

Oct 97

LEWA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER NO. 4 - JUNE 1997

INTRODUCTION

Since our last Newsletter in December we have received the most wonderful rain for many, many years. The Conservancy today is a sea of bush, green grass and coloured flowers; a great contrast from the dry dust bowl of February. The wildlife and vegetation have responded accordingly and we can certainly look forward to a year of recovery in the vegetation and substantial breeding within all the wildlife species. The down side of the heavy rain was that many of the roads and fence lines were heavily eroded and in many cases totally washed away; a price we are very happy to pay. The newly purchased grader from South Africa will now be busy for several months re-aligning and restructuring the entire road network within the Conservancy.

On the 8th April, an armed Somali poacher was intercepted by one of our game guards as he entered the Conservancy. He was clearly intent on shooting two White Rhino about 400 yards away. The man was challenged, but only responded by raising his rifle at our game guard. The latter, acting in self-defence, had no option but to open fire and the intruder was shot dead. This is the first serious poaching attempt made on our rhino inside Lewa.

This incident is a clear indication of the renewed interest in rhino horn. We have received irrefutable information that there is a market and a new threat on the rhino. This has been expected and we are boosting our men on the ground and putting more effort into training our armed groups, we will also increase the flying surveillance of the entire Conservancy. We are confident that we do have a highly committed team of game guards, but this recent incident has clearly shown that no reduction in the security system can ever be considered and that only by maintaining a technological advantage and by operating with highly motivated staff can we expect to hold the situation stable for our rhino.

WILDLIFE

There have been no rhino births during the start of the year, although we anticipate three Black Rhino and two White Rhino will calf within the coming year. We sadly lost a male Black Rhino (Simba) during the rain. We were unable to identify positively how he died, but he was washed down a steep 'lugga' during a very heavy rainstorm and was either badly hurt or drowned. He was only found ten days after the incident and so it was impossible to see exactly what happened. His horn was recovered. The Black Rhino in the Ngare Ndare forest fared very well through the prolonged dry period from November to March. This has clearly shown how the rhino have benefited from the expanded area of 225 sq. kms and the threat of droughts has certainly been reduced. In the coming years we expect a marked increase in the rate at which our rhino breed, as the animals born within the Conservancy, used to the conditions and vegetation, reach maturity.

In late September/early October, Lewa will be hosting part of AFARI - 97. This acronym stands for 'African Fire - Atmosphere Research Initiative'. A group of some 18 scientists from Kenya, South Africa, Germany, USA and Canada will be studying the atmosphere effects of fires occurring on East African savannahs.

INTERNAL DEVELOPMENT

This year we estimate that our total running costs will come to approximately U.S. \$670,000. Further progress has been made towards achieving our goal of becoming financially self-supporting, and in 1997 we are hopeful that the proportion of our annual recurrent budget made up by revenue actually generated on the Conservancy itself will have risen to about 55%. This should be compared to last year's figure of about 40%. The main sources of income this year will be tourism (61%), wildlife utilisation (22%) and farming (6%).

A comprehensive Management and Development Plan for the next five years is being written, and should be completed by September. This document will clearly spell out why and how the Conservancy plans to progress over the next five years. This will cover all aspects from Rhino Security, Tourism, Staff Housing, Road Construction, The Planning of water storage and distribution to the development of affiliated community wildlife schemes such as Il Ngwesi and Namunyak also the improvement to an acceptable standard of the four Primary Schools assisted by the Conservancy. This will become a key document, not just for helping us plan the Conservancy's future direction but also in securing institutional funding from such organisations as the World Bank and the European Union.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Conservancy continues to make a considerable effort to provide assistance to two neighbouring Community Wildlife Schemes.

Il Ngwesi lodge, built on the adjoining Il Ngwesi Group Ranch is now up and working. During the first four months' of operation it ran at 60% occupancy, generating \$17,000 for the community. We can confidently say that this has all the makings of an untold success and will have a major impact on how wildlife is seen by the Ngwesi community. Where once it was an asset to be used, subsequently through Government legislation this was no longer allowed and the wildlife numbers declined. This process is now reversed, and through the major support of the Government, the adjacent Borana Ranch, and Lewa, this project will establish wildlife as a valuable resource for the foreseeable future.

The Namunyak Wildlife Conservation Trust in Wamba continues to work well with no poaching incidents reported so far this year. They also have been blessed with wonderful rains and all the streams and springs are once again flowing. An agreement has been signed with Acacia Trails to build a 10 bed camp near the Sarova river. This is the first tourism in the area and will be operational by December. The Trustees are both pleased

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and proud of this arrangement as it will be the first major source of income generated by the wildlife.

CONCLUSION

We have been exceptionally fortunate with the rains so far this year and this will have a most beneficial effect on our wildlife. We are moving ahead (although not as quickly as we would wish) towards our objective of becoming self-sufficient financially. The growth of environmentally friendly tourism on Lewa is assuming ever greater importance in this respect. Our major concern remains the security of our rhino and the first six months of this year has seen a general deterioration in the security situation in this region, in particular on our northern boundary. We cannot afford to drop our guard for a moment, and increased resources have accordingly been directed towards reinforcing and re-equipping our security staff. The next few months will be crucial in defeating any further attempts made on the lives of Lewa's rhino population.

On the personal front I was at Lewa for 3 weeks in January helping with a Japanese T.V. film with a very professional film crew which should have got excellent footage of our rhinos, both black & white. We hope that any exposure in the Far East of the rhino situation will help as it is there that the major demand for rhino horn exists, though in the Chinese rather than the Japanese markets. After a short interval in S. Africa I returned to Lewa to meet the winners of the 96 "Bowling for Rhinos" which annual event, organised by AAZK is our major fund raiser in the States. As on other occasions the winners & their partners were wonderful people & I hope they enjoyed being at Lewa as much as we enjoyed having them. As well as showing them & telling them about, as many rhinos as possible, I also took them down to the newly opened Il Ngwesi lodge & we were all of us really impressed by the way in which it is operating & the benefits it is bringing both to the local pastoral community & to the wildlife. There was also an opportunity to introduce everyone to the joys of viewing wildlife, including elephant, from the splendid elevation afforded by the back of a camel.

In August I returned to Lewa again & had been so happy when a fax from Ian in July had informed me that the young black cow Julali, had given birth to her first calf, a male. Tragically when this baby was only a month old Julali was killed instantly when an elephant damaged tree fell on her, breaking her neck. The calf, named Laringoi, is now being hand raised by Jane & having had the benefit of his mothers milk for the first & most critical period of his life, is so far doing very well. I so hope that Jane will experience all the joy with him that I did with Samia, & none of the tragedy. I also had the big thrill of being out with my tracker & discovering that Mwingo had given birth to a tiny & perfect calf. She had come to us originally from Nakuru having being injured & partly blinded in a fight there & we thought she was never going to breed. Sadly this very gentle rhino lost her baby when it was taken by a very big male leopard. Hopefully she will have better luck next time.