

ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA

NEWSLETTER



DIRECTOR'S NOTE BY MARY WYKSTRA



Two projects featured in this issue are the Ginger's Hope disease monitoring and the wildlife corridor monitoring. We are excited to work collaboratively with existing and new partners. We collaborate with existing partners including Cheetah Conservation Fund and the Kenya Wildlife Service to further strengthen in-country affiliations. Some of our new partners include the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and Kenya Society for Protection and Care of Animals (KSPCA).

The Ginger's Hope project raises awareness of the importance of domestic pet care in environmental and human health. Each year as many as 2000 people die from rabies with over 90% of the cases originating from a bite by an infected dog. The only way to eradicate this fatal disease is through vaccination. In recent years, other viral diseases have highly impacted domestic and wild animals. Disease monitoring is the only means of understanding the impact of mass vaccination campaigns. In addition to existing partners, ILRI is a key player in this project.

Additionally, drought cycles impact cheetah and other predators that utilize wildlife corridors in search of prey and mates. The corridors are used by herders moving between grazing areas. As droughts worsen, the corridors become a source of conflict where wildlife and livestock share the same movement patterns. We are excited to partner with Colorado State University through hosting individual students and the growth of a study abroad programme that is focused on African mammal behaviour.

Mary Wykstra
Founder and Director

THIS ISSUE:

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

PAGE 01

2023 IN REVIEW

PAGE 02

**COMMUNITY
CONSERVATION**

PAGE 02

GINGER'S HOPE

PAGE 03

ADVENTURE SAFARI

PAGE 04

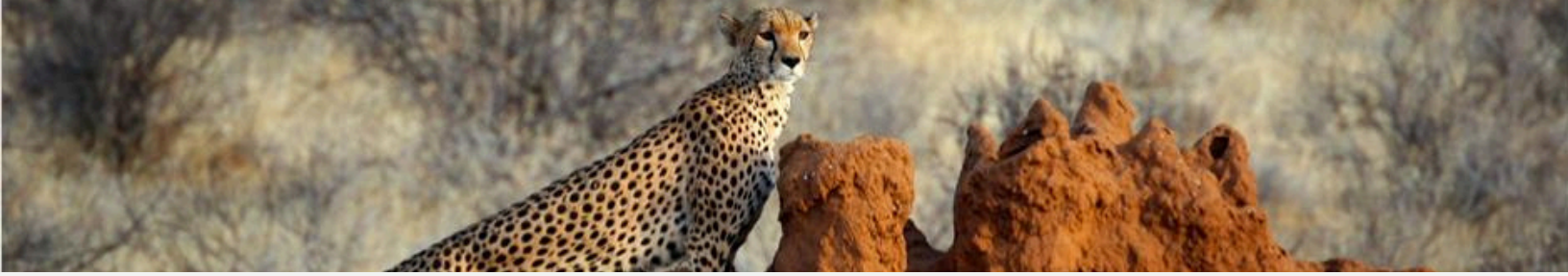
SCAT TEAM

PAGE 05

SPECIAL TRIBUTE

PAGE 06





Fieldwork

2023 IN REVIEW

Field officers in Meibae continued monitoring cheetah and other species. In 2023, field officers conducted 128 transects of 5 km length are used to estimate wildlife densities. Jackal were the most abundant predator species (recorded on 11 occasions) and Guinea Fowl were the most abundant prey species (recorded on 347 occasions).

Random patrols are conducted on most work days, and after the once-weekly transects. The patrols give us a distribution of predators and prey across the landscape. Five field officer completed 704 patrols this year. Guinea Fowl, Gerenuk, Dikdik, and ostrich are widespread across the conservancy with more than 300 occurrences. The jackal was the most widely distributed predator, with spotted hyena also widely dispersed. Cheetah were seen on 19 occasions distributed across the conservancy.



Field Officer, Chris Lentaam recording a track observation during his routine patrol.

