



ACTION FOR CHEETAHS IN KENYA

Newsletter

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DROUGHT AND THE ECONOMY

Mary Wykstra, Director

Action for Cheetahs in Kenya (ACK) has functioned well in its first six months. We are still working in affiliation with the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). We completed our field camp in Salama and conducted field work in Salama and Samburu. Our Salama Cheetah scouts have been busy collecting cheetah sighting data and encouraging people to form community groups that practice sustainable business.

The world economy is at a low that has never been seen before. This means that receiving funding from overseas donors is more competitive, and conservation dollars are limited, thus proposals granting funds in research or community development are hard to come by.

This year's drought in Kenya is being recorded as the worst in the last 70 years. Crops in the Salama area have failed for at least the last 3 years. Many people put efforts into cultivation of the plots they were issued in the Aimi ma Kalungu and Malili ranches 2006-7, only to lose everything when the last rains failed. The Kiu, Ngaamba and Kima settlements have also had crop failure, and dams are nearly dry. This however is not the fault of the drought completely, but the fault of poor land use planning by allowing small scale agriculture in arid and semi-arid lands. It is not only that the lack of rain is that much worse, but that our larger consumption of water has depleted our water resources faster as well. It is the goal of ACK to assist these communities in developing businesses which are sustainable in this environment. But to do this, the people of this area must have an open mind to step outside of the traditional

farming practices and to think about the ideas that can be supported by this dry land climate. They need to work together in order to achieve sustainability.

An increase in unsustainable and illegal practices of charcoal burning and poaching for game meat affect the people and the predators. The desperation that comes from living in a drought tends to lead to an "each man for himself" mentality. Thus, even people who would like to practice sustainable farming are having their resources depleted by neighbors and outsiders coming to take what they can get.

Other effects of the drought include livestock loss in the pastoral areas. Our attempts to collar cheetahs in and around the Samburu and Buffalo Springs Reserves have been dampened with an increase of livestock grazing in the Reserves and high security risks outside the Reserves. The large predators that take refuge in the Reserves are now facing the challenges of security and conflict for resources. Predators in the Reserve become shy when livestock increase, thus are making it difficult for tourists to see the animals.

Continuing partnerships with Wallace Isaboke and EcoSys Action assist ACK in creating awareness and in encouraging sustainable business. Research partnerships with the Ewaso Tracking Project assist us in the technology necessary to understand the effects of environmental, economic and human influenced stresses on the cheetah. We are hoping for rain that will bring relief to the people and the wildlife.



Photos: Left - large trees being felled for agriculture and charcoal burning in the semi-arid climate area of Aimi ma Kalungu. Center- a herder brings his livestock to a nearly dry dam. Right - weak cow being supported by branches in attempt to keep it alive through the drought.

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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.

CAMP LIFE



In May, we completed the construction of the camp in Salama. The contractor hired to build the camp built only one camp before, but he did a fantastic job in building our office and tent sites. Research is now much easier and we can hold our staff meetings as well as hosting our volunteers in a comfortable setting.

In the long term, we will be using solar power for the office/kitchen but for now we power our computers using a battery which is charged via our vehicle. Our water is from roof collection, but with the rain failing in the first season, we need to buy water to fill the tank.

Our research focus has been in the data being collected by the scouts while the camp was under construction. Cosmas and I have been working on finalizing the data analysis from what has been compiled in the last 7 years of our Wildlife Forum, National Survey, Telemetry and Conflict, and Prey Distribution and Settlement monitoring. Our goal is to begin game counts again later in the year in Salama, and to continue attempts at catching cheetahs in the Salama and Samburu study areas for collaring.



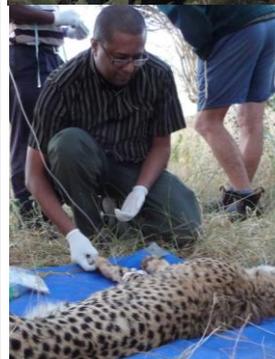
Photos: Top – Camp mascot from Ecosys Action (Boopy – plush toy) sits at the gate to great incoming visitors. Funding for camp construction came from Ecosys Action, the Cincinnati Zoo Angel Fund and private donations. Bottom- Mary Wykstra, Cosmas Wambua (ACK staff) and Maïke Bieber (volunteer) after the Camp was completed.

