

Notes from the Field

SPRING 2019

**MAKING SAMBURU
SAFE FOR ELEPHANTS**

**COMMUNITIES FOR
CONSERVATION**

**ORPHANED PRIMATES
GET A SECOND
CHANCE**



WCN

Wildlife Conservation Network

SAVE THE ELEPHANTS

Making Samburu Safe for Elephants



The Land Cruiser is parked at a discreet distance from the Ewaso Ng'iro River, where a herd of elephants is bathing. From inside the vehicle, Frank Pope of Save the Elephants (STE) observes its newest member—a six-month-old male. The calf splashes in the water, his chubby body slick and mud-spattered. His mother, Monsoon, is nearby, keeping a watchful eye on her son. Monsoon is the herd's 57-year-old matriarch and one of the oldest elephants in Samburu National Reserve, her young calf is one of 52 born in the Reserve last year. Under the herd's protection, he is growing into a confident, feisty bull. Ten years ago this relatively serene childhood would have been upended by a raging poaching crisis in northern Kenya.

Most of Monsoon's herd was killed during the height of Kenya's poaching crisis that began in 2009. Driven by a demand for ivory, poachers killed an estimated 100,000 elephants from 2010 to 2012. Monsoon herself was shot five times; each time she survived because of quick interventions by STE and Kenya Wildlife Service to treat her wounds. Monsoon suddenly became the matriarch of her herd, a role for which she was woefully unprepared. Elephants rely on matriarchs to teach them how to survive—they carry knowledge about safe migratory routes, where to find sources of water in arid landscapes, and how to avoid threats. Monsoon had no one to show her the ropes, but despite these challenges, she persevered.

The birth of Monsoon's newest calf could signify that she finally feels safe enough to reproduce again.

STE has been monitoring Monsoon for 17 years, gathering data from her tracking collar. This data has shown Monsoon and her herd frequently traveling at night to forage for food when passing through dangerous locations. It also indicated the herd often retreats into Samburu when they feel threatened. Such fear-based behaviors in elephants are likely to have long-term implications for their survival, impacting the way they search for food and their reproductive cycles. For example, Monsoon had a calf she managed to raise and keep safe during the 10-year-long poaching crisis, but until last year she hadn't given birth to any more calves since then. (Elephants usually give birth every two to four years.) The birth of her newest calf could signify that she finally feels safe enough to reproduce again. Returning to Samburu to have her calf could mean she feels the Reserve is secure. Monsoon's movements seem to support these theories; she travels with her herd more freely during the day while in Samburu and she eats, sleeps, and socializes there with relative ease.

STE's collaborative efforts to engage local communities in conservation and to curb poaching in Kenya have played a key role in making Samburu safe for Monsoon's herd and for all elephants in the Reserve. The wave of new elephant births in the last year, including Monsoon's new calf, gives hope for a brighter, more secure future for Kenya's elephants. ●

CHEETAH CONSERVATION BOTSWANA

Communities for Conservation

After 30 miles, Jane and Britz finally drove past the last of the commercial cattle ranches. The Kalahari Desert transformed almost instantly; thorn bushes and endless dirt converted to healthy, green vegetation. Every few months, Jane Horgan and Britz Malepe of Cheetah Conservation Botswana (CCB) make the 100-mile drive to visit villages in the Western Kalahari Conservation Corridor, one of the most intensely beautiful, untouched places on the planet. The villages are home to the storied Bushmen (the San) of the Kalahari, and the landscape is rich in wildlife—its savannah-like grasses well-trodden by antelope, lions, and leopards. But above all, this is cheetah heartland.



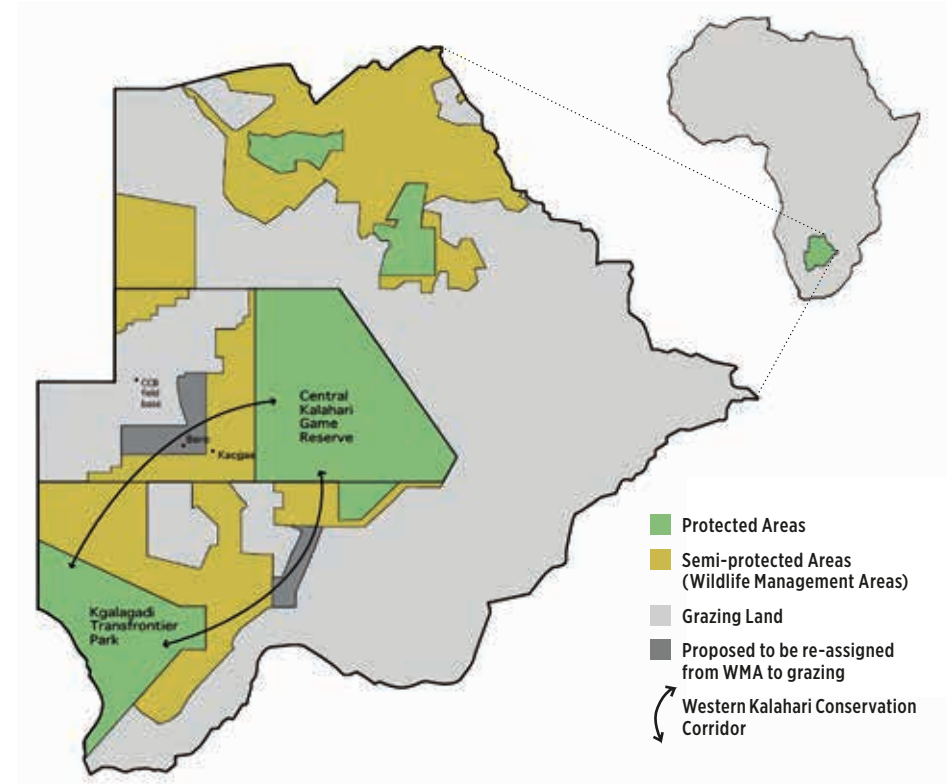
Two San boys posing for the camera.