Community Conservation

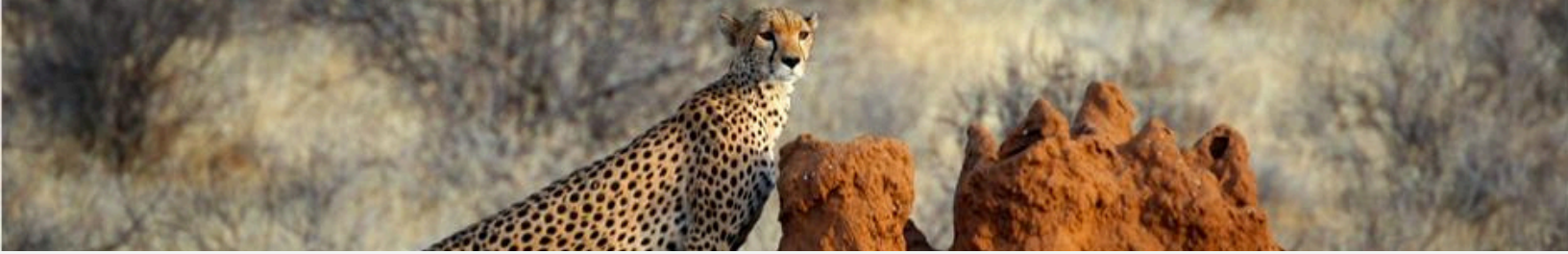
JULY- 2023 GINGER'S HOPE



ACK Canine Handler, Kelvin Mwambilo, assists ILRI veterinary staff with blood draw sample collection from Meibae dogs.

This year significant strides were made in addressing canine distemper and improving dog health in the region. Over 1500 dogs and cats were vaccinated in three campaigns where samples were collected. Blood, urine and saliva samples from the dogs provide their status as carriers of distemper and rabies diseases. This year's efforts were well-organized, with updated record-keeping system to ensuring consistency in tracking dogs and their homes.

Consent forms were distributed to participants, promoting transparency and community engagement. Preliminary analysis revealed that 10% of unvaccinated dogs and 2% of previously vaccinated dogs carry active distemper. Prevalence of distemper confirms the need for greater efforts in vaccination as the only way to control viral diseases.



Community Conservation

JULY- 2023 GINGER'S HOPE - CONTINUATION

These findings reinforced the importance of maintaining annual vaccinations for at least 70% of the dog population to effectively control outbreaks.

Historical outbreaks, which once killed over 60 dogs, have been reduced to 10–20 annual fatalities, thanks to sustained vaccination efforts and community education. However, the movement of unvaccinated dogs between regions remains a challenge. The ILRI team commended this year’s efforts as the most successful visit to date, citing excellent organization, effective sensitization, and exceptional hospitality.



Community members bringing pets to the Ginger’s Hope clinic

Champions for Cheetahs

DECEMBER 2023 - INTERNATIONAL CHEETAH DAY

ACK uses sports as a tool to bring communities together in support of cheetah conservation. In celebration of International Cheetah Day (ICD), recognized globally on December 4th, we hosted the third Champions for Cheetahs Football Tournament on December 2, 2023

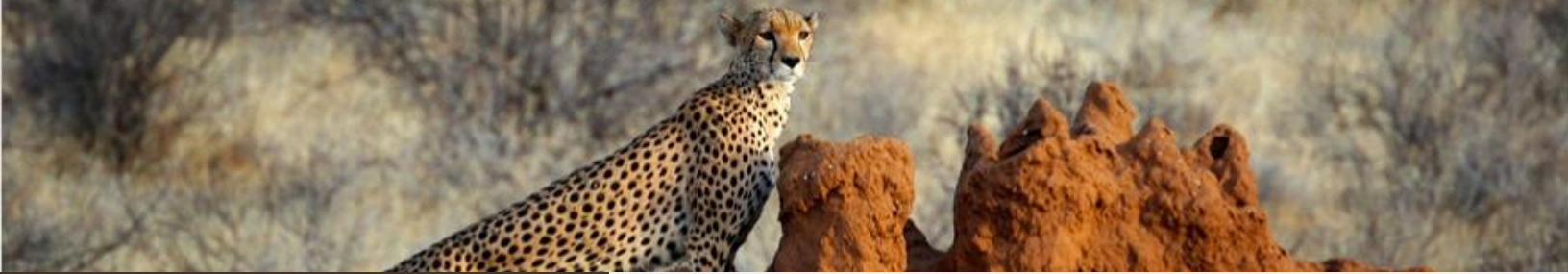


Super Eagles team members with ACK Research Scientist Timothy Maiyo

This year, the event was held at Silango Primary School in Meibae Community Conservancy, as part of our efforts to rotate the tournament across different locations within the conservancy. The tournament saw an impressive turnout, with six teams representing various cheetah study blocks competing for the championship.

Alongside the matches, interactive activities such as pepeta and goal kick challenges, as well as cheetah-themed trivia, kept the crowd engaged.

