

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy

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Update

By early July, Lewa Downs was beginning to look rather brown. The heavy 'El Niño' rains of 1997-8 have been followed by disappointing 'short rains' in late 1998 and 'long rains' this year. Since the exuberant vegetation growth of El Niño had dried out, much of the Conservancy was becoming a serious fire hazard and we were getting worried about the effect of a minor drought on our wildlife. Luckily there were a few days of welcome rain in late July – usually our driest month – which has greened everything up and should keep the wildlife going well till the anticipated 'short rains' in November.

The major challenge for Lewa is to move away from 'crisis management' and to focus on medium and long-term development strategies. Whilst the Conservancy has been going from strength to strength over the past few years, it is still built on a fragile financial foundation. Funding for our heavy security and management costs, and increasing community development costs, is dependent on tourism and donations, both of which are potentially fickle. Budgets have always been tight, so that we have had to rely to a large extent on old, unreliable and expensive vehicles and equipment. We need to build sustainability with longer-term strategic planning and establish an endowment fund that will allow us to survive the difficult times – natural or man-made – that Africa can be relied on to provide. It is also important to find new ways to contribute to our own costs and those of our allied community groups, with a more businesslike approach.

Rhinos

So far it has been a good year for rhinos, with only one sad bit of news. The orphaned male calf Larangoi was killed on the 8th June in a fight with an adult male black rhino called Amuri. This incident occurred at about 2 o'clock in the morning, and there was nothing that the two game guards with Larangoi could do to prevent it – indeed they were fortunate to escape injury themselves. Territorial fights between black rhinos are common and we have lost others in this way. Successful re-introductions of orphaned animals back to the wild are extremely difficult, and though the risk of failure is high, we believe the effort is worthwhile. We are extremely grateful to our many supporters who have helped us to look after Larangoi, and although the end result was unhappy we managed to give him a good life.

We are very pleased to report two new black rhinos have been born. The mother of one was a female introduced from Solio Ranch in 1995

called Ndito, who lives up in the Ngare Ndare Forest.

The other mother is Juniper, who was born on Lewa and is eleven years old.

This is her second calf, born after an interval of three years since the last calf.

With these two births, we feel that we may at last be overcoming the problems



Larangoi

that the black rhinos had in their first years on Lewa. Since we were one of the first intensive protection rhino sanctuaries, many of the lessons which have informed later rhino introductions were learnt here. The two main conclusions were to ensure that sanctuaries are large enough to give rhinos room and to introduce them simultaneously, so that residents do not cause problems for new immigrants. The expansion of the sanctuary to incorporate the whole Conservancy and the Ngare Ndare forest has eased the social pressures, and with no new introductions for 5 years, the rhinos now seem to be getting on with what they are supposed to be doing – breeding.

There are also two new baby white rhinos. One was the third calf born to Tumbili, who was originally from South Africa. A great surprise in late July was a calf born to Jessima, who is the first of our second generation white rhinos to calve. Normally first calves are born to cows about 7 years old, but her calf was produced when she was only 5 years and 3 months old.

Grevy's zebra

An increasing focus for Lewa's conservation efforts is our population of Grevy's zebra. Although there have been no recent surveys, it is believed that there are only about 3,000 of these attractive animals left in the wild, of which over 600 (20% of the world population) live on Lewa. Grevy's zebra are disappearing from much of northern Kenya. It is believed that the reason for this is that nursing mothers must remain close to water, and overgrazing by cattle herds in the vicinity of waterholes and rivers has made life increasingly difficult for Grevy's zebra outside wildlife reserves. On Lewa Grevy's zebra live together with the common or Burchell's zebra, and appear to eat the same food. We are concerned that

Burchell's zebra may be out-competing the much rarer Grevy's zebra, and limiting their rate of population growth. To find out whether this is the case we have started a collaborative research programme with Dan Rubenstein and Mace Hack of Princeton University. It is important to get information on the survival rate of young zebras, and in order to do this we are setting up a database so that each animal can be individually recognised. Each Grevy's zebra has a unique pattern



Grevy's zebra suckling

of stripes on its rump, and our research team under the guidance of *Sarah Blomeley* is using a digital camera donated by Zurich Zoo to take photographs of rump patterns, and load them into a computer. Funding for the first phase of the zebra study, due for completion in August 1999, has been provided by St Louis Zoo, and we hope to raise further funding to continue the monitoring programme.

