

CHEETAH CONSERVATION FUND - KENYA

Newsletter

PO Box 1611 Sarit Centre, 00606 Nairobi, Kenya WWW.CHEETAH.ORG cheetah@africaonline.co.ke

STARTING A NEW YEAR

Mary Wykstra, CCF Kenya

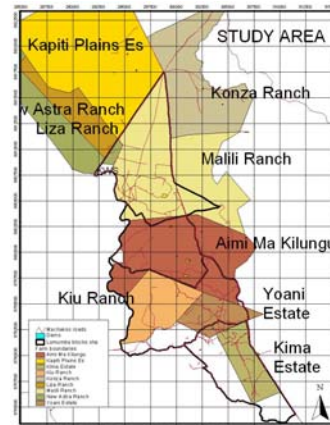
This year is important for Cheetah Conservation Fund efforts in Kenya. It marks the end of our second phase of research and operations here. Our first phase was theoretical and composed primarily of networking and information gathering. The 2002-4 comparison of Nakuru, Laikipia and Machakos Wildlife Forum regions evaluated needs in cheetah research in regions outside of protected areas. Through that phase we identified the need to approach the issue of conservation through the challenges which face all of Kenya at some level – land use changes.

Since Kenya's independence, land uses have changed from pastoral and large scale commercial farming to an ever increasing number of small-scale and subsistence farming. Initially this first affected areas where the commercial ranches were changed from Government or single land owner to that of Group, Shareholder or title holder divisions.

Group ranches often allow settlement or pastoral use combined with common land ownership. These ranches are often owned by an ethnic group which had been dominant in the area and can be divided into sections based on family or clan units. Some Group Ranches have now become divided among the group members with each member being given a title deed. A shareholder ranch is typically managed by an elected committee which reports to the shareholders and supervises the ranch operations. These ranches often practice commercial agriculture or ranching. While again the ranch may have some settlement, it is the choice of the voting members on how the land is used. In some cases the share holders may feel that the commercial level of the ranch is not as productive as allowing individual ownership. In this case, the ranch is surveyed and a submission is placed with the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) for the subdivision of the property. Following a land survey, when subdivision is approved, a type of lottery is used to distribute the shares in the form of a title deed to each member.

In some cases, people will form groups and will continue to manage land together or to sell to individuals who may combine plots to form large portions of the land after subdivisions occur. But most often the subdivision results in a broken landscape. In the case of the Aimi ma Kalungu and Malili shareholder ranches, the subdivision occurred in 2006. Since that time, some owners have settled and others have marked their plots. These ranches, covering 46,000 acres, were divided among nearly 5000 share holders (some individuals and families had more than one share, so this does not mean that there will be 5000 new settlers).

Map shows the area where cheetahs have been monitored since 2004. Ranches in black have been a part of the 2003-2008 studies. Aimi and Malili ranches were subdivided in 2006 and new settlements are occurring.



The CCFK work in Kenya will be dedicated to looking at the effects of this division on the cheetahs and their prey in the area surrounding Aimi and Malili Ranches. Our case study in 2005-7 monitored an individual cheetah movement and collected information on livestock loss in this area. In 2007 we initiated game counts which will be used by Cosmas in mapping the settlement and wildlife distribution in the first year of the settlement. Using past Forum game counts we can compare wildlife density to that of the years prior to the subdivision.

2008 will be critical to the future of our work in this area. We will identify and compare this area with other regions which we will identify from the National Cheetah Survey work which was conducted from 2004-7. Using the models for monitoring and community interactions and the materials developed over the last six years the CCFK team can guide researchers proposing to affiliate with CCF and KWS to create long-term cheetah conservation programmes. The *Cheetah and Wild Dog Strategic Plan* that was produced through the February 2007 workshops at Mpala and Nairobi are expected to be adopted by KWS early in 2008. This plan is the guiding document that will assist CCFK, KWS and other cheetah researchers to work collaboratively towards a future where cheetahs continue to range across their historical lands and live together with the people of this great nation.

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Issues 1 and 2 available on the www.cheetah.org web site!



RESEARCH

MONITORING GAME IN RELATION TO CHEETAH DISTRIBUTION

By Cosmas Wambua, Research Assistant

In April 2008 the data collection for my master's degree will be completed. After completion of the thesis requirements results will be published and information will be distributed through presentations and printed educational materials. To measure game population trends CCFK will continue the counts in portions of the study area in order to compare the game distribution with the livestock conflicts.

