

## Project Update: May 2010

It's been one of our most challenging field seasons yet – from severe drought to massive floods to increased threats to lions. The Ewaso Lions team pushes forward, working with communities, to ensure the long-term survival of Kenya's top predators and other wildlife.

Below are some key highlights. The full Mid-Year Report, including photos, is available to read online. Click here:

<http://www.ewasolions.org/diary.php?hash=a6a238cd5eb633f98b784eeb46ac1894&mnid=22&page=>

### Lion News

We are currently monitoring close to 40 lions in the Ewaso ecosystem of Samburu. The lions did well during the drought of late 2009. All cubs survived and thrived when most other animals succumbed to the severity of the drought. Most of the females have cubs at the moment, including Magilani in Westgate. I am very excited to report that she was finally seen in April 2010 with two young cubs. She was last seen in August 2009, so it is a huge relief to see her again, especially with cubs.

**Conflict:** Lions face high pressure from recent conflict. Lions are struggling to find wild prey and are turning to livestock. Recently in Westgate Conservancy, lions killed three camels; in response, we have held seven community meetings within the entire group ranch. We addressed the need to make *bomas* stronger with closed entrances, so livestock does not escape and end up in predator territory. The meetings were well-received, and the livestock owners have responded by reinforcing *bomas* to protect livestock better. We will be actively involved in a *boma* reinforcing project from May 2010 onwards thanks to support from our donors.

If conflict continues, things could get grim for the lions and we are working hard to continue with our awareness and education programmes. It is thanks to your donations that we are able to go out each day and hold meetings and travel around the group ranch talking to the communities about lions. To read our blog on the increased conflict, click on this link:

<http://ewasolions.wildlifedirect.org/2010/04/12/conflict-threatens-lions-in-samburu/>

**Radio-Collaring:** After months of trying, we successfully collared the elusive male lion, Lguret, in late February 2010. It was no easy task to find him; we spent a total of 60 field days over the past 8 months, averaging 12 hours each day, and driving nearly 2,000 km! Lguret now has a new radio/GPS tracking collar and we will be able to capture valuable movement data. For photos and a detailed account on this collaring operation, click on this link:

<http://ewasolions.wildlifedirect.org/2010/03/03/finally-capturing-and-collaring-lguret/>

I have begun to analyse the data from his old collar and preliminary results already show interesting patterns where he moved out of the reserves to areas where large numbers of livestock were present. We still have plans to collar at least four more individuals. Collaring lions is very tough work and requires a lot of time and funds. We are grateful for all the

donors who have assisted us so far and I urge you all to keep supporting us so we can monitor the Ewaso lions closely.

**Camera Trapping:** Thanks to donors, we have acquired two camera traps for the project. Identifying individual predators in Westgate is difficult since they are nervous and often run away before we can take good identity photos. It is always exciting in the mornings to go and check the cameras and see what the cameras have captured. So far, we have managed to get some great photos (<http://www.ewasolions.wildlifedirect.org/2010/02/11/camera-traps>) of elephants and hyenas (including one of a hyena biting the actual camera!). In time, we hope to have a collection of ID photos to estimate the density of carnivores in this community area.

**Other Wildlife News:** Many animals died during the severe drought in 2009. Almost all buffalo, waterbuck, warthog and impala died during this time. The rains returned in October 2009 and the survivors made the most of the new grass shoots that emerged. Rains in March and April 2010 have created a lush green paradise in the reserves. Fattened oryx, huge herds of impala, gazelle and giraffe are scattered all over the reserves and elephants are back in large numbers. We have been fortunate to have some good predator sightings, including our first cheetah sighting in Westgate. We are excited to have seen wild dogs on numerous occasions both in the reserves and in Westgate, including a pack that passed right behind our camp kitchen! We've also seen caracal and had a very special sighting of an aardvark.

### **Staff News**

Paul Thomson joined the Ewaso Lions team full-time in January 2010. Paul has over 5 years professional experience in African wildlife conservation and is pursuing a master's degree at Yale. Before joining Ewaso Lions, Paul worked with the African Wildlife Foundation in both Kenya and Washington, DC. I am very excited to have Paul join our team and you will be hearing a lot from him as well. *Karibu sana* Paul!

In April 2010, we employed two new field members. Moses Letitiya has taken over Jeneria's position as Lion Scout in the Sasaab region. Jeneria is now our head tracker and research assistant. Robert Lenongiro has recently started as Community Officer. Ricila is now in charge of the Warrior Watch programme (see below) and is Camp Chef. Joseph is Camp Manager and is being trained in data management.

### **PhD**

After some challenges in 2009 due to the security troubles and severe drought, I am beginning to catch up with PhD-related work and data analysis. I have about another year to complete my PhD with the University of Oxford. I will be travelling to Oxford towards the end of the year to begin writing my thesis. The guys will carry on with activities in the field and in camp whilst I am away.

### **News in Camp**

Ewaso Lions Camp, located in Westgate Community Conservancy just outside Samburu National Reserve, has seen some real growth this past year. We finally have permanent

shade, thanks to our new mess structure kindly provided by Sasaab Lodge. It is no longer possible to pack up the whole camp in Gypsy the way I used to in 2008!

We still need a lot more in camp: more tents, tables, cooking items, and fuel. Our chairs are broken, and solar battery has died. Also, with the rains, our bathrooms have all collapsed and need to be rebuilt. We appreciate any donation towards our Camp needs and are grateful to all of you who have supplied so much to date.