The Eco-village was a key highlight with the involvement of regional conservation partners, including Grevy’s Zebra Trust, Born Free, and the Northern Rangelands Trust, who joined us in raising awareness about wildlife conservation and broader ecosystem protection. Conservation partners further reinforced our commitment to sustainable conservation efforts through community engagement.



Conferences

Attending conferences and workshops not only shares the successes of ACK, but also provides staff with enhanced skills, knowledge and networks. This year our staff were engaged in several opportunities including:



ACLIE - Jane and Leopold presented papers at the African Linear Development Conference showing how corridor research and detection dogs can provide value in data collection regarding wildlife connectivity



KWS Science Conference – Jane attended this first international scientific conference hosted by the Kenya Wildlife Service.

Adventure Safaris

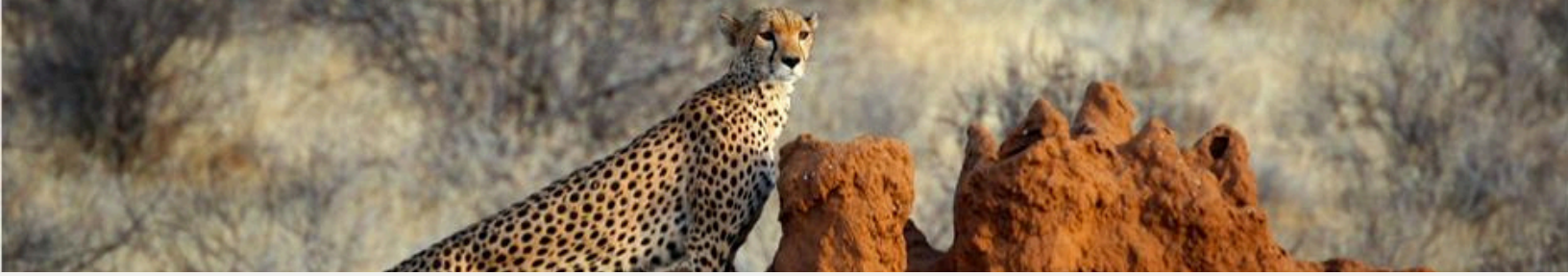
MAY-JUNE 2023

In mid May, the first Colorado State University study abroad group was co-led by Prof. Jennie Willis, Brooke Squires (RAW EcoTours), and Mary Wykstra. The course in African mammal behaviour taught basic concepts in using ethograms to observe mammal interactions. They visited Naivasha, Lake Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu culminating at the ACK base in Meibae Community Conservancy. With a broader conservation perspective, the ACK team presents methods of studying a species like the cryptic cheetah in a human dominated landscape.

Later, in May, board member Jameson Weston led a group of six visitors on an immersive safari through the Masai Mara, Lake Nakuru, Laikipia, and Samburu. ACK Director, Mary Wykstra, engaged the group in discussions about community-driven conservation and the vital role individuals play in environmental stewardship. Through interactive discussions and firsthand experiences, the trip reinforced the strong connection between people and wildlife, highlighting the importance of collaborative conservation efforts in protecting Kenya’s ecosystems.



Colorado State University students with ACK staff on top of Nonkupuli hill in Meibae Community Conservancy



Scat Dogs

MAY - DECEMBER 2023

Our K9 team utilizes an integrated training approach to track and monitor cheetah activity with greater efficiency and accuracy. A major milestone in the K9 program was the transition of interns Kelvin Mwambilo and Karimba into full-time canine handlers. Their journey involved intensive training, hands-on fieldwork, and a deepening understanding of scent detection and dog behavior. Leopold Slatta-Bachmyar and Anthony Oyugi provided technical guidance that included how to interpret subtle cues in body language, scent detection responses, and behavioral shifts.