DATA AND COLLARING

To assist our team with a bit of expertise we hired Darcy Ogada, PhD to help us run stats on some of our past data. While Cosmas is focusing on the completion on the National Survey and publications from his Master's work, Darcy and I have been working on the wildlife forum, tracking data and game counts from our years in Elementaita. We have collected a lot of data, so it is time to share our findings with the public and scientific world!



Darcy received her PhD in 2008, thus has been a great addition to our staff for completing scientific papers. Look for publications in the next year in scientific journals and popular media.



We have also sought some assistance in radio collaring. It has happened on more than one occasion that we scheduled our field work for collaring with the KWS veterinary department, but in the middle of the exercise there is a wildlife emergency requiring the veterinarian assisting us to be called away.

The KWS veterinary staff is small with huge responsibilities, and are the supervisors of our radio collaring exercises. Since time and resources go into each collaring attempt it is not convenient to change our plans. Thus, Dr Mohsin Likoniwalla agreed to be a back up. Dr Mohsin completed his DVM in 1993 after which he went into private practice. He has been a veterinarian with the Colobus Trust 1995-2008 darting and treating injured primates, and also had wildlife medical experience in Shimba Hills Reserve and Mwaluganje. He has been in private practice for the last 15 years with The Andy's Veterinary Clinics in Nairobi and Mombasa. In May, he accompanied us in Samburu with KWS veterinarian Dr Steven Chege. KWS will give the final authority for Dr Mohsin to assist in immobilizations after they have worked with him several times.

Photos: Top – Dr. Darcy Ogada during her PhD field research on Vereuxs Eagle Owl. Bottom- Dr Mohsin assists with cheetah immobilization.





RESEARCH

SALAMA COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS 2009

By Cosmas Wambua, MSc



In Africa, and Kenya in particular, large wild carnivores have been at the forefront of human wildlife conflict involving livestock. Livestock loss to wild predators is both an emotional and economic problem and whenever humans and wild predators coincide, this problem manifests itself.



It was with this in mind that Action for Cheetahs in Kenya and an MSc student from University College of London teamed up to conduct community interviews in the Salama area. Floris D'Udine's interest was to investigate the possibilities for coexistence of humans and their livestock with cheetahs and their prey. The study looked at the effectiveness of traditional livestock husbandry in reducing cheetah attacks using a case-control approach and emphasis will be given to the role of domestic dogs. Interviews evaluated how the community utilizes domestic dogs, and for what purpose people keep dogs, with a view of establishing the viability of a livestock guarding dog program in future. In the same breadth, questions were asked regarding the age of the herder if any, perception of wildlife, health of livestock and condition of livestock bomas.

It is only through good data on various livestock husbandry practices, and general integrity of the ecosystem that human/wildlife conflicts can start being addressed effectively. Although no fool proof method has yet been identified to eliminate the problem of livestock loss to wild predators in areas of shared resources, the idea would be to minimize the impact of predators on the economic bottom line of the farmers.

ACK cheetah scouts and Community Liaison Officer used practice sessions to improve consistency in how the questions were asked before the beginning the formal interviews with the community. Interviews were then conducted in the Aimi, Malili, Kiu, Ng'aamba and Marwa areas by the scouts with the assistance of Floris and volunteer Maike Bieber. This was an opportunity for the ACK staff to spend time with individual farmers and discuss other aspects of ACK work in this region. The interviewees also answered questions regarding identification of the different predators.

We hope that useful data will come out of these interviews, and you should look forward to the major results of this exercise in our future newsletters. Preliminary observations show that dogs are most often kept at the homestead to guard property rather than being used in the grazing fields to protect against predators.



We wish you all a merry Christmas and a prosperous new year and are looking forward to your continued support morally, financially and materially in the race to save this magnificent cat.

Top: Dogs at interviewed homesteads
Center left: Well made predator proof bomas prevent many loses from happening.
Center right: Floris with CLO Lumumba Mutiso and Cheetah Scout Jimmy Kitange.
Bottom: Left Cheetah Scout Pius Mutila shares information with a family during an interview. Center and right: Poorly constructed bomas do not protect livestock from predator attacks.