The conservation corridor is crucial for cheetahs' survival, but it is slowly being eroded as more wildlife areas are being converted to farmland. If the corridor disappears it will create a gap in the last contiguous population of cheetahs. This would be a nightmare for the cheetah population regionally: isolation leads to inbreeding and a loss of genetic diversity, putting the species at risk for disease and

reducing their ability to breed. Cheetahs need the corridor, but any efforts to protect it won't succeed without the support and participation of the communities there. CCB's new initiative, "Communities for Conservation," aims to safeguard the future of the corridor for the benefit of both wildlife and people.



THE KALAHARI DESERT



Livestock farmers and the San have different relationships with wildlife. There is conflict in farming communities between carnivores who prey on livestock and farmers who lethally retaliate against them. The San, however, are not traditional pastoralists. For 20,000 years, they have subsisted off the land, maintaining a deep appreciation for wildlife. Communities for Conservation addresses both lifestyles to reduce conflict between cheetahs and farmers and to offer new, culturally aligned and eco-friendly income opportunities for the San.

Implementing programs that address conflict with farmers is CCB's bread and butter work. They use livestock guarding dogs to keep small stock (goats and sheep) safe from cheetah attacks and do extensive conservation education to change people's negative perceptions of cheetahs. But these approaches don't apply to the non-pastoralist San. Instead, CCB is helping the San build a wildlife-based economy focused on ecotourism ventures.

CCB has years of experience and connections it could use to facilitate everything from handicraft enterprises to campsites for tourists. Through Communities for Conservation they can also bolster cultural experiences such as San demonstrations of traditional dances and showing tourists how to identify medicinal plants. This doesn't just provide the San with sustainable income, it also helps them to preserve their culture. The San worry their way of life could die out; they see cultural tourism as a way to keep it alive.

Communities for Conservation is just starting, but with more funding and resources it will become the most extensive community program that CCB has ever implemented. This approach could be the best way to ensure the preservation of one of the most pristine landscapes on Earth and for everyone in this part of the Kalahari—people and wildlife—to thrive. ●

OKAPI CONSERVATION PROJECT

Orphaned Primates Get a Second Chance

The rescue and rehabilitation of Rosie and Okapi was a joint effort between Okapi Conservation Project, ICCN Rangers, Virunga National Park (including their pilot, Anthony Caere), Kahuzi-Biega National Park, and Lwiro Primate Rehabilitation Center. Now living at Lwiro, Rosie has found other energetic chimps to play with, and Okapi has been adopted by a surrogate mother, an adult baboon named Grace.



Pilot Anthony Caere navigated the snug, two-seater airplane through a light mist that cloaked the forest below. Sitting shotgun were two infant primates: Rosie, a chimpanzee with protuberant, saucer-like ears and soft, chestnut-colored eyes, and a pint-sized baboon named Okapi. Abandoning her seat, Rosie settled into Anthony's lap, her lanky arm wrapping around him as Anthony gave her a reassuring pat. The trio was en route to Lwiro Primate Rehabilitation Centre in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Rosie and Okapi share parallel histories—both orphaned by lawbreakers, rescued by rangers, and cared for by Okapi Conservation Project (OCP)—de facto sisters of circumstance. Lwiro would offer them parallel futures as well.

ICCN (Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature) Rangers who police the Okapi Wildlife Reserve had confiscated Rosie and Okapi days apart in the village of Badengaido and brought them to OCP for care. OCP supports wildlife protection in the Reserve, but is not typically in the business of rehabilitating primates, at least, not anymore. In the 1990s, OCP did offer rehabilitation services and though they retired that aspect of their work, they retained relevant experience and resources (including medical supplies and safe enclosures). Rosie and Okapi arrived at OCP malnourished, with Rosie suffering from abscesses on her hands and feet. OCP was able to treat them and provide round-the-clock affection until both animals were well enough to travel to Lwiro for long-term care.

While no one knows exactly how either primate ended up in Badengaido, OCP suspects both were orphaned under conditions related to illegal mining. Badengaido's proximity to a gold mine had caused it to balloon with an influx of illegal miners. With limited food options, it's common for miners to poach primates, and once the adults are killed, young primates are frequently sold as pets on the black market.

Illegal mining is a menace, one that OCP focuses on eliminating as part of their mission to protect the endangered okapi (or "forest giraffe") and its habitat. Okapi are highly sensitive and can only withstand small-scale or temporary human presence. As deeply shy animals, okapi keep at a distance when people are around. Increased mining activity brings more people,

causing okapi to move into insecure areas. Additionally, when mines grow large they decimate okapi habitat, which also pushes okapi into unsafe areas. OCP supports the ICCN Rangers' efforts to evict miners from the Reserve by supplying the communications equipment and base salaries for the rangers and funding aerial surveys to locate illegal mines. By working with ICCN Rangers to reduce threats like illegal mining, OCP is able to protect okapi and maintain the integrity of the Reserve for all wildlife there.

Rehabilitating two orphaned primates is atypical for OCP, but it's an example of how conservation for one species can safeguard others. Conservation has a domino effect that makes it possible for conservationists protecting okapi to give any animal help when they need it most. ●

WCN protects endangered wildlife by supporting conservationists who ensure wildlife and people co-exist and thrive.

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