

# ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA NEWSLETTER

January - June 2021



## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Following a year of pandemic lockdown our team was ready to get back into the field. Two Master's students from 2019, Peter Kibobi and Jane Wanjira, completed their thesis papers and requirements for graduation this year. We congratulate Peter for taking a position with Nature Kenya and we welcome Jane into our team to continue as a consulting scientist working on corridor monitoring in the Meibae Community.

Several staff members have shifted positions, including Kelvin Mwambilo who has settled in well to assist Chris Lentaam in logistical management in Samburu. The young warriors that we hired in our early years in the area have graduated to elders – they are all now married and either have children or are soon expecting them. Along with this transition come more responsibilities outside of the workplace. The position of our field officers in the community also enables them to take strong advocacy in their new cultural roles.

All of these changes make our team strong and resilient. I hope you enjoy the updates on our project in this edition of the ACK Newsletter.

Mary Wykstra, Director



*Larkeri Lbitiri was just a warrior when he was hired by ACK, now years later, he is an elder in his community.*

## HIGHLIGHTS

**Return of Wildlife:** After a prolonged period of dryness, recent rains bring sightings of gerenuks, Grevy's zebra, ostriches, Grant's gazelle, herds of elephants, impala, warthogs, guinea fowls, and dik-dik that were confirmed in the area. These sightings give us a clear picture of prey abundance, which is an important measurement for predicting increased conflicts. If predators have limited options to choose from, they are more likely to cause conflict. Wild dog, leopard, and lion sightings are being reported from the community as they return. Our field officers use patrol and transect to monitor wildlife movements using continuous data collection from the Meibae area from year to year.

**Ewaso Lions Collaboration:** ACK works with our neighbors, the Ewaso Lions (EL), in conflict mitigation. Early in the year, lions moved into an area where prey had left during the drought. The only prey remaining was livestock. To protect the livestock, we worked with the EL team to encourage the lions into an area of Westgate Conservancy where prey was more abundant. As people seek new grazing areas in light of a pending 2021 drought, livestock shifts cause wildlife and predators to be displaced.



*Action for Cheetahs in Kenya field officer, Kivoi, collaborates with Ewaso Lions staff in the field.*

## STAYING CONNECTED

Herders and community members are staying better connected with the expansion of phone network into remote areas like the Meibae region of Northern Kenya. In Kenya, the phone is a lifeline in communication, especially with our staff and each other. One of the most challenging elements of connectivity in remote areas is electricity to charge the phone – something often taken for granted.

Not a day goes by at our camp where one or more herders bring a phone for charging. The visits provide us with another opportunity for conversation about wildlife and conservation. This communication is important for herders who are sometimes very anxious about wildlife management and their own livelihoods.

## PROLONGED DRY SEASON

During the months before the April/May rains, the livestock in the area suffered over a shortage of healthy pastures. We experienced movement of livestock and people to places where there were healthier pastures. Wildlife was also moving away because the conditions were intolerable.

Life returned back to normal after the rains and the suffering vegetation blossomed to provide enough food for the livestock, wildlife and people. Families reunited and life went on as usual. It is beginning to get dry again and we hope for some rain to sustain life in the coming



*Donkeys play a critical role in relocation. Photo by: Lentaam-ACK*

**Ginger's Hope:** This year's annual rabies vaccination campaign that ran from May 6<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> 2021 was one of the longest and most successful as it lasted 6 days and we had good coverage of the target areas. A total of 1,119 dogs and cats were vaccinated in Meibae alone. Additionally, over 3,000 vaccinations were secured and administered in the Westgate, Sarara, Archers Post, Wamba, Milgis and Ol Malo regions. We thank our partners and colleagues: Ewaso lions, Daktari Wildlife Foundation, Grevy's Zebra Trust, Meibae Community Conservancy and Samburu County for the collaboration and support during the planning and execution of the campaign. We also thank Dr.'s Mohsin Likoniwalla, Desmond Tutu, James Nyariki, and Ian Ayugu together with the entire ACK and Meibae staff for their tireless efforts. Vaccinations and sterilizations continued in July and August to complete this year's mass campaign efforts. For more information on the 2021 campaign look [HERE](#).