Giraffe

Successful conservation sometimes creates its own problems. For Lewa a major issue is the high densities of giraffe and elephant, which damage the trees that provide browse for

themselves and other animals such as black rhinos. Although reticulated giraffe numbers continue to climb on Lewa, their numbers are very low in community areas, and in Meru National Park, as a result of a history of poaching for skins and meat. The

obvious solution is to ship Lewa's surplus off to these areas. Even though in areas such as Meru and Sarara (which is under the management of the Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust - NWCT) poaching is under control, it will take a long time for their wildlife populations to bounce back to their former levels unless additional animals are introduced.



Giraffe translocation to Namunyak

Tusk Trust provided the funding to translocate 15 giraffe from Lewa to Sarara in June. The giraffe were captured by darting them with a tranquilliser, then guiding them into a specially modified rhino box. This technique was successful and caused less stress than the previous system of herding them using a helicopter or horses. The giraffe were then released into a holding boma within Lewa, where they were kept for a couple of weeks prior to the move to NWCT. They are currently being monitored by NWCT staff on the ground and by the Lewa Super-cub which is able to home in on the giraffe using the radio-collars placed on 2 of the animals. One radio has now failed, and the other tagged giraffe has moved some way south. By the time that this newsletter gets to you, it is quite likely that it will have made its way back to Lewa, a distance of some 80 km. While it is possible that this 'homing giraffe' may be uniquely attached to Lewa, this does mean that we will have to rethink future translocations. We may have to keep the giraffe in holding bomas in Sarara for a longer period, and release them when there is abundant surface water.

We will also need to mark all the animals moved so that each individual is monitored. If giraffe continue to return from Sarara, then Meru National Park may be a better bet, since they are unlikely to be able to find their way through the heavily cultivated Nyambeni Hills.

Elephant

Lewa still has the problem of too many elephants that want to knock down trees. Usually the miscreants are individual large bulls, and in the past we have found that the most effective way of dealing with the problem is to translocate these

exercise was very testing for the darting team as the young cow was extremely aggressive, living in a patch of very thorny bush. She charged at the slightest provocation, but eventually

one of her charges brought her into a small glade where a dart was successfully put into her. By this time the darting team looked as if they had been pulled through a thorn hedge backwards – which they effectively had been many times! She was transported in the Lewa lorry under sedation for 4 hours back to the park where she was released into a resident herd. This is the first time any such operation has been conducted up here and proved the practicality of doing similar operations in the future.



Translocating young elephant to Meru National Park



Vegetation damage by elephant bulls

animals to areas such as Meru National Park, which are still short of elephants following the heavy poaching of the 1980s. For this work we need the assistance of the Kenya Wildlife Service, which has wildlife vets and a lorry capable of carrying adult elephants. We are in discussion with KWS on moving these bulls within the coming months.

In late June our capture team assisted KWS to move a sub-adult elephant that was trapped in a small patch of farmland back to Meru Park. The



Darted elephant being loaded on a ramp

Security

After the problems of last year, the security situation around Lewa, and the rest of northern Kenya, has quietened down. The Kenya Wildlife Service and the Kenya Police have put a major effort into the Samburu area, with Samburu Game Reserve, Buffalo Springs and Shaba now back on the tourist circuit. We are taking advantage of this relative lull to concentrate on training and planning.

This is particularly important in view of recent news that prices for rhino horn in Yemen have increased for the first time in many years, which is likely to increase the threat from poachers.

Fifteen of our armed security personnel went to the KWS Field Training School at Manyani for a 2-week training course. They were taught basic field-craft, drill, weapons' training and radio procedures. The KWS instructors were impressed by the morale, performance and general enthusiasm of our men. If funds permit, refresher training will be carried out annually. This training was particularly important because the Kenya government has agreed to give Kenya Police Reserve status to our armed security personnel, meaning that they will have full authority to apprehend and arrest poachers in the Ngare Ndare forest as well as on Lewa. *This is a major breakthrough, and gives an indication of the importance that the government attaches to the work being done by LWC.*



LWC Security staff with Passing Out Certificates from KWS Training School

The tracker dogs, *Murphy* and *Bonnie*, continue to provide sterling support, being

called out on operations roughly once a month. Their major success in the last six months has been to find an AK47 automatic rifle north of Rumuruti, which had been hidden by bandits after a shoot-out the previous night.

We shall be undertaking a threat assessment in the near future to see whether our security resources are being efficiently used, and how we might cope with increased pressure from poachers. We must also evaluate whether the increasing capacity of neighbouring communities will allow us to scale down the level of our security, which at the moment is probably higher than that of any other rhino sanctuary.

