and community groups – a reminder that the canine programme’s reach extends well beyond detection work.



Tim and Mary

May and June brought two rounds of Colorado State University study abroad students to the ACK camp. Research Assistant Timothy Mayo co-hosted the first group’s three-day visit, teaching students about field work and canine detection searches. Timothy then co-led the second group’s visit in June, with students learning about field survey methods, conflict mitigation, and the role of detection dogs in conservation research. These visits provide a meaningful educational experience for the students while also raising awareness of ACK’s work among the next generation of conservation professionals.



CSU students learning from ACK staff





Research

Research in the first half of 2024 spanned cheetah population monitoring, conflict mitigation toolbox development, camera trap data collection, and expanded partnerships with national and international research groups. It was a period that demonstrated ACK's growing ability to operate across multiple research fronts simultaneously.



Sterilization campaign



Basil Lewela

The year began with the continuation of ACK's long-term patrol and transect programme, which generates over 10,000 kilometres of monitoring data annually. In February, the annual Ginger's Hope vaccination and sterilisation campaign reached 1,532 dogs and cats with rabies and distemper vaccinations, sterilised 60 animals, and sampled 111 dogs – all in partnership with TNR Trust, the International Livestock Research Institute, Samburu County, Meibae Community Conservancy, and volunteer veterinarians. Camera trap monitoring at the Lpus play tree also confirmed the presence of a healthy two-male coalition.

March brought an incident that highlighted the importance of ACK's linear development work: a giraffe was struck and killed by a police vehicle, drawing renewed attention to wildlife mortality along highways. In response, the Green Technical Committee was formed – with a specific focus on highway hot spots – replacing the previous Highway Mortality Monitoring team. In April, the Conflict Mitigation Toolbox was presented to the Laikipia-Isiolo-Samburu (LIS) Carnivore Working Group, a body of conservationists and researchers created to unite carnivore project research and mitigation efforts across the region. The presentation marked an important step in disseminating ACK's tools to a broader audience. June rounded out the period with the arrival of Basil Lewela as Senior Research Scientist and a reconnaissance visit to Melako Conservancy in northern Samburu County, scouting a potential national survey site.



Education and Outreach

Outreach in the first half of 2024 operated at every scale simultaneously – from a landmark international summit in Ethiopia to school visits in the communities surrounding Meibae. Each activity contributed to a coherent vision of conservation as something that is built from the ground up, strengthened by partnerships, and sustained by the people who live alongside wildlife.

January opened on a historic note when Mary Wykstra travelled to Ethiopia for the first Global Cheetah Summit. Representatives from cheetah range countries and conservation organisations gathered to create a shared declaration of actions – a commitment to collaborate on saving remaining cheetahs across their range through knowledge exchange, technical skills development, and the creation of sustainable financial income streams. It was a moment of global alignment for cheetah conservation, and ACK was there as an active voice.



Mary at the Global Cheetah Summit



Conflict Mitigation Toolbox presentation

Benard Letoiye was also hired as Education and Outreach Coordinator, a role that would quickly take shape in March as Benard joined field staff in visits to local schools and community groups, building the relationships that underpin community-based conservation.

April brought the Conflict Mitigation Toolbox to a regional audience through its presentation to the LIS Carnivore Working Group. May saw Mary present at the Zoos and Aquariums Committing to Conservation Conference in Salt Lake City alongside Holly Koppleberger and former student Emily, with COOL Crafts featured as a centrepiece for community conservation commerce. She also welcomed Colorado State University students to the ACK camp for a three-day study abroad visit, and was appointed as a representative on the Kenya Wildlife Service Carnivore Task Force. June closed the half-year with the second CSU group visit, guided by Timothy Maiyo to Melako Conservancy in northern Samburu.



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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.

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