

ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA

Newsletter

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ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA

Mary Wykstra, Director

This is our new project title – Action for Cheetahs in Kenya (ACK). The economy drives everything from the price of fuel to conservation efforts. We are forced to become creative in our efforts to save the wild cheetah from extinction in Kenya. The Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) is one conservation organization which is suffering from the global economic crisis. In order to continue their programmes in Namibia, CCF has made the decision to downsize its international efforts and has given the Kenya cheetah project the challenge of functioning independently from CCF. We, the Cheetah Conservation Fund Kenya staff, are deeply indebted to Dr. Laurie Marker and CCF for all they have given to launch the cheetah programme in Kenya. While we will no longer be receiving monetary support as of January 2009, we will continue to be affiliated with CCF as colleagues and advisors in our goal of saving Kenya's cheetahs.

The Kenya Wildlife Service has been an integral part of the CCF operations, and will continue to be our partner in cheetah conservation. Strong bonds have been established with farmers and villagers in many regions of Kenya. We will not stop striving to educate and bring the unique challenges of this magnificent cat to light around the world.

We will continue our focus in the Salama area and will link with other partners and researchers. **Cosmas Wambua** completed his Master's degree in July 2008 from Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia and will be the Senior Research Advisor to maintain consistency in data collection and analysis. **Lumumba Mutiso** will continue to be our Community Liaison Officer in the Salama area and will

coordinate field scouts and cheetah monitoring there.

Wallace Isaboke (formerly part of the East African Wild Life Society cheetah team) will launch education and awareness projects in the Salama area, He will focus on cheetah conservation, bee keeping, tree planting and snare removal. Permission and affiliation with KWS through my current research permit with the Ministry of Science and Technology was granted for international researchers **Cherie Schroff** (Tsavo ecosystem) and **Chifuyu Beckett** (Amboseli and Salama cheetah monitoring) to conduct cheetah monitoring in collaboration with CCF and ACK. In the Samburu ecosystem, we will link with the Ewaso Tracking Project to launch cheetah monitoring in collaboration with **Save the Elephants** and the **Mpala Research Centre**.

We have also linked with **EcoSys Wana Duma**, the **Cheetah Alliance**, **Cat Haven** (Project Survival) and **Cheetah Friends Europe** to bring our programmes into the light of international recognition and into the hearts of children worldwide. CCF and its partners will continue their endorsement for the programmes here.

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Issues 1-4 available on the www.cheetah.org web site!



Photos left to right:
Pius, Jimmy and Cosmas holding scout meeting, Lumumba addressing baraza. Cheetah photos Nairobi, Salama and Samburu



RESEARCH

Research is the backbone on which policies and wildlife management decisions are made. CCFK research works with stakeholders to gather and analyze information on cheetahs and the issues that face their survival in Kenya.

BEHAVIORAL & PHYSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES OF CHEETAHS TO HUMAN DISTURBANCES IN KENYA

By Chifuyu H. Beckett, PhD student



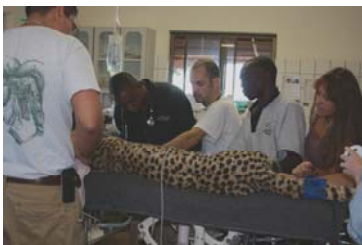
Recent subdivision of large ranchlands in Salama is accelerating human immigration into this area. Cheetahs are suffering from habitat loss and prey reduction. Accordingly, conflict between people and cheetahs are recurrent. Without introducing management protocols, the cheetahs will soon become extinct from the Salama region.

As a PhD project, I am investigating habitat use, prey selection, and stress hormone of cheetahs in the Salama region to identify potential solutions to cheetah-human conflict issues. Radio telemetry (collaring) of target cheetahs will be the method used to determine cheetah movements. I will examine cheetah scat (faeces) in order to identify preferred prey species in these regions. I will also analyze cheetah's stress hormone. Scat detection dogs will be used to find the scat. The acquired knowledge will assist in the development of cheetah conservation-protocols by the KWS and ACK that can be applied to the remaining cheetah populations in Kenya.