New Staff

Several new senior members of staff have been taken on recently. As well as the Community Development Officer (see below) we have a new Administrator, Secretary, Nairobi office Receptionist, and Research Officer. After four years in the job, the first Administrator, *Simon Marriott*, has moved on, having overseen the growth of the Conservancy. When he came it was a fledgling organisation - operating out of two tiny rooms in the old farm buildings. Thanks to Simon's military background, commitment and attention to detail, he was able to bring order to what had previously been a bush office. He leaves us with a very clear and simple system and possibly his biggest achievement is to have tamed and trained a team that previously could care for wildlife but had not even heard of an "in tray"! Simon, Caroline and their tribe have moved to New Zealand to where they plan to set up a trout fishing venture.

The new Administrator is *Dr Chris Thouless*, who has been associated with Lewa for almost ten years, having worked in the early 1990s for WWF and Kenya Wildlife Service, studying the elephants of Laikipia and Samburu. In recent years his main job has been Chairman of the LWC Scientific Advisory Committee, although his paid employment was with the Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks, working on an EU-funded project on the development of protected areas in the Kalahari Desert. His wife *Caroline* has an even longer

association with Lewa, since her working life started with Wilderness Trails in the 1970s. She will be working alongside Chris in the office.

The new Secretary/PA at Lewa is *Saada Omar*, and *Fatima Ali* has taken over as the Receptionist in the Nairobi office. *Geoffrey Chege* has been appointed Research Officer, in charge of ecological monitoring. While he was a student at Kenyatta University, he carried out a research project on elephants at Lewa.

Community projects

Lewa's community programme has taken a major step forward with the appointment of an extremely experienced Community Development Officer. *James Munyugi* worked for the Kenya Wildlife Service, and its predecessor, the Department of Wildlife Management, for many years, particularly in the Samburu area. He has been the Warden of the Samburu Game Reserve, the District Warden of Samburu, the Community Warden of the Samburu area, and the overall head of training within the Community Wildlife Service in Nairobi. James's salary and running costs for two years will be provided by a grant from the Global Environmental Facility through the World Bank. His main jobs will be to manage and develop our existing community programme and to expand the community areas to the north of us that are participating in wildlife management.

There are two distinct components to LWC's community programme. One involves ensuring that Lewa's neighbours see it as a positive force in their lives. We can achieve this by assisting with education, health, water supply and revenue generation so that Lewa becomes the focus of economic advancement in the area. This aspect of the programme involves working with all

our neighbours, regardless of whether they are cattle-herders living closely with wildlife, or small-scale farmers who have no interest in seeing wildlife anywhere near their land.

The other aspect of the programme involves working with communities whose lifestyles are compatible with wildlife - primarily the pastoral people of the north - whose land forms part of the greater north Kenya ecosystem which still stretches to the Ethiopian border and beyond. At the moment there are two active programmes - with Il Ngwesi Group Ranch and with the Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust - and we are looking at a number of opportunities to extend these ideas.

Good neighbours

LWC continues to assist its immediate neighbours in a number of ways.

Schools. The bursary programme is ongoing, currently funded by the Gemini Trust and Cooper Motor Corporation amongst others. We are upgrading the facilities at the Lewa School. The most important job is to increase the quality of the teachers' accommodation. They are currently in small tin huts and we are building them much more attractive single room accommodation. This is essential in order to secure good quality teachers.

Women's Group. Thanks to the generosity of Jan Reed Smith and her team, we have built an office/work room for Jane's Women's Group. This will be used for the production of small artefacts to be sold in the Conservancy shop, and also for community meetings.

Namunyak



Sarara Camp in Namunyak prior to the fire

The initial success of the Sarara camp has been confounded by a disastrous fire which started in a paraffin fridge and destroyed the entire mess. Since the camp was empty, all the linen and most of the camp equipment was in a store-room under the mess, and was lost. Fortunately the fire did not spread, and the tents were undamaged. Bookings for the Sarara camp have had to be diverted to other camps, especially Il Ngwesi, and a valuable source of income for the community has been lost.