COMMUNITY

CHEETAH TREES



Top: Children on safari in Nairobi National Park. Center and Bottom: An opportunity to meet a cheetah in the Nairobi Orphanage.

The school tree planting competition was judged in May 2009. Judgement was based on the number of surviving trees, essays written by the students about trees and the interaction between teachers and students. The teachers all impressed us with their comments about the issues that were successful and those that challenged the students. The competition was reported to have not only taught the kids about trees and their importance, but also about how to work as a team to accomplish a goal. Although drought cause challenges in keeping the trees watered, it was surprising to find out that in all of the schools the lack of support from the families of the children was ranked as one of the biggest challenges.

Children from Kavuko Primary wrote in their essay that they “have come to realize that they are of great importance.” The Kimakiu Primary students began their essay: “Without trees, human life would be unsustainable.” Ngaamba students wrote “We should protect our trees so as to make our country a better place to live in both for human beings and animals.” Marwa Primary students ended their essay with this thought “it is our humble appeal to all and sundry from far and wide to make a unanimous resolve to plant, cherish, protect, and do everything within their means to save this important but threatened resource from extinction. Let’s join hands as, “Together we can accomplish more.”

The Kavuko Primary School had a survival of 89% of the trees. Our tree choice was based on native and indigenous species to assure the best chances of survival, and to aid in teaching the students the value of these species. The Kavuko students were treated to a safari into Nairobi courtesy of EcoSys Action and PAWS Africa Safaris. Cheetah staff members Mary Wykstra and Pius Mutila, Volunteers Victoria Yu and Maike Bieber accompanied the 10 children and 3 teachers from Kavuko through Nairobi National Park, Nairobi Safari Walk and Orphanage, the Giraffe Center and the Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage.



DIPS AND BEES



Trees were also planted at some of the dips and some private homes. During the drought, pure survival took precedence over caring for the trees. Since not all of the dips were given trees, it has not been possible to treat this as a competition, but rather an experience. Two of the dips planted 500 trees. One has a 10% tree survival and the other where water accessibility is via borehole dedicated to the dip had a 70% success. With donated trees, the coast of caring for the trees needed to be evaluated by the management committee. A third dip was given only 250 trees and has a 40% survival even though it is close to water and paid a dedicated person to care for the trees. A fourth dip asked to wait until the next rains for their trees to assure more success.

Each of the dips has fenced their compound thanks to private donations from our friends in Canada. This aids in security and better management of the resources as well as assisting in control of animals when they become stubborn and do not want to enter the dip runs. The biggest issues at each dip remains transparent management of funds and water supply for livestock to drink. Each of the dips have decided to switch acaricide providers and now will be using Ultravetis East Africa Ltd. We look forward to the new partnership and improved technical support. It is necessary to change acaricides to prevent tick resistance to the chemical, thus ACK congratulates the dip committees for their efforts to improve community services.

Following the first bee keeping workshop, Wallace Isaboke has been seeking another group to train. The hives at Sam Bananah’s home remain colonized and should be harvested soon. The income from honey production can be more than triple per year than the income from burning charcoal from the same tree. We look forward to adding additional groups into this project.



Top: Mwanyani dip managers plant tree with Lumumba Mutiso and EcoSys Action Director Christian Pilard. Bottom: Checking hive for honey!

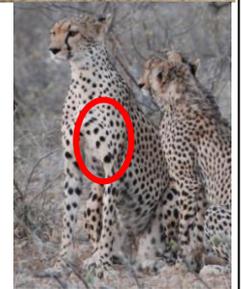
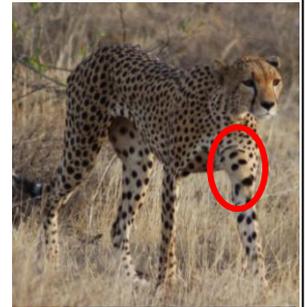


PARTNER UPDATES

SAMBURU AND MBIRIKANI – JUNE UPDATE

Collaring attempts in the Samburu and Buffalo Springs Reserves continued with field work in Buffalo Springs during attachment to ongoing Save the Elephant and Ewaso Tracking Project work from 22-25 June 2009. KWS Veterinary officer, Stephen Chege was scheduled by Save the Elephant for Elephant and Zebra monitoring projects, thus was a great opportunity for finding a target cheetah.

