

notes from the field

SPRING 2016



Peace
for lions

25 years
saving
cheetah

Zebra bar codes



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network

Lion warriors make peace in the rain

With rain comes conflict. During northern Kenya's rainy season, hunting becomes more difficult for lions because their prey grows stronger and faster with the abundance of vegetation and water. Lions are forced to travel longer distances in their hunt for animals like impala and gazelles, and on their way, they encounter abundant livestock that are easy to target.

Ranchers and pastoralists in the region rely heavily on their livestock, so they may retaliate against the lions for killing their goats, cows, or camels. Since November when the rains returned, Ewaso Lions has recorded 45 incidents of lions attacking livestock and has stopped the killing of lions an estimated 26 times. As a result, no lions were killed during this period.

Ewaso's core field team works closely during the rainy season with the young men – known as warriors – who are part of their Warrior Watch team. Warrior Watch participants are stationed in their native villages and trained in human-wildlife conflict negotiation. They display a genuine empathy for the loss of the livestock, and they are skilled in calming tensions and working to prevent future problems from occurring.

As Jeneria Lekilelei, Ewaso Lions' Field Operations and Community Manager, recalls, "One day, the lions killed camels in five locations. I sat with the herders under a bush all day. I explained the camels weren't properly attended. I said, 'Have you ever heard of a camel being killed when herded by a proper person?' They said, 'No.' I said, 'Then you can't be angry at the lions.' Because I had talked with them, they were willing to leave the lions and come back with me to the village." Jeneria stayed with them until late in the night to make sure no one went after the lions. The next day, he went back to check, and found the lions safely back in the Samburu National Reserve.

Despite the high incidence of conflict this rainy season, the fact that no lions have been killed or harmed is a testament to the power of Ewaso Lions' work with the people who must live among the lions. ■

Despite high incidence of conflict this rainy season, no lions have been killed or harmed.



Top: Samburu warriors report lion sightings and any incidents of conflict. Inset: Jeneria Lekilelei, Ewaso Lions' Field Operations and Community Manager, leads the Warrior Watch program.

Celebrating a **Quarter Century** of Cheetah Conservation



Scott Miller



Cheetah Conservation Fund



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It often takes time – and a lot of determination – for a big conservation vision to become successful. Twenty-five years ago, Dr. Laurie Marker moved to Namibia from the United States to found the Cheetah Conservation Fund (CCF). She planned to work with local farmers to address their issues with cheetahs and prevent human-cheetah conflict.

CCF started off small, working with only a few local farmers. The team understood that building partnerships takes time and results wouldn't be instant. Eventually relationships grew, and CCF has now worked with more than 5,000 farmers on innovative solutions like

the much-lauded livestock guardian dog program, which has been adopted by other conservation groups. Many interns who started in the field working with CCF have also gone on to become conservation leaders.

Laurie also played a key role in the early development of the Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN). When first pursuing his interest in conservation, Charlie Knowles, one of WCN's co-founders, learned of Laurie's impressive efforts in the field and sent a letter to her in Namibia, asking how he could help. Through his collaboration with Laurie, Charlie was inspired to create a way to support other individual conser-

vationists throughout the world, leading to the inception of WCN.

It has been 25 years since CCF was founded, and its partnerships are now stronger than ever. CCF continues to grow and foster those relationships, helping the cheetah population in Namibia climb by approximately 40 percent since its work began. CCF is now the longest-running cheetah conservation program in existence and is proud to have changed long-held negative perceptions of the cheetah in Namibia. Twenty-five years ago, many Namibians viewed cheetah as pests but now proudly declare their country to be the "Cheetah Capital of the World." ■



Left: Charlie Knowles with Laurie Marker and Chewbaaka during Charlie's visit to CCF in 1996. Center: Dr. Marker instructs students in the CCF clinic. Right: CCF conducts education programs for visiting school groups. Inset: Laurie Marker working with Khayam at Wildlife Safari in Oregon in 1985.

Citizen scientists count the zebra with a bar code

The very first Great Grevy's Rally created citizen scientists out of 450 people by sending them out into the field with cameras to count Grevy's zebra for a weekend.

An incredible 118 teams explored northern Kenya, bringing together people from all walks of life. Participants ranged from tourists to community members to key county officials. Together, they covered 25,000 square kilometers, cameras on hand to snap pictures of each zebra's unique stripe pattern – every Grevy's zebra has a unique pattern of stripes, much like a human fingerprint. The photos they took were then uploaded to a database that uses new technology to read zebra stripes like a bar code, allowing for easier identification of individuals in the future.

The goal is to attain accurate numbers of how many of these endangered equines currently live in select Kenyan parks. There are only an estimated 2,500 Grevy's zebras left in Kenya, accounting for

90% of the total wild population. It is vitally important for Grevy's Zebra Trust to understand where the population is trending – if it is



increasing, decreasing, or remaining stable – to inform their conservation work.

The early results are promising. One school bus full of children saw over 50 Grevy's zebras, an experience mirrored by several other groups. Overall, this was a unique opportunity for everyday people to spend time as hands-on conservation scientists, contributing to the protection of a highly endangered species. ■



Every Grevy's zebra has a unique stripe pattern, much like a human fingerprint, which can be read like a bar code.





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WCN protects endangered species and preserves their natural habitats by supporting entrepreneurial conservationists who pursue innovative strategies for people and wildlife to co-exist and thrive.

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