However, this disaster may lead to a new opportunity. We had already been discussing the possibility of an equity-sharing arrangement between Namunyak and the existing operator, Acacia Trails, but had not been able to work out a way to do this. Now, if we can raise the money to reconstruct and upgrade the camp, the Namunyak community can immediately become 50% partners. The plan is for Namunyak to staff and manage the camp, and for Acacia Trails to find and host international clients. Proceeds will be shared, with Namunyak receiving a proportion of the proceeds from international clients, and all of the proceeds from local clients and operators who provide their own transport and hosting. Tusk Trust has already pledged a proportion of the funds required, and we are looking hard for the remainder so that the camp can become operational again before the new tourist season.

In order for the community to be able to manage the camp effectively, in the way that the Il Ngwesi community is managing their own lodge, we need to identify a good team, and to train them and the Namunyak trustees in business and tourism management. We are fortunate in just having taken on James Munyugi, with his background in community training, and this will be one of his most important tasks over the next few months.

Email
Lewa Wildlife Conservancy
at
lewa@swiftkenya.com
for further information

Il Ngwesi

Bookings at Il Ngwesi Lodge continue to run at 70% occupancy, which is extremely satisfactory. The Lodge has received two awards: one from a local magazine Travel News, which designated it as the Best Self-Catering Lodge in Kenya; the other was the prestigious David Sheldrick Conservation Award. These awards speak for themselves and Il Ngwesi

continues as one of the most successful community wildlife programmes in the country. The Il Ngwesi game guards successfully rescued a one week old elephant calf which got stuck in a water hole and left behind by the herd. Thanks to the prompt response from Daphne Sheldrick, the little elephant was collected by air, flown to Nairobi, and has joined Daphne's band of orphans. To date he is doing well.

*Young elephant
calf rescued at Il
Ngwesi*



LWC Donors

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On Thursday 12th August 1999 Lewa lost one of our most enthusiastic and committed supporters – Evi Bernhard. Evi had lived here, and loved and helped Lewa for over 12 years. During this time she hand raised two orphaned elephants named Lindy & Michele, releasing them both back into the wild. Lindy recently returned to Lewa with a small calf at foot. Evi started and financed the Conservancy's shop at the main gate; this makes a contribution every month to the recurrent budget.

Evi fought a hereditary medical problem for many years; she leaves us all with a memory of her inner courage and unfailing strength of mind, never complaining even under the most difficult circumstances. Her many friends will surely miss her, but we at Lewa will take a leaf from her book and try to face our problems and work with the same determination.

On the day Evi died, we helped to rescue an abandoned elephant calf that had fallen down a well in Namunyak; the little animal was flown in by helicopter to Lewa and subsequently taken down to Nairobi to Daphne Sheldrick. The calf is a female named in memory of Evi and has settled in really well with the other orphans in Nairobi.



Larangoi

Please contact any
of these addresses
FOR MORE INFORMATION



Evi Bernhard

MICHAEL WERIKHE

Just before this newsletter went to print, we heard news of Michael Werikhe's death and Anna Merz has written this tribute to him.

"When Samia was a small calf back in 1985, I had a letter from Michael Werikhe. He had then started his unbelievable career of walking for Kenya's fast vanishing rhino to raise first national and later international awareness of their plight, but he had never at that moment been close to one. I invited him to stay, and that was the first of several visits to Lewa. It was his gentleness, his compassion and utter fascination for the animals we both loved that bonded our friendship. Lewa's rhino, like those of all Kenya, have benefitted from his work. If they knew of his death, then surely our rhino would mourn him. On their behalf as well as our own, all of us at Lewa feel devastated by his untimely death."

Anna Merz

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (Nairobi Office)

P. O. Box 49918
Nairobi
Kenya

Tel : (+254-2) 607893
Fax : (+254-2) 607197
Email : lewa@swiftkenya.com

Lewa Downs
Private Bag
Isiolo, Kenya

Tel : (254-164) 31405
Fax : (254-164) 31405
Email : lewa@swiftkenya.com

Our principal fund-raising organisations overseas:

U.S. 501(c)(3) Non-profit and Tax Exempt Organisation N°: 87-0572187
Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (USA)

Attn: Tim Lapage
10 Claimjumper Court
Park City, Utah 84060, USA

Tel : 435-649-4655
Fax : 435-649-4655
Email : safari@sisna.com

UK Registered Charity N°: 1069800
Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (UK)

Attn: Hugo de Ferranti
28 Walpole Street
London SW3 4QS, England

Tel : 0171-730-4044
Fax : 0171-730-3433
Email : noble.house@virgin.net

Lewa Wildlife Conservancy (Asia/Pacific)

Attn: Paul McIntosh

Email : rhino@asiaonline.net