*Dr. James and other volunteer veterinarians vaccinated dogs and cats against rabies and distemper in May 2021.*

**Thriving Spots:** Over the past 6 months, each of our field staff had a close encounter with, or a community report about cheetahs in their areas. Most of these sightings happened too quick and sudden to capture physical photos of the animals, only tracks were left. Our staff also attended to conflicts in the community involving cheetahs and gave advice on possible solutions to avoid future conflicts. We are happy that cheetahs are present in the area, so the herders are advised to be vigilant during grazing to prevent day time conflicts from happening.



**Disappearing Spots:** The Samburu ecosystem suffered a huge loss to the cheetah population. Three adult cheetahs, one cub and three unborn cubs were removed from the Samburu National Reserve under different fatal incidents. On 26 March, we were notified that a male cheetah shot by herders grazing in the park was found by a naturalist who saw vultures and found the carcass. The shooter was never identified. The following week, a female cheetah succumbed to serious injuries inflicted by a predator. An Elephant Bedroom tour guide, Samburu rangers and ACK Assistant Director, Cosmas Wambua, watched over the cheetah after the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) veterinary team was called to treat her infected wounds. Sadly, she died after being taken to the KWS veterinary facility in Nairobi on the 11th of April. A few days later, a young, dehydrated cub was found and it is suspected that the cub may have belonged to the dead female – the cub also passed away from starvation and [dehydration](#).



*Cheetah with serious injuries in Samburu National Reserve. Photo by Cosmas-ACK*

Another fatality – just a week later – involved a female cheetah hit by a speeding vehicle inside the park. Sadly, the female was pregnant with two cubs. In a careless moment, the driver removed three cheetahs from the Samburu ecosystem. The driver was found and disciplined by the Samburu County warden’s office. In the Meibae Community Conservancy, 70km away from the reserve, a cheetah mother with four cubs lost one cub to a dog in a grazing field on 26<sup>th</sup> April – one month after the first fatality in the reserve. After follow-up, our field staff found that the young herders who were looking after their goats, were afraid of being attacked by the nursing cheetah. As a result of that fear, they helped their dog kill the cheetah cub. It is a sign of community trust that the herders alerted us about the incident and apologized for killing the cub explaining that they feared the angry mother would kill their dog, or them, if they did not take action. In addressing the issue, we are educating the community on cheetah behaviour to prevent that fear as there has never been a documented case of a cheetah killing a human. KWS were informed and necropsy was completed showing that the cub was otherwise healthy. We will be carefully monitoring the recovery of cheetahs from these devastating months.

**Wildlife trafficking:** In February, Mary Wykstra, ACK Director, spent two weeks in Somaliland working with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) at the Cheetah Safe houses. These have been created to assist the Somaliland government in dealing with the increased confiscations from cheetah cub trafficking. Over 50 cheetahs are residents in three safe houses. Most of the cubs arrive at the care center malnourished, dehydrated and sick.

The origin of the cubs is unknown, but ACK’s cheetah genetic work in Kenya linked with government projects, can prevent cubs from being taken into the trade from our parks and community lands. CCF has been given a portion of land in the Geed Deeble National Park to create a cheetah sanctuary and education center. ACK will continue to work with and support the efforts in eastern Africa to not only care for the orphan cheetahs, but also to curb the trade.

## SCAT DETECTION UNIT

**Scat Dog Update:** We wish Warrior a relaxing retirement as she leaves our active working dog ranks due to age and a heart condition. Madi is the oldest and the only male of the working dogs. Artemis and Persephone (2 yrs) are picking up quite well in their training and are now big girls. Their energy level is high and their accuracy in training while locating cheetah poop is promising!



**K9 Handlers:** We would like to wish Paul Makibia all the best as he joins his new job. Paul was our assistant canine handler in 2020 through early 2021. In March, Bill Kipchirchir joined the team as an intern handler and will work with Lulu Mandi to continue forward with field work. Lulu was promoted to the Lead Dog Handler and is now leading the team.

Additionally, we'd like to welcome Antony Oyugi back after completing his bachelor's degree. Antony will work with us until he is assigned to an internship where he will spend a year practicing to achieve his full certification as a Veterinary Technologist in Kenya.



