

1991-07-11

TRANSVAAL MUSEUM

A division of New York Zoological Society

6213

NEWS FROM NAIROBI

# WCI PROJECT AIMS TO EXPAND NAIROBI NATIONAL PARK



KENYA'S NAIROBI NATIONAL Park covers about 45 square miles of savanna southeast of the city of Nairobi. In fact, the city limits directly border the northern sections of the park. Thanks to WCI funding,

the park is now separated from the city by 15 miles of electric fencing.

Nairobi National Park is typical of many East African savanna sanctuaries: The migratory routes of its wildlife—including zebras, wildebeests, impalas, kongonis, and Thomson's and Grant's gazelles—are cut off on one side. But the pathways are still open to the south, leading to the greater Athi-Kapiti Plains ecosystem—second only to the Serengeti-Mara in its spectacularly large populations of herbivores. Keeping Nairobi National Park as a part of the greater ecosystem requires a careful analysis of the dynamics of grasslands ecosystems as well as also an understanding of local development policies and economics.

In 1990, WCI East African Regional Coordinator Dr. David Western and Associate Researcher Helen Gichohi were asked by the Kenyan

government to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) on a commercial Export Processing Zone. This export zone is akin to what is called an industrial, or corporate, park in the United States, and the plan is to develop such a zone at Athi River in an area adjacent to Nairobi National Park.

WCI has supported Gichohi's ongoing research into the pressures on the reserve's savanna communities. In recent years, coarse grasses have invaded the reserve, increasing the seasonality of wildlife use, reducing tourism, and putting greater grazing pressure on private ranches to the south. Gichohi carried out experimental burning of grassland plots to see if they were more attractive to the migratory grazers, who prefer tender new shoots. Animal numbers swiftly increased following

*Continued on page W4*

W. CONWAY

By East African standards, Nairobi National Park is quite lacking for industry, port harbors, and major urban centers. Well situated for tourism, it attracts and accommodates visitors yielding significant economic benefits to the government and its potential wildlife.