The project has just acquired a Toyota Landcruiser. The vehicle has been christened Winslow and is a great companion for my faithful Suzuki, Gypsy. Together, Winslow and Gypsy will allow us to expand the reach and impact of our work across our project area, which covers over 900 km<sup>2</sup>.

We have hosted many visitors over the past few months. Christina Tsantes from Hunter College, New York, stayed with us for 6 weeks in July/August 2009 and greatly assisted with setting up of databases. Scott Smith from the Wildlife Conservation Society spent a wonderful week in camp in October and witnessed both the severity of the drought and the first rains. Stacey Gardebrecht visited and assisted us for a week in February 2010, followed by Aimee Guha-Roy from the University of Oxford who assisted with data and gained some field experience – little did she know she would arrive for the floods! We are happy to host Mary Wykstra and her team from the Action for Cheetahs in Kenya at our Camp whilst she conducts fieldwork in Samburu.

### **Warrior Watch**

We are thrilled to announce our newest programme, Warrior Watch. Through Warrior Watch, Samburu warriors become active within their communities as wildlife ambassadors by reporting on wildlife sightings and issues such as conflict in exchange for a stipend and educational lessons. In partnership with Westgate Conservancy, we selected and trained the first six warriors in January 2010. The programme is already showing signs of success: the warriors seem to genuinely enjoy their new roles; they've held meetings throughout the group ranch; and have attended over ten conflict cases in 4 months. We hope to increase the number of warriors in the programme and are currently seeking funds to enable us to do so. Meet the warriors and see what else they do here: <http://ewasolions.wildlifedirect.org/2010/05/09/warrior-watch-engaging-warriors-in-conservation/>

### **Sponsoring Students**

We are happy to announce the first two students sponsored by Ewaso Lions, Samson and Edward. Under the Ewaso Lions sponsorship, they will continue their education at a highly ranked secondary school in Meru, and their tuition will be covered for four academic years. We received donations from Christina, Nina, Kathy and Trey to enable the boys to go to school. Meet the boys here: <http://ewasolions.wildlifedirect.org/2010/03/16/first-students-sponsored-by-ewaso-lions/>

### **New Book: *Simba Stories***

In May 2010, Ewaso Lions will release *Simba Stories*, a book of poems, stories and illustrations that celebrate lions, all made by students from Lpus Leluai Primary School in

Westgate. We will be distributing the book locally to increase awareness on the importance of lions and conservation.

*Simba Stories* will be available for purchase – the details will be posted online. Proceeds from book sales will be used to establish a Wildlife Club at Lpus Leluai Primary School. A very special thanks to Lindsay Morency for putting the book together and making it look so fantastic!

### **Floods in Samburu**

On March 4<sup>th</sup> 2010, Samburu was rocked by severe flooding, which left eight camps and lodges destroyed, hundreds of people without jobs, infrastructure ruined, and tourism essentially shut down in the area. We were very fortunate – the Ewaso Lions camp was not affected.

Ewaso Lions' friends and donors responded quickly to our appeals and we were able to assist many Samburu residents with food and clothing. Things are now beginning to recover, and lodges and camps are being constructed and repaired. We are yet to assess the impact on wildlife as so many roads are still impassable. See photos of the flood and its aftermath here:

<http://ewasolions.wildlifedirect.org/2010/03/04/massive-flood-devastates-samburu/>

### **Launch of Kenya's Lion and Spotted Hyena Strategy**

Ewaso Lions was represented at the launch of the National Lion Strategy by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in Nairobi. This management plan recognises the current and potential geographical range for lions and the threats facing them and provides guidance for their conservation and management.

Ewaso Lions played an important role in the management plan by providing data and information on lions and hyenas from the Samburu region. Ricila and Mporian, warriors from our Warrior Watch programme, joined Joseph, Paul, and myself at the KWS headquarters for the launch. Mporian was given the honour of opening the ceremony with a traditional Samburu blessing.

### **Lion Research Safari**

In January 2010, we had our first Lion Research Safari in conjunction with Gamewatchers (a fantastic, eco-friendly Safari Company which has a number of Porini Camps in Kenya). Our guests, the Wills family of Scotland joined us during our research activities in Shaba and visited our community programmes in Westgate. For more information on Lion Research Safaris, and how they help our project, go to:

<http://www.porini.com/lion-research-safari.html>

### **Kenyan Kids on Safari**

We have now taken more than 40 young kids on game drives in Samburu and Buffalo Springs National Reserves. Kenyan Kids on Safari (KKOS) and Todd Cromwell donated cameras, binoculars and a print station to Ewaso Lions to allow us to take young children in villages and schools into the National Reserves to see wildlife. Many of these children have never seen the big cats or elephant's close-up and only get to see the negative side of

wildlife. Together with Intrepid and Sasaab Lodges, we have shown these kids a positive side of wildlife. We hope to take more kids on safari in 2010.

### **Tree Project**

We have planted 75 trees to date within schools and villages in Westgate. Unfortunately, most of the trees died during the 2009 drought. We hope to resume and reenergize the Tree Project over the next few months.

### **Westgate Marathon**

Together with Sasaab Lodge and Westgate Conservancy, we held the first-ever Westgate Marathon on the 1st May 2010. The Westgate Marathon was open to everyone. The theme was "Running for Lions." The marathon was a huge success – we had 30 runners participate including five from the Ewaso Lions team. The winners will be sponsored to run the famous Safaricom Lewa Marathon in June. We hope to hold another Westgate Marathon in 2011 and