*Antony Oyugi celebrates graduation by throwing his cap in the air!*

## THE SURVIVOR

Field Officer Lentaam was up early in the morning to go on his weekly 5 km transect. This day was different and exciting with lots of giant spotted hyaena tracks. Then, he heard some jackal calls that shifted his attention. Interestingly, the jackals were collaboratively killing a goat! As he ran to rescue the goat, Meibae rangers on their regular patrol in nearly the same location were also rushing to where they heard the noise.

They all arrived at the same time to save the goat and the owner was alerted. They laughed together and parted ways to go on with their businesses. Life continued.



*Cheetah tracks in Kenya – this picture was taken by one of our field officers!*

## EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

**Conflict Mitigation Training:** We began our first field officer workshop in March to test the usability of our carnivore-conflict mitigation toolbox that was developed and completed by ACK staff. Our first training involved 10 rangers from Meibae Community Wildlife Conservancy in a 2-day workshop. This workshop taught the officers how to utilize our toolbox in mitigating wildlife conflicts while attending to reports from the community. After six months, the officers will get back to us to report on how easy or hard the toolbox is to use in real world situations and give suggestions on improvement. This training will be happening in two other regions- Makueni and Tana River counties - in the coming months.



*Lentaam (left) together with Meibae rangers in a practical session.*

**Informal Learning:** We assisted with the startup of a herder class for young herders who are busy under the heat of day offering protection to their family livestock. We used curriculum-based videos and learning materials to teach letters, numbers and animal identification. Many of them are still shy but our engagement is seeking to strengthen our interactions and empower the young herders into responsible, reliable leaders and conservation pioneers. We currently have a class of 33 enthusiastic herders.

**Formal Affiliation:** Since 2017, ACK has been affiliated with the University of Nairobi (UoN). Many of the students we have worked with in the past 5 years have come from UoN. Our affiliation through the Department of Clinical Studies incorporates our work in wildlife management with conflict resolution, disease management and wildlife monitoring to strengthen our commitment to local capacity building. Adelaide (BSc UoN) joined our directors Mary and Cosmas for the final signing of the Terms of Affiliation with Prof. James Nguhiu- Mwangi and Dr. Titus Adhola in April 2021.



*ACK Director, Mary Wykstra, Assistant Director, Cosmas Wambua, and Education Coordinator, Adelaide Moturi sit around a table with Prof. Nguhiu of the UoN to sign the affiliation.*

**Cocktails for Canines:** In March, we were joined by Dr. Desmond Tutu, and Dr. Mohsin Likoniwalla in engaging our online audience about dog care and diseases to help raise funds for our vaccinations campaign. Join us again on October 22, 2021 for more informative guests!



## STUDENTS AND STAFF

**Publication:** Congratulations on your paper acceptance Jane! Jane Wanjira had her manuscript- "[Evaluating the Efficacy of Flashing Lights in Deterring Livestock Attacks by Predators: A Case Study of Meibae Community Conservancy, Northern Kenya](#)" - accepted for publication (Link to the publication in our web site library). In this study, the use of predator deterrent lights was tested as a part of long-term solutions to determine nighttime attacks by large predators reduced in homesteads with lights versus those without lights. It was found that flashing lights do have a potential to reduce cases of livestock attacks. This study directly contributes to conservation efforts, especially of large predators, by mitigating conflict with livestock owners. We wish her all the best and success in scientific writing.

**Capacity Building:** Thanks to the Northern Kenya Conservation Education Working Group (NKCEWG), our Education and Outreach Coordinator, Adelaide joined virtual training workshops facilitated by San Diego Zoo Global educators. She is now equipped to apply this new knowledge in program design to complement our different target audiences, together with our staff.

**Behind the Scenes:** Our long-term facility caretaker, Kennedy Mwange has left the project to move closer to his family. We welcome Florence Kiswii to our Nairobi house as the primary facility caretaker. Seyian (Stire) and Lbulkash are the caretakers of our Samburu facility. We are very grateful for the time and attention that they provide to keep us safe and healthy after we return from the field or office work.



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**@call-action4cheetah**

## 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 not-for-profit project working in affiliation with: Cheetah Conservation Fund, Kenya Wildlife Service, and the University of Nairobi.

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