Karimba Lekitasharan on an endurance walk with Madi and Persi



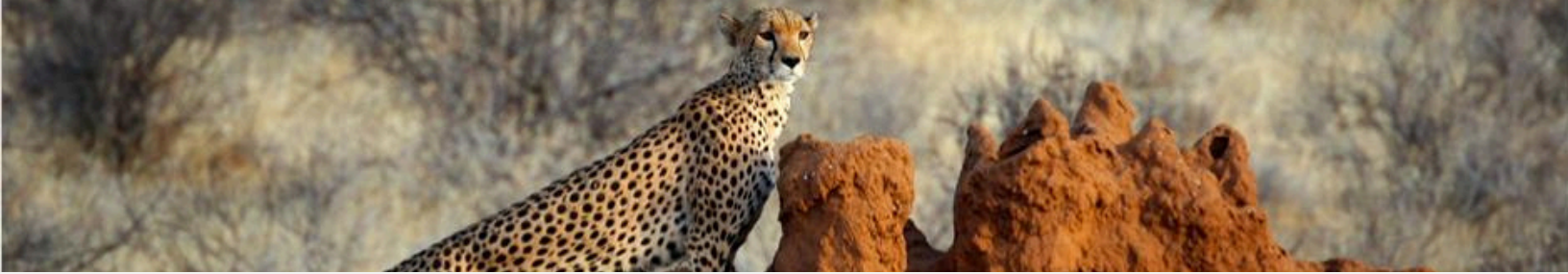
Kelvin Mwambilo rewarding Persi during a training session

Through perseverance and mentorship, they mastered essential handling techniques, strengthening the team’s overall capacity. Their promotion marked a significant step in building long-term expertise within the program. By integrating their skills into daily operations, they enhanced search efficiency and team coordination. Their progress reflects the success of the structured training approach and dedication to developing skilled conservationists.

The team introduced a rapid rewarding system to improve performance. By reducing the distance between the marker (target odor - scat) and the reward, we conserve the dogs’ energy, allowing for longer searches and greater coverage. The success of the new training style was evident in the output from Persephone, whose boundless energy often led her to dash over-excitedly after toys. Training adjustments greatly enhanced canine field operations, improving the dogs’ focus during search indications and resulting in calm, precise behaviors like the SIT and STARE technique.



Madi invoking the SIT & STARE technique showing focus on the target odor - cheetah scat



SPECIAL TRIBUTE - COSMAS WAMBUA

JUNE 2023

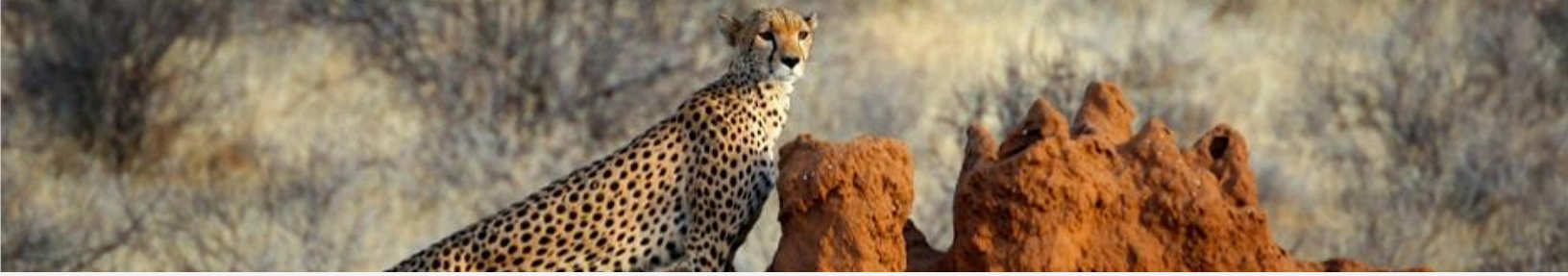


Our team bid a final farewell to our friend and colleague, Cosmas Wambua. With a welcoming handshake and a warm smile, Cosmas welcomed more than 500 visitors to our ACK facilities over the 20 years that he worked with us.

Although he attended universities in India and Ethiopia, Cosmas' goal was always to be the best leader and teacher he could be in his home country. He mentored employees and students as ACK grew from a two person project under Cheetah Conservation Fund to a 20 member Action for Cheetahs in Kenya team. The many memories poured in for us and for his family showing us all the number of lives we touch and inspire.

Following his sudden passing on 12 June, 2023 a series of memorials with family and friends helped us with the healing process. "When Great Trees Fall," a poem by Maya Angelou, said it best "They existed. They existed. We can be. Be and be better. For they existed." Cosmas was a strong force in the ACK team and his contagious laughter will forever ring in our hearts.





Support our work to protect cheetahs and their habitats —
make a donation today through our website at

WWW.ACTIONFORCHEETAHS.ORG/DONATE

ACK accepts donations through Venmo!

@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 non-profit project working in affiliation with: Cheetah Conservation Fund, Kenya Wildlife Service, and the University of Nairobi.

P.O. Box 1611 00606, Sarit Centre, Nairobi, Kenya
www.actionforcheetahs.org