In July and August 2008, I worked closely with the Cheetah Scouts, Jimmy, Pius, and Kisenge, and ACK Community Liaison Officer, Lumumba. The goal was to identify target cheetahs and their frequent use of locations for trap setting in order to place telemetry collars. Thanks to the efforts of the cheetah scouts, we set three traps on several ranches in August. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful in our attempts. We learned valuable lessons from this experience to improve our trapping methods. We believe we were unable to trap a cheetah because the goats were not vocal when a cheetah approached (although we found some cheetah tracks near traps we set!!). Cheetahs rely on their sight and hearing rather than smell so the vocalization of goats is very important. Our next course of action will be the use of mechanical goats with a digital "baaaaa" to attract cheetahs into traps.



Left: Chifuyu and Cheetah scouts use local knowledge to set up the cheetah traps.



TRAINING IN NAMIBIA

In March 2008, Mary attended immobilization training in Namibia with Isaac Lekoolool and Domnic Mijeje. As a result, KWS has written a new protocol for cheetah work-ups. This protocol not only included immobilization, but also biomedical sampling.



In August, Lumumba attended the Integrated Livestock and Wildlife Management and Cheetah Biology courses sponsored in full by CCF through the Howard Buffet Foundation. Cosmas also attended the Cheetah Biology course in November. This training and the results of Cosmas' MSc research will be the subjects of presentations at the next series of baraza in Salama.



RESEARCH

A DISTANT VIEW OF TSAVO EAST FROM RUKINGA

by Chérie Schroff (TsavoCheetahProject@live.com)

In 2007, the first connections were made to launch cheetah studies in the Tsavo ecosystem. At that time the Tsavo East National Park was evaluated for



using the spoor count technique in generating data on cheetah population numbers. In August, 2008, I spent time in Tsavo West and Rukinga Sanctuary to put final touches on the planning for initiating the cheetah research in the Tsavo region. My driver and I ventured out onto the dusty roads, guided by an array of area maps, all of which had been marked in ink with the areas of cheetah signs and sightings. Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) scientists and other Park researchers contributed their cheetah sightings and opinions regarding issues facing the cheetahs in the area, recent observations of an injured cheetah, cheetah kills and cheetah spoor, etc...

The Rukinga Sanctuary is located between Tsavo East and Tsavo West National Parks and will act as the project base starting in 2009. Rukinga, an area of primarily dense vegetation, is a haven and corridor for many endangered species, including the cheetah. Local scientists collect data on elephant and lion utilizing Rukinga as a passage-way between Tsavo East and West. Rukinga Sanctuary manager, Rob Dodson, pointed out areas of recent cheetah sightings, but suspects a current decline of cheetah numbers in and surrounding Rukinga. With a lack of tourists and good security in this private reserve, Rukinga is ideal for camera traps to photograph and identify this cheetah population. There are many

unknowns, hence the need for this study. National Park personnel and lodge/tour operators were also excited about a 'much needed' cheetah study in area. With the vegetation quite similar to Rukinga – dense bushland and woodland, and the park more desolate than Tsavo East, we may employ the camera trap method in areas of northern Tsavo West.

The Tsavo Cheetah Study will encompass the Tsavo East and West National Parks, the Rukinga Sanctuary, and adjoining ranches and communities, for a three year duration, from 2009 – 2012. We will estimate cheetah population density, assess threats to long-term cheetah survival, and provide community education and effective livestock management.

This study will test the method of spoor counting Tsavo East and Rukinga Sanctuary, as a cheetah monitoring and census technique primarily using sandy roads. We will calibrate our results with those from a 'Tsavo Cheetah Photography Survey' in Tsavo East and West and camera trap photos in Rukinga Sanctuary and Tsavo West. Lodge and tour operators, park personnel, and tourists will play an important role in the photographic survey, by assisting our team in the promotion of 'cheetah friendly' cheetah photography in Tsavo East and West. It will be interesting

to learn if there are seasonal variations of carnivores in the park and if cheetah use the same corridors through the Rukinga ranch as the lion and elephant. The study is in affiliation with the CCF, Action for Cheetahs in Kenya, and KWS. We will partner with Wildlife Works for our research in Rukinga Sanctuary.