From October 2007 – April 2008 we conducted early morning and late night game counts on six farms that are a part of the ecosystem where we have been monitoring cheetahs for the last 3 years. This area is fast changing into agricultural farms. The counts provide an opportunity to glimpse some of the rare species which make up the biodiversity in this region. Some of the species recorded during these counts include lesser kudu, aardvark, striped hyena, spotted hyena, serval cat, African wildcat, reedbuck, bushbuck, bat-eared fox, porcupine, black-backed jackal, honey badger, civet cat and genet cat. Three cheetahs were seen at Kapiti Ranch on the November 2007 night count. They were observed eating a cape hare on a very dark night. Since the cheetah does not see in the dark this was a very unexpected treat.

The preliminary results from these counts indicate that there is a big difference between the herbivore species recorded during the morning counts and the night counts. For a long time we have been wondering what the cheetahs in this area

were feeding on during the periods when no livestock losses were reported. The game counts are giving us an idea of the available prey. In the Kiu area where many livestock losses are reported, the game numbers and species counted have been very low. The core area where the collared cheetah most often used has a very high small prey base that is active at night. Thus a change in cheetah behaviour for night activity is needed in order to find its preferred prey.

It is very important now that we will have some base line data on the density, distribution and abundance of game in the study area to initiate cheetah scat (faecal) analysis to see the composition of the diet of the cheetahs in this area. We believe the relatively larger numbers of duiker, steinbuck and cape hare observed during the night counts will make up the primary prey base. As settlement occurs, the changes in agricultural activities results in legal and illegal activities that negatively affect the prey population. This affects the area's carnivore population by making it more difficult for them to find food in the "normal" places and leads to a disturbance which causes an increase in livestock losses.

For effective cheetah habitat conservation to occur, increased efforts in livestock husbandry must be accompanied by maintaining a sustainable prey base. These efforts must go hand in hand if the cheetah and similar wide ranging species are to remain wild.



Following subdivision the settlement of the Aimi and Malili ranches change the land from large scale sustainable ranchland to small scale agriculture. Sustainable development requires cooperative efforts and enforced policing of illegal harvesting and poaching. Savannah and woodland ecosystems are fast becoming fragmented, and overgrazed. Top Left: settlement around the dams reduces water drainage. Bottom Left: dry savannah fragmentation leaves wildlife without space to graze. Top Right: Trees harvested for charcoal and overgrazing fast changes an area from grassland to desert. Bottom Right: Game meat poaching kills indiscriminately – cheetahs, goats, cattle and dogs become victims. This cheetah was killed in a poacher's snare.



COMMUNITY

A C.L.O.'S JOB IS NEVER DONE



As the Community Liaison Officer for CCFK, Lumumba Mutiso is our eyes and ears in the Kiu-Salama community. Although he assists with research activities (radio tracking, game counts, immobilizations and necropsy) as circumstances dictate, his focus of work is in collection of information on cheetah sightings, livestock losses and maintaining our relations with the managers for the cattle dips. Lumumba attends public meetings and meets with people individually to explain our activities and to share information on livestock husbandry pertaining to wildlife.

Our process for data collection relies on the good will of the community. When people report livestock loss to Lumumba, he visits the site of the attack and conducts an interview to collect data on the circumstances leading to the livestock loss. It is important that Lumumba visits a site as quickly as possible while the carcass is still fresh. This allows him to look at the killing style, to evaluate the area and to determine with reason that the cheetah is the culprit. The information received on site helps us to give advice on management changes that could prevent future losses.

Generally farmers have been very accommodating to the interviews and they show their respect to Lumumba. There has been the occasional angry farmer who threatens to chase him with a panga (large knife). We realize that the loss of livestock is emotional, but only through accurate collection of information surrounding a livestock loss can we address the problems and aid farmers in solutions which will reduce livestock losses. For example: since higher livestock losses have occurred in the grazing area in the early part of the

year, we know that from February – June an increased vigilance in the grazing fields should assist with keeping the cheetahs away from small stock. Also since higher livestock losses occur when herders are under the age of 18, the issue of children as the primary herders could cause increased livestock loss. It is most often the case that one or two shoats (sheep and goats) are killed, thus it is the weak or wandering shoat that is most vulnerable when it is not being carefully watched. If these issues are addressed there will be a decline in the number of losses.



Lumumba has also been the person interviewing the farmers bringing their cattle to the dips. We have collected information from all four dips and have distributed some of these results to the management committees. A significant issue arising from the dip records is the large fluctuation in numbers of livestock being dipped. It is essential for the control of tick born diseases that livestock are dipped regularly. The dip product is meant to aid in prevention of ticks from infesting the livestock. After one week the chemical loses its effectiveness and the livestock is once again a carrier of diseases from the grazing areas into the community.

