

ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA NEWSLETTER



July – December 2020

DIRECTORS NOTES

On the 10th of December, 2020, we slaughtered a goat at the doorstep of our Salama camp. It is an Akamba tradition to do this when you are moving houses. In 2009, we opened our Salama Camp with a similar meal that fed our team and construction crew, but this December we were bidding farewell to ACK's Salama Cheetah Camp.

We first evaluated the Salama area in 2004 at the request of David and Jane Stanley who were concerned about the future of cheetah in the region. We found the area to hold about 30 cheetahs, set up monitoring projects and received permissions to radio collar cheetahs in this area. By 2006, there was land subdivision of three commercial group ranches that lost profitability to shareholders. None of our efforts were successful in slowing the land fragmentation that occurred in the following 10 years and we helplessly witnessed the extinction of a local cheetah population. From 2015, fewer than three cheetahs were seen by our field officers each year.



We held meetings with community members to address land fragmentation and loss of habitat and prey base, but our efforts were only successful in slowing the loss of diversity from the region. We supported alternative livelihoods, livestock health, habitat restoration and waste management and, most importantly, we assisted with conflict mitigation.

Increased pressure on the land that supports the cheetah led to the cheetah extirpation in this area. The lessons we learned and the projects we implemented have assisted us in setting up a range wide cheetah survey and in developing programmes in the Samburu region where human pressure is less. We still have a lot of work to do in Kenya, but in closing our Salama location we will be focused on Samburu and range wide cheetah management. We are sad to say goodbye and to leave behind so many friends in the Salama and AthiKapiti area, but we realize that our resources were being spread too thin and that we needed to reduce our focus in order to assure that what happened in Salama will not happen in the rest of Kenya.

Mary Wykstra, Director

HIGHLIGHTS

A sigh of relief in the tough times: We would like to thank Community Wildlife Fund for making our work known to the world by filming our work with the dogs, covering aspects of African folklore in promoting conservation, and generously feeding needy families in our local Meibae community during the tough COVID-19 times. CWF supported our four scat detection dogs with a reliable food supply donation. This was an immense relief to our team, knowing that we could maintain the dogs high-energy diet standards. CWF continued supporting our dogs through creation of an [adoption program](#). Read more about the canine program below!



Food donations from CWF being delivered to the Samburu community in the Meibae Community Conservancy.

Feature on Wildlife Warriors: Wildlife Warriors is a project uncovering the great works and potential of young Kenyan conservationists steered by Paula Kahumbu, the executive director of Wildlife Direct. They featured our scat detection dogs and how they help with the non-invasive study and conservation of cheetahs. Stay tuned over the next few months and learn more about our dogs when the episode airs on Citizen TV, a local television network. Wildlife Direct also donated 500 face masks for distribution to the community, we appreciated that donation.

GOING DIGITAL

Connectivity during COVID restrictions was challenging to say the least! But we managed to try out some new technology:

ACK produced nine episodes of [Cheetah Tales](#) videos and live chats on Facebook, wrapping up in July.

Two staff members visited Samburu National Reserve in August to feature a video about searching for cheetah scat.

Our team joined a host of live forums discussing everything from Tourism to Nairobi National Park Management Plans.

And most importantly, staff meetings were held digitally even when we were separated by the lockdown. These digital platforms held our team together. We used WhatsApp before the lockdown, but we learned to use it better when it was our main line of communication.

Our Impact

A friend to one of our field staff went out with his goats to graze as he does every day. While at the grazing fields, he realized that his goats were starting to run in all directions! He responded quickly to find what scared the goats. When he looked, he saw a goat being taken by a cheetah!

The pair of animals went rolling into a gully and the owner quickly went for his spear. As he raised the spear to save the goat, he remembered the work his friend does with cheetah conservation. That alone made him change his mind. Instead of attacking the cheetah, he scared the cat away with a quick hit. Both cheetah and goat survived the encounter!



Sharing threats facing cheetahs: Cosmas Wambua was invited by Friends of Elephants in India for a webinar presentation on Ecology, Relocation, and Conservation of Cheetahs in Africa. Catch up on what was discussed regarding threats faced by cheetahs and elephants [HERE](#).