CHEETAH TREES



Once a tree is planted in the ground the job is only half done. 2008-9 is being considered as having one of the worst droughts in recent history for most of Kenya, including the the Makueni area. The subdivision in Aimi ma Kalungu and Malili ranch has resulted in settlement of about 10% in March 2008 (Wambua MSc, 2008). Those trying to settle are finding the ranch land challenging as the area is not suitable for agriculture.

This combined with lessened security because the land is no longer under ranch management means that poaching and charcoal burning has had a devastating affect on the environment.

The challenge for the schools and dips was to keep their trees alive. We planted late in the last rainy season, so our participants did their best. We are estimating nearly an 80% survival to date. Well done! Judging of the school trees will be done in March 2009 with the school having the most success receiving a trip for 10 children to visit schools in Samburu where lion researcher, Shivani Bhalla planted trees with schools there at the same time.



*Left: Mike Wambua talking to school children about importance of trees.
Right: Cheetah Scout, Jimmy, surveys trees cut for charcoal – evidence of habitat loss in the Malili Ranch Subdivision*



COMMUNITY SCOUT REPORTS

Right: Lumumba, Kisenge, Pius and Jimmy pictured left to right. Below: photo data base for livestock attacks and poached animals (buffalo head pictured below).



cohesive environment between humans and wildlife using information on the value of cheetah for our country.

Poaching is a problem in the area, more so after the 2007 sub-division. Between July and August some of us feared that cheetahs were driven away or poisoned because the tracks and sightings were few. But, we were able to identify areas for trapping and in August we attempted to catch the cheetahs for collaring. The collaring was not successful because the cheetahs move so quickly from one area to another. The goats we used as bait were quiet, thus did not attract the cheetah to the trap. We continue our monitoring and community awareness efforts so that people can live together with these animals. We thank the farmers for their support and understanding that only through a balanced eco-system can we prevent livestock losses from being overwhelming.

Starting on the 26th of May 2008 data collection and community awareness in the Kiu ecosystem was handled by Cheetah Scouts under supervision of Lumumba, the Community Liaison Officer. The following is the Scouts account of their efforts:

Scouts were equipped with a digital camera, GPS, phone, bicycle, callipers and data collection forms. After training we were given tracking guides and livestock loss verification cards. Our work comprised of identifying tracks, talking to herders about cheetah sightings and responding to livestock loss reports. Our primary goal was to identify locations for setting traps to catch and collar cheetahs in conflict areas.

We learned the areas from the deepest forest to the open plains. We travelled by bicycle, often needing to push it through thick bush and rocky steeps. As we learned our areas we identified common cheetah areas and could focus our efforts. The newly allocated plots on Aimi and Malili ranches were inhabited randomly. Farmers cleared, burned and scared away the wild herbivores, thus leaving the cheetahs with a lack of food. Many farmers believed that the cheetahs belonged to the conservators and wanted cheetahs to be carried away. When the cheetahs caused conflict some of the farmers became aggressive. We were the broker for a

Solutions to our problems include:

- * Reduce poaching.
- * Improve the environment through planting trees and stopping the clearing and charcoal burning.
- * Protecting livestock by good herding in the day and strong boma's in the evening.
- * Maintain a balance of livestock and wildlife that allows the cheetahs to find their preferred food.



EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

For the past several years cheetah lover, Susanne Garrison, assisted disadvantaged children in Gilgil through enlisting sponsors for uniforms and tuition. Quiet in her efforts, Suzanne always maintained her goal of showing that cheetah conservation efforts in Kenya also benefit its people. In 2006, Christian Pilard of EcoSys offered to assist Susanne and ACK and Wana Duma was launched. Cheetah Friends Europe also joined in their support by sponsoring a student from the Salama area. The project's aim gives children the opportunity to excel through the assistance of financial support for school fees and health needs. The project is now registered as the Wana Duma Children's Project in the US and as EcoSys Wana Duma in Kenya. EcoSys Wana Duma staff (Susan Njeri and Daniel Karanja) ensure that the needs of the Gilgil children are met. Hassan Njenga joins the EcoSys Wana Duma staff this year as Program Director to develop programmes that encourage the children to become responsible members of their community. Wallace Isaboke has offered his time to produce materials and increase education activities focused in the Salama area through a grant from the Rufford Fund. Wallace will be working with the ACK and EcoSys Wana Duma staff to complement cheetah conservation efforts. His focus will be in sustainable community development through tree planting, bee keeping, snare removal and habitat protection. Wallace will also be using a mobile film unit to show videos to schools and community groups. He will measure the success of the school programmes through pre and post presentation testing.