During the last few years, Lumumba has become not only a cheetah “fundi” but also a supportive member of the community. Along with his neighbors, Lumumba learns new information about community development and livestock management. Together with Lumumba, CCFK would like to thank the community for their support. With your information we are gaining a better understanding of the biodiversity and its relationship to the farming community. Through your questions, we are able to seek those who can provide the tools to help the community in their sustainable conservation efforts.

FUNDRAISING SAFARI

In September and October 2007, Mary Wykstra visited the US to present information on Kenya CCF activities to donors and affiliated organizations. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums and American Association of Zoo Keepers annual conferences gave opportunity for Mary to share information on the progress of CCFK activities in Kenya. 4-8 October was spent with Dr Laurie Marker in San Francisco at the WCN Expo where the Kenya programme was included in the CCF general presentation to current and potential donors.

Binder Park, Toledo, Cleveland MetroParks, Columbus, and Utah’s Hogle Zoo hosted presentations to staff and the public, raising funds and awareness for operations and equipment maintenance. Zoo staff contributed to hosting the talks through union and zoo keeper contributions. Craft sales provided the attendees the opportunity to support Kenya artists and community craft projects.



COMMUNITY

A FARMERS PERSPECTIVE ON CHEETAH CONSERVATION

By: Kisenge Musyoka, Livestock Farmer, Kiu North



Kisenge uses strong bomas and practices timed breeding to help protect his herd from livestock losses. He dips his livestock to aid in preventing tick-borne disease. He also de-worms and vaccinates regularly to improve health and productivity.

Livestock losses to predators in Kiu North, a subdivided section of the Kiu Ranch are nothing new. But since 2002, the frequency of losses from cheetah have severely affected me. I lost eighteen shoats when the cheetahs attacked our herd on twelve occasions in 2005 and 2006. On each occasion I reported the loss to CCF and on each occasion they spoke with me about the situation leading to my loss. At first I did not care that the cheetah is an endangered species – my losses were unacceptable.

Before I go any further I would like to acknowledge the assistance that CCF has given to myself and to the community in regards to human-wildlife conflict – specifically in terms of the cheetah. Mary and her team have contributed education and information into the community which have assisted many of us in improved livestock health and husbandry. Through the information which has been given to us, people can understand the meaning of having cheetah in the area in regards to conservation. The Community Cattle Dip Project builds capacity within the area for project management and improved livestock health. Baraza (community meetings) educate the people about wildlife, cheetahs and allow the people to express their concerns and develop solutions to their problems. CCF combines government support with private funding to improve conditions in the community and to improve relations with the Kenya Wildlife Service.

On a personal level, I have received benefits of improved livestock health and a better understanding of the role of the cheetah in a healthy ecosystem. I used to have high expenses in keeping my livestock healthy, constant injections and veterinary visits. Since June of 2007 I have not lost any livestock to disease and my milk and meat production has improved. Ticks carry diseases (like East Coast Fever) and weaken livestock, thus making them susceptible to pneumonia. With stronger livestock, I am not having a problem with other diseases.

CCF Research Assistant, Sarah Brooke, spent some time with me after my last livestock loss. She advised me on means to protect my livestock from loss. CCF staff have been pointing out to me that the cheetah lived in this area long before I moved in with my livestock to settle. It is our responsibility to preserve the heritage of the wildlife that have been free in this region. It is also my responsibility as a member of this community to share the information which has helped me.

The following are improvements which I believe have stopped my problem:

- 1 – We improved the style of fencing around our boma for better protection when the livestock are not grazing.
- 2 – We improved our herding style by not using children alone as herders. We not have three herders who are instructed never to leave the livestock unguarded. If the herders must do something they are to bring the flock back to the boma first and are never to leave the flock.
- 3 – We identified the problem areas and have taken different routes to graze and water the flock. We keep the herd under more careful watch in the thick bush and graze in the more open areas.
- 4 – I share information with other people. The cheetah need to have food, thus we, as the community, must avoid poaching of the prey species. As long as there is poaching the problems with cheetah killing livestock will continue to worsen.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the Cheetah Conservation Fund for their work in our community. Their team continues to collect and share information which will assist us in improving our lives.



Kisenge with Mary Wykstra and Lumumba Mutiso discussing livestock management improvements



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

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Cheetah Conservation Fund
PO Box 1611 Sarit Centre
00606 Nairobi Kenya

We need your Help!
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Visit the Cheetah Conservation Fund web site: www.cheetah.org for more information on worldwide efforts in cheetah conservation. In Kenya you can assist through wiring funds to:

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