International Cheetah Day: Last year's International Cheetah Day was a celebration that mostly focused on the impact of waste in an environment that is shared by wildlife, livestock, and people. In addressing the impact of waste management on the environment, Adelaide and 5 staff members engaged 15 youths in our Salama study area in understanding waste, how to handle waste, and how we can creatively utilize the waste generated to benefit the people and environment. This aroused the duty of responsibility among participants in reducing the waste accumulation around their homestead and since living entirely without plastics is nearly impossible, they were tasked to creatively use the single use plastics – especially bottles – to make something useful borrowing the recycling method. The outcome of this training was construction of an eco-bench out of plastic waste. Participants in this program made eco-bricks from two-liter plastic bottles completely packed with clean plastic waste. The youth were excited to duplicate the same type of creations in their homes!

In addition to the bench, we incorporated cheetah trivia questions into the process and planted 60 trees in the community.



The eco engineers and ACK Staff after the completion of the Taka Taka Bench in Salama on International Cheetah Day 2020.

SCAT DETECTION UNIT

Dog adoption program: We began a dog adoption program and gained four adopters before the end of the year! The adopters receive regular updates of the dog's progress, their health, and stories from the field in return for valuable support to help us keep them healthy and well-trained. Each of our dogs has a unique personality that makes them exceptional in the conservation field. If you are interested in supporting one or all of our dogs, visit our website – you can also [buy an adoption](#) as a gift for a friend or family member!

Madi, one of the scat detection dogs that you could symbolically adopt.



New Staff: Paul Makibia became a new addition into the scat dog team with experience in handling explosives detection dogs. He is excited for this new journey and is eager to learn and experience how conservation dogs work. Particularly of interest is how our scat detection dogs are trained to search for the cheetah scat in the field where cheetahs have been sighted or reported by the community.

Back to school: We would like to wish Antony Oyugi all the best as he resumes classes to complete his Bachelor's Degree in Animal Health. His time as intern with the scat detection dogs was invaluable and his absence will be felt by the entire team. All four dogs – Warrior, Madi, Artemis, and Persephone – will also miss you!

THE RAINS

Nothing is more heartwarming to us than the showers of rain that we experienced in Samburu in the last months of 2020.

The birds rejoiced with a multitude of songs; all sorts of insects emerged to crawl and fly around; rock hyraxes blissfully led their babies out of the dens to eat all the fresh food and new growth – as if they were waiting for the rains!

The landscape was full of life again!

Looking around from the elevated rocks, everywhere was green and Ewaso Nyiro river was fat with the rainwater.

The drop in the afternoon heat was the most awaited relief for us but we also harvested enough water in our tanks to last us until the next rainy season!

FIELD SITE UPDATES

Return to work: Following the pause in work since COVID-19 in March, our staff finally returned to part time work in July. Our 5km linear transects along major infrastructure like roads, railways, and power lines help us monitor wildlife trends and the impact of infrastructure on the wildlife in our study area. ACK field staff resumed full time work in September.

Conflict mitigation: Our staff have been on the forefront linking our work with the community and ensuring that their livelihoods are positively affected by the presence of predators in the area. Chris Lentaam, Samburu lead supervisor, helped to resolve a conflict involving lions in the Remot area. The community was infuriated with the loss of livestock as it is their entire livelihood. We appreciate the conservation stakeholders who stood up to calm the community and the community members themselves: the four lions returned to Westgate Conservancy unharmed.

Cheetah tracks and sightings: Our dedicated staff recorded tracks of cheetahs and evidences of fresh kills in the area. The community too reported sightings of three and five cheetahs in different blocks within our Meibae study areas. Cheetahs are very shy cats that prefer not to come into contact with human. Chances of our staff sighting them during their patrols are low hence we appreciate every effort by the community in reporting what they see with us.

STUDENTS AND VOLUNTEERS

University of Nairobi: Jane Wanjira is working on her thesis and manuscript submission as she prepares to defend her thesis to the examination council for the University of Nairobi. She will continue working with us in setting up camera traps in Meibae along the major wildlife corridors.

University of Eldoret: Peter Kibobi continues work on his Linear Ecology project thesis on the impact of infrastructure on wildlife leading up to the completion of his defense to the examination council. He will then leave us for a new job starting January. We wish him the best in his new job!

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.

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and actionforcheetahs.org!
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