- An injured cheetah seen in Samburu in March was reported near spring pools by an Isiolo ranger two weeks after we found her. The wound was still visible, but she was with a male. If mating occurred, it would be likely that she will be seen with cubs in July-August of this year. Once the cubs are old enough she could be a good target for collaring.
- A mother cheetah seen in Buffalo Springs near the Ewaso Gate in March was sighted again on 23 June by ACK. This mother is easy to identify by large merged spots on her left chest area. She will not be a target for collaring as she seems to be a regular in the area highly used by tourists and can be monitored using tourist assisted camera surveys.
- A male that is regularly found in the Larson area is also commonly seen and will not be a collaring target.
- A set of two males seen by Shivani (Ewaso Lion Project) on 25 June disappeared into the thick bushes west of the Ngara Mara road in the direction of the Ewaso River. These males were not photographed, but are believed to be seen in the area on occasion. If we can find two males in the Spring area on the next visit they would be a prime target for collaring.



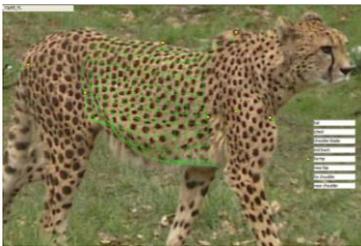
Due to the issues of drought and insecurity the cheetahs appeared to be widely dispersed and difficult to find. Large numbers of livestock in and near the Reserve boundaries also cause shyness in cheetahs making darting difficult. Lions in the Reserve around water areas will also increase the cheetah shyness. Our next field dates should be in November - December.

PhD affiliate, Chifuyu Beckett will continue to advise in the Samburu area to assure we are consistent with data collection in Salama, Samburu and Mbirikani, however due to a lower similarity of environmental and social factors among Samburu and Salama, she has requested KWS authority to focus her PhD work in the Amboseli region. Her comparison of stress and behaviour differences between the human dominated landscape of Salama and the pastoral and tourist sector of Mbirikani will continue once vehicle funding is secured (hopefully in November 2009). Preliminary work in the Salama region is still on track through the overall efforts of ACK in collaboration with Chifuyu.

Identifying marks on Buffalo Springs female near Serena Lodge.

THE TSAVO CHEETAH PROJECT – JUNE 2009 UPDATE

By Chérie Schroff (Principle Investigator)



Although cheetahs are present in the Tsavo National Parks (south eastern Kenya), there has never been a thorough scientific population and conservation assessment of cheetahs in the Tsavo region. In 1990, Paule Gros estimated a potential of 440 cheetahs in the Tsavo National Parks. Cheetah Conservation Fund Kenya and East African Wildlife Society nationwide survey (2004, 2006) revealed a high presence of cheetahs, providing a rough estimate of 200 individuals (nearly 1/4 of Kenya's total cheetah population). Poisoning, poaching, and retaliation for livestock loss were identified as the primary threats to the cheetahs in this region.

Tsavo is identified as a key ecosystem for sustainable cheetah populations, and therefore recognized as a focal area for cheetah studies and conservation in Kenya. The primary aims of this 3 year study are to: 1) Estimate cheetah abundance in the Tsavo National Parks and adjacent Rukinga Sanctuary; 2) Understand the general distribution of the species; 3) Identify and address threats to cheetah survival; 4) Provide community education and awareness on the cheetah. Study methodology includes: 1) A Cheetah Photographic Survey in the Tsavo Parks; 2) Camera Traps in Rukinga Sanctuary and northern Tsavo West; 3) Spoor Counts in Tsavo East and Rukinga Sanctuary; 4) Interviews with residents and stakeholders in the Parks and adjacent communities. Cheetah conservation here is dependent on reliable population estimates, and an understanding of cheetah distribution and threats.

Affiliates for the study are: Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF), Action for Cheetahs in Kenya (ACK) and the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). Partners are Wildlife Works (Rukinga Sanctuary) and other local conservation initiatives. You can help! The project is in urgent need of a vehicle. To donate or request further information, please contact: TsavocheetahProject@Live.com and visit blog: TsavocheetahProject.blogspot.com



CCF would like to thank the following donors and partners for their support of cheetah conservation efforts 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
Nakuru East Branch
SWIFT #: BARKENXXXX
Code#: 03-027 Account #: 1275706

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)

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