

# LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY

## NEWSLETTER Nº 5

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### INTRODUCTION

Since our June Newsletter El Niño has continued to influence our weather, with the October/November rains being the heaviest we have recorded since 1961. In one sense, the timing of this for the Conservancy could not be better since we have both reduced the number of giraffe and translocated the problem bull elephant, and so the vegetation will have a perfect opportunity to recover. On the debit side, however, bad soil erosion has occurred, roads have been destroyed and we are losing income from tourism and wildlife utilisation

For the past month virtually no vehicles have been able to move within the Conservancy, the distribution of rations and wages has been reliant on donkeys and aircraft. Although our security personnel are all well equipped they have not

had dry clothes for weeks, and have effectively been living in a bog.

Since June we have had a further two armed contacts with poachers resulting in the recovery of two automatic weapons.

As always with the rhino we have had our ups and downs with several births and deaths over the past six months.

Our tourism revenues continue to increase and to date the Conservancy has not been influenced by much of the negative press leading up to our elections. This gives us great confidence that if our tourism is carefully planned for the future the revenues will continue to grow, and in the long term will be the major contributor to our aim of becoming self financing.



## WILDLIFE

We have had one black rhino and three white rhino calves born in the last six months. Sadly, we have also had our disasters. A black rhino female Jillai, who was born on Lewa and successfully calved in early September, whilst feeding amongst the branches of a broken tree trapped herself and suffocated. Our rangers found her on the first day and imagined she was just sleeping. On the following day she was in the same position with no sign of the calf. It seems unbelievable that these so called natural deaths continue to happen, but speaking to some of the old game wardens and elders amongst the community, they talk of similar disasters in the fifties when rhino were abundant.

Lewa does seem to have an undue number of natural deaths, however I believe it is something we have to accept and recognise as part of the challenge. The whole population still shows a net gain, and that is the overall aim. On Jillai's death all the rangers conducted a major search, and after a full day her small calf was recovered about 800m away. This was most interesting as it proved that black rhino do hide their calves and go to water, which has previously been reported but never one hundred percent confirmed. The little calf, Larangoi, is now being raised, and to date is fat and strong. Special mention must be made of Daphne Sheldrick, Jill Woodley, Susannah Rouse and the David Sheldrick Wildlife Appeal who have been of invaluable help in raising this orphan.

Of the three white rhino calves born, one was to a female who was given to us by the Natal Parks Board and flown from South Africa to Nairobi. This is her first calf and shows how these animals can be moved around the world, reintroduced and then successfully breed.

Sadly one of these calves was gored and killed by a male black rhino five days after birth. This is the third such incident over five years with the same male. Consequently, we have requested KWS to remove this animal and translocate him up to one of the community programmes in the Mathews Mountains - the Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust. This request is presently under review. The total rhino population to date stands at 25 white and 20 black.

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## INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

Thanks to a generous donation from an organisation in America, we have completed the construction of new accommodation for our armed security. Whereas previously they lived out of their rucksacks and never had a dry roof or base, they now have comfortable accommodation and modern facilities. This has given a major boost to

KWS have completed the translocation of a further four bull elephant from Lewa to Kora. This was extremely successful and completed over a period of a week. The translocation of the total of 12 bulls has reduced enormously the impact the elephant were making on the riverine vegetation. It has also affected the remaining bulls in that they no longer spend all their time along the river, but are utilising the entire Conservancy.

The giraffe population now stands at approximately 220. In an effort to get away from culling, we will be translocating 25 animals up to Namunyak. Weather permitting the translocation is scheduled to take place in the first ten days of January. The animals will first be driven by helicopter into a funnel trap and then into a lorry. It will take about five hours to move them to Namunyak where they will be then held in holding pens for two weeks. This will allow the animals to settle down and orientate themselves to their new home. We plan to move six or seven animals at a time, and one in each release group will have a radio transmitter.

The Scientific Advisory Committee are advocating a major reduction of the common zebra (presently 2000 head) to reduce the competition to the Grevy's, who are in direct competition. We are presently looking into the practicalities of this to see what options are available. The Conservancy's Grevy's Zebra population is one of only two protected populations in the wild, and we therefore need to manage our grasslands to the benefit of this species.

In early October we hosted Professor Trollope of South Africa and a team of international scientists from the Afari Project. They were conducting extremely high level of research assessing the impact of smoke emissions on the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect. During their ten days here, as part of our management objectives, we were carrying out our annual burn and the scientists collected samples from the air and on the ground, together with satellite imagery from the Space Shuttle. We are yet to receive the results of their work, but are proud to have been involved in this internationally important topic.

their morale and raised their pride in the whole organisation. We are still short of one entrance gate and housing for unarmed security. These have been kindly financed from donors in the UK and America and construction will start as soon as the weather clears.

Conservancy's responsibility would be one of a facilitator and an accountant for the Trust.

The Il Ngwesi Group Ranch continues to grow from strength to strength. The lodge has now been operational for 12 months, and during this time has generated \$45,000 for the community. Bookings have been extremely high. These are mainly Kenyans and expatriates, and we have yet to find a single negative remark in the Visitors Book. At the Eco-Tourism Conference held in Nairobi during November, Il Ngwesi Lodge was recognised as the top eco-tourist destination, and we expect considerable publicity and interest to follow from this conference.

The linkage between the Conservancy and Il Ngwesi community has proved of enormous mutual benefit over the last 12 months on matters of security. Based on this relationship, any poaching or possible threat not only to the Conservancy, but to the general area, are reported back promptly and communicated to KWS. This resulted in the capture of two elephant poachers and the recovery of their weapons during November. This is the first action of this kind in recent history where a community has been the basis of a successful anti-poaching operation against determined, sophisticated, commercial poaching. The Group Ranch has now established a Management Committee who plan and organise all the grazing and livestock within the Group Ranch. This has led to an enormous increase in grass reserves with the consequential benefits to wildlife. We are confident in the coming years that the wildlife numbers within Il Ngwesi will show a dramatic increase with this new found protection of land management.

The Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust at Wamba continues to work well. Security within this area over the last 12 months has remained quiet. There have been no reported incidents of commercial poaching.

During November, Acacia Trails have established a new tented camp in the northern part of the Trust area. This is built in a particularly rustic manner using local materials with accommodation in a new style of Bedouin type tents. This camp will undoubtedly prove to be a great success due to its unique construction and the remoteness and beauty of this area. There are no comparable camps within the country with this combination of terrain, wildlife and culture.

The Royal Engineers have agreed to base one squadron in Namunyak from January to March 1999. During this time they will be refurbishing the Trust offices, upgrading the Wamba town water supply, de-silting two dams, improving the Wamba Mission Hospital Airfield and up-grading all the roads on the eastern side of the mountain. This should make a major impact on the relationship between the Trust and the community, and establish further recognition of the benefits of the community working through the Trust.

KWS have approved an experimental cropping programme of guinea fowl within the Trust area. This, in conjunction with the introduction of tourism is of major importance if the Trust is to establish a realistic income for this community. With the security situation now more stable, the generation of income is the principal challenge facing the Trustees.

During the year, a senior member from both Il Ngwesi and Namunyak were sent to South Africa to the Natal Parks Board on a Protected Areas Management course. This was a great success and both individuals came back with new ideas and aims appropriate for their respective areas. This was made available through a kind donation from the US Fish and Wildlife Service and we will now be training and equipping 18 community guards within Il Ngwesi and Namunyak. The eventual aim is to establish two unarmed security forces of a similar standard to the one operated within the Conservancy.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Security of our rhino continues to be our single most expensive and important challenge. With three armed contacts having occurred in the past 12 months, having had none in the previous 12 years, it is clear that this is where we have to concentrate our efforts. With the planning and personnel presently in place and the level of support we receive from the Kenya Government and KWS, I am confident that we can continue to meet this challenge. Our aim is to establish a level of security that will operate as an effective deterrent.

We are indebted to the many individuals and organisations who continue to support the Conservancy, and without this support the future of the rhino and the overall aim of this Conservancy would be unattainable.

*Thank you all.*

The existing office space is proving too small to accommodate all the different sections. Accordingly during the coming year we need to complete four new offices adjoining the existing administration block.

Through the offices of the Conservancy we have formed a Water Association incorporating all the users on the Ngare Nyting/Ngare Sergoi river. This is the first Association of its kind in this area, and it has established an excellent dialogue between farmers, conservationists and pastoralists with water being seen as a major constraint on development in Kenya. In the coming years we feel that the establishment of the Association and the usage of water being planned by Government authorities in conjunction with the consensus of the users, will give this river a more secure future. We are at an early stage in assessing the possibility of a very large dam on this river, which would maintain the flow outside the Conservancy during the dry seasons. The construction this dam could have enormous benefits to the wildlife and people. The cost is estimated at eight million dollars, an extremely ambitious figure, but possibly of crucial importance to the district in the long term and it needs to be looked at in this light.

We continue to try to establish a working arrangement on the Ngare Ndare Forest incorporating the responsible Government agencies, the Conservancy and the community. This is proving quite a challenge, both in setting up a legal entity under which to operate, and to

raise funds for tree nurseries, fence maintenance and general protection of the ecology. KWS is working closely with us on this issue and we are hopeful in the coming year to come up with some solutions.

Our tourist figures continue to grow with the three operators within the Conservancy have a total of 5829 number of bednights in the past 12 months. This is a major improvement on last year's figures of 4686.

The Conservation Centre incorporating the museum was closed on the 3rd November, as this was not proving a financial success. It would appear we misjudged the market by assuming that we could draw a percentage of the tourist traffic going to and from Samburu. It has not proved possible to persuade sufficient tour operators to include a visit to the Conservation Centre in their itineraries. The Administrator has now moved into this house making space for the newly employed Security Advisor to move into the old research house.

We are now working with an advisor on drawing up a five year development plan for the Conservancy. It is hoped that this document will be completed by mid February at which stage we will be approaching various institutional donors to assist with our endangered species and community programmes. The Board feel that both these issues are of national importance and responsibility, consequently we hope for a positive response from these donors.

## **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

The Conservancy clinic is operational, with a fully qualified community nurse now on our permanent staff. It is early days for us to be able to assess the benefit to the community of this clinic, but the Conservancy management consider health care to the adjoining community to be of major importance, and every effort will be made to ensure the success of this clinic. Both the African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF) and the British Army have been extremely helpful in establishing the clinic and they are confident that the level of care provided is of a high standard.

The Conservancy continues to support the four schools on our boundaries. We have had little major capital input this year, but plan to incorporate funding requests for this in our development plan to be presented to the institutional donors. It is the long term aim of the Conservancy to raise the standard of these schools to a suitably modern level.

Through international and local support we are able to continue with our Bursary Scheme providing a full scholarship to 16 students. This is our fourth year of operation of the Bursary Scheme, with the first students coming out of Secondary School into University. We hope to be able to continue the Scheme up to University level as our contribution to help provide better education for Kenyans.

It is planned in the coming year to establish two community trusts on our south and eastern boundaries. The rationale behind this plan is to establish a legal body with genuine community participation. The community can then identify their own social needs and based on these needs we can draw up a community action plan for presentation to donors to assist on such matters as schools, health care and water. This plan is at an early stage, but we are receiving positive response both from the communities and donors. The