

ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA NEWSLETTER



January-June 2019

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Welcome to the return of Action for Cheetahs Newsletters!

As the year of 2019 began, I reflected on the past 10 years since Carnivores, Livelihoods and Landscapes (CaLL) was first registered in Kenya. Our first board was made up of Kenyan scientists who advised and developed the mission, objectives and goals of a programme dedicated to carnivore conservation in human influenced landscapes in Kenya. Action for Cheetahs in Kenya (ACK) was the first project under the umbrella of the newly formed not-for-profit organization.

Prior to CaLL, the project was guided and supported by Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF). We completed detailed surveys (2001 – 2004) in three of Kenya's Wildlife Forums (Nakuru, Machakos and Laikipia). We identified characteristics of land use and human influences that were most affecting cheetahs, human-cheetah conflict and recognized that the environment that supports cheetahs needed to be treated with a holistic approach that included a range-wide view.

In 2002 and 2003, we coordinated a gathering of cheetah and other carnivore researchers to document and share efforts in range wide research and community outreach. We took the forum of researchers to Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in 2004 with a jointly organized carnivore workshop coordinated myself, and a Lion Guardians researcher, Seamus Maclennan. This workshop has now been taken on by KWS and has been held annually since 2005.



Above: Founder and Director Mary Wykstra during the first National Cheetah Survey. Below: Susanne Garrison (volunteer), Cosmas Wambua (Senior Scientist), and Mary with Ginger on Soysambu.



In partnership with the KWS and the East African Wild Life Society we completed the first range-wide survey of cheetahs across all of Kenya (2004 – 2007). This survey took us to the far corners of Kenya in search of the evidence that cheetahs were present. We used interviews with residents in cheetah habitat to quantify the threats to cheetahs on a full country scale. We also set up our first field base in the Machakos/Makueni region where land use was rapidly changing and representative of the country wide issue of land fragmentation. The group of scientists who assisted with the registration of CaLL believed that such an organization could provide a forum for uniting carnivore researchers.

Our National Survey was completed in 2007 and data analysis was nearly completed at the time of registration. In 2009, after CaLL was registered, we changed the project name from Cheetah Conservation Fund - Kenya to Action for Cheetahs in Kenya (ACK). We shifted our focus from the range wide survey to address the issues of land use and conflict that were identified both in the survey and in the Range Wide Conservation Program for Cheetah and African Wild Dogs (RWCP) in the National Cheetah Strategic Plan for Kenya.

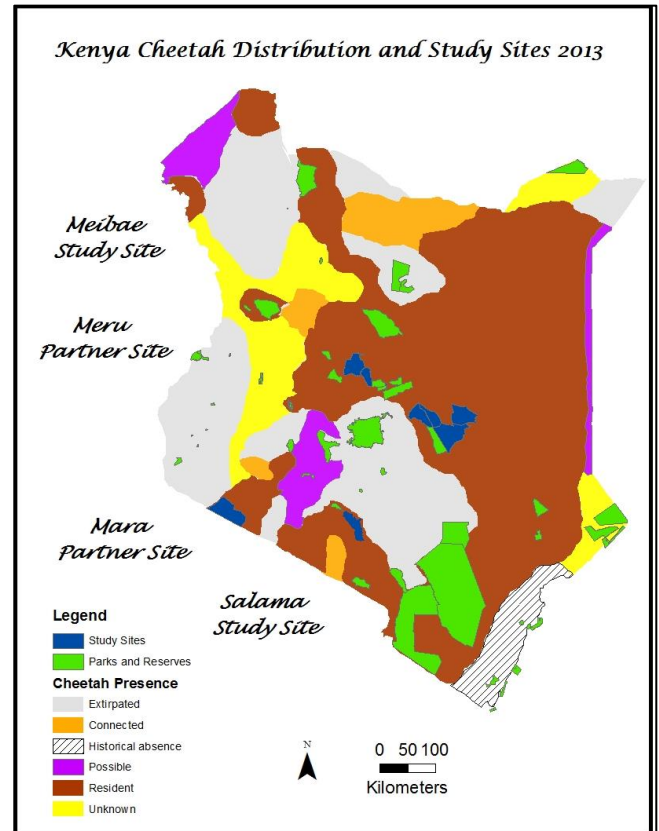
We selected the Makueni District for our first field base and our camp was opened in May 2009. We felt that the Salama region represented the issues facing cheetahs across Kenya, and we launched our field work with the aim of developing model programmes that could be repeated on a range wide scale.

I left Kenya for nearly a year to improve my academic and leadership skills at Yale University, and when I returned we initiated work in Samburu.

In 2010 to 2015, we strengthened our field projects and grew partnerships in Kenya and abroad. I became affiliated with the University of Nairobi and began to assist more Kenyan students in building their capacity as conservationists. The Mara Meru Cheetah Project joined us in our affiliation with KWS and CCF in 2012, and linked with CaLL in 2018.

We conducted several pilot projects to improve our ability to conduct a second national survey and to fill knowledge gaps based on issues in our two field sites. As I look back at our beginning, I can see how far this great team of researchers and field staff have come.

Asante Sana, Mary



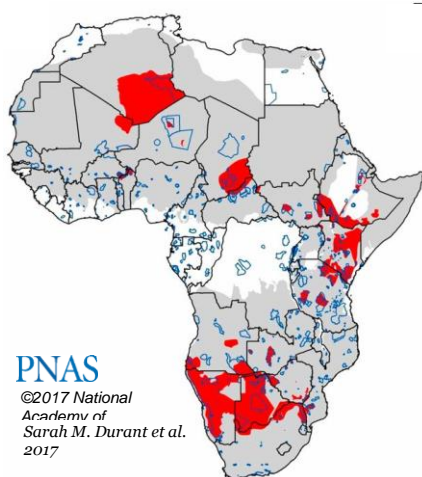
Map: Cheetah distribution and study sites 2019.

JANUARY TO JUNE 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

National Cheetah Survey: Pilot studies for the second National Cheetah Survey began in 2015. Noreen Mutoro (MSc. University of Nairobi, 2015) conducted an evaluation of cheetah scat, using hairs from the fecal samples to understand prey selection. With human collection, we could only confirm 10% of the 300 samples as cheetah. The study showed that variety of prey was important for cheetah survival. Juliana Masseloux (BSc Oregon State University, 2016) combined transect data and interviews to develop a method for determining occupancy, more accurate for high-abundance predators. For less abundant species like the cheetah, Masseloux proved the importance of reliable, on-the-ground data in determining their presence.

We conducted field surveys in the Samburu/Isiolo Ecosystem, Northern Kenya beginning in December 2018 as part of the second national cheetah survey. This ecosystem in particular, is of importance as it hosts the only resident cheetah population that falls entirely within Kenya. We use detection dogs and surveys as non-invasive methods to locate wild cheetah fecal material.

The scat data can then describe cheetah population through genetics, health, and dietary analysis studies in addition to telling us population numbers and relatedness to map corridors on a range-wide scale. Driving surveys and community interviews will be completed in 2020 as a part of Mutoro's PhD.



Map: Cheetah distribution showing importance of the Samburu Region.
Photo: Noreen Mutoro and Javan Amihanda training Kalama Ranger on track identification. Apart from sample collection, we trained some of the rangers on carnivore spoor (tracks and scat) identification and on fecal sample collection.

FROM THE FIELD

Habitat monitoring has been a key element of ACK field research. Our Salama and Samburu teams have collected information on predators and prey in the region. Trend analysis of long-term data helps us understand the issues impacting cheetah habitat selection.

In the first six months of 2019, our 10 field staff completed over 1000 patrols and 160 walking transects in their areas! Patrols give us information on species presence and give our staff opportunities to interact with their community. Transects give us more detailed information about density and abundance of wildlife species.



Field officer Joseph Learkeri identifies a carnivore track while on patrol in Meibae Community Conservancy. Photo: Sara Blake

MEET TIMU

In February, a 2-week old cheetah cub was found by a ranger from one of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum conservancies being carried through a market. The cub was taken to Ol Jogi where they have experience with cheetahs; however, young cubs need substantial manpower to care for and feed every 3 hours. Our Lead Scientist, Sara Blake, has experience with other big cat cubs and was pulled from office work to assist in the care of this male.

A large group of people were integral in the rescue and early care of the cub, so he was named *Timu* after the Swahili word for “team”. In the months since Sara returned, Timu has grown strong and is learning to be a cheetah from his caregivers.