*Top and center: EcoSys Wana Duma kids, volunteers and staff in Gilgil
Bottom: First bee hive delivery in Salama*



COMMUNITY

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF WILDLIFE LOSSES



Last year was witness to many challenges. Following the Kenya presidential elections, the nation and the world rallied to solve the resulting problems as quickly as possible. Issues that our wildlife faces are no less challenging. Predator poisoning has a huge impact on the scavengers and researchers are seeing a drastic decline in lions and hyenas – both inside and outside of parks and reserves. Recent cheetah deaths are also alarming.

We received reports from Samburu in 2006-7 that two cheetahs were hit by vehicles along the road from Isiolo to Wamba. Two incidents on Mugie Ranch (Laikipia) were also reported, one appeared to be caused by another predator and the other was also hit by a vehicle. On Sosian Ranch in Laikipia a young male cheetah drowned in an open water tank where it seemed he was playing with siblings. In Samburu, a young cheetah was found in a tree, apparently taken there by and leopard and a male cheetah was kicked in the head by a zebra and apparently died instantly. Also in the Masai Mara, a cheetah carcass was reported in a leopard tree. These cheetah deaths were not targeted but some were a result of human impact affected some.

The most alarming deaths in 2008 were those in our own study area. One young cheetah was hit by a vehicle on the Mombasa Highway in July, bringing the total highway cheetah deaths to 8 since we began our work in 2004. Livestock and other game are often found by scouts and on our desnaring exercises with KWS. The last known cheetahs (two) to be snared were the cubs of our collared mother in 2005. In February 2008, a prime female was killed in a poacher's snare on a bordering ranch (New Astra) southwest of our primary focal area. The most disturbing incident was in October 2008 when a female cheetah with seven (7) unborn cubs was targeted and killed by a poison arrow. These targeted cheetah deaths in our study area are disturbing because our goal in working in Salama has been to decrease conflicts between cheetahs and people and to stabilize the cheetah population. The loss of 3 adult cheetahs in the Salama area equates to a 20% loss of the entire estimated population. If this loss continues cheetahs will be extinct in the area in the next few years.

As disturbing as these incidents are to us personally, there is often good that results from them. Our efforts throughout Kenya result in reports coming to us and to KWS. We thank those of you who report cheetah and other important wildlife losses to us! In our study area we are seeing an increase in conservation efforts in the community. Youth groups are improving roads, water drainage and helping their neighbours with security. This helps to prevent wildlife damage to property and livestock. Women's Groups and Community Based Organizations are asking what they can do to help in the area of conservation as well as poverty alleviation. Elders and friends of CCFK have expressed their sympathy to us on the most recent loss of the cheetah and her cubs and have asked for both CCFK and KWS to increase awareness efforts in 2009. The newly formed Cheetah Alliance has initiated the Cheetah's Prayer project that will turn into a global effort.



Photos

Top left: Bushland converted to farmland becoming desert during drought. Bottom left: Cheetah killed by poachers snare. Bottom right: Mary with Julius Manza, KWS Community Warden Machakos



CCF would like to thank the following donors and partners for their support of cheetah conservation efforts in Kenya

THANK YOU!

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Action for Cheetahs in Kenya
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We need your Help!
Support ACK and CCF

Visit the Cheetah Conservation Fund web site: www.cheetah.org for more information on worldwide efforts in cheetah conservation. Visit www.resaf.org/ACK for our blogs

In Kenya you can assist through wiring funds to:

Mary Wykstra-Ross – Action for Cheetahs in Kenya OR

Bank: Barclays Bank of Kenya LTD

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By Check: Cheetah Conservation Fund

PO Box 1611 Sarit Centre

00606 Nairobi Kenya

\$10 – Plant Ten Trees

\$30 – Adopt a Dip (one month)

\$50 – Snare Removal (one community event)

\$4000 – Sponsor a Radio Collar (2 years)

\$20 – School Visit (one visit)

\$40 – Game Count (one month)

\$100 – Sponsor a Scout (one month)

_____ Open Donation