*Timu upon his rescue in February.
Photo: Sara Blake*

Survey Scat Collection: Searches of the Meibae Community Conservancy, Kalama Community Conservancy, Samburu National Reserve, and Buffalo Springs National Reserve lead the Scat Dog team to 77 scat samples during the first half of the year.

Additionally, we received more samples from our field scouts in Meibae and rangers in Kalama Conservancy, Buffalo Springs, and Samburu. Thanks to the dogs, we identified several sites where regular scent marking occurs and rangers or scouts can now regularly check those sites for new samples.

ACK welcomed Cosmas Wambua back onto the project to assist with logistical planning for survey field work.

Scat Dogs Saving Cheetahs: Two handlers and two dogs made up the ACK Canine (K9) Team until June 2019 when Madi and Warrior were joined by two new Malinois puppies - Artemis (Arti) and Persephone (Persi). All of our dogs were donated to us – a huge thank you to Paula Kahumbu, Benard Ojwang (Bran Dog Kennels), and George Karavis (Ultimate K9 Solutions). Benard and George have also been voluntary consultants to the training of the dogs since 2018.

The K9 and Research Teams completed searches in Meibae and Kalama Conservancies, and Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Reserves. The dogs covered over 400 kilometers in 55 search days, finding over 50 cheetah scat samples. The team is grateful to KWS, Samburu and Isiolo Counties, and the conservancies that gave permission and access to conduct the surveys with the dogs. We would also like to thank the rangers from each area for providing information on cheetah sighting locations, and security for the team while searching transects



Photo: Warrior & trainer Javan Amihanda on a transect. A dog's nose has as many as 20,000 scent receptors compared to a human's 3000! Dogs can detect a scent as far as 2km away.

STUDENTS & INTERNS

University of Nairobi: ACK welcomed Jane Wanjira, a masters student from the University of Nairobi. Jane's thesis project is phase three of monitoring the impact of flashing deterrent lights in reducing livestock depredation, adding 20 new sets in the Meibae study site. She is also looking at wildlife mobility between lighted bomas. The project is in collaboration with Michael Mbithi of Co-Existech and supported by WildAid.



Photo: Jane during field work with communities in Samburu. Photo: Sara Blake

Kenyatta University: Brian Mlamba is completing analysis of DNA from fecal samples collected from the Mara cheetah population in collaboration with CCF and the Mara Meru Cheetah Project.

Intern: Denise Wagner joined ACK as an intern with the Detection Team. Denise's animal behavior background provides skills in training and handling with our growing dog team. She also provides logistical support during searches and upgrading the record-keeping procedures for the dogs.



Photos: Cheetah hit by car (left) on and hyena mortality on Mombasa Highway.

University of Eldoret: Peter Kibobi completed field work on road kills along Mombasa Highway to evaluate indicators of mortality hotspots as his MSc at University of Eldoret. His thesis could be used to inform construction of future roads.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Capacity Building: Adelaide Moturi attended capacity building workshops in Uganda and Kenya. The International Zoo Educators Regional Workshop in Entebbe and the Northern Kenya Conservation Education Working Group at Lewa Conservancy both focused on program development and effective communication to an audience, helping Adelaide better prepare future Conservation Education topics for schools and communities.



Photo: Rangers and field staff that received poison training. Photo: Sara Blake.

ACK organized for The Peregrine Fund to give a Poison Workshop in Meibae Community Conservancy. Educating eight ACK staff and 30 Meibae Community Conservancy rangers on the threats of poison to people and wildlife and on safety handling cases of suspected poisonings.

School Outreach: Our school outreach programme visited six education establishments reaching 720 students and 21 staff members in Salama and Meibae. We show a video that



Kule Primary students in Meibae Community Conservancy watching a nature documentary. Photo: Adelaide Moturi

connects students with nature, using film as a tool to channel conservation messages through predator awareness in an interesting and effective manner. The big cat documentary initiated discussions to help the audience understand the message.

ANNUAL EVENTS

Spring Fundraising: Our first US Spring Tour took place in March and April 2019. We split the tour so the fall tour will focus on the East and Central US, and the spring tour will focus on the West Coast. Thank you to the Zoos and AAZK Chapters that welcomed us on our first spring fundraiser!

If you work at a facility or have a group that would be interested in learning about conservation and helping us raise funds in 2020 to continue saving cheetahs, send us an email. fundraising@actionforcheetahs.org

Contact Us

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A Decade of Cheetah Conservation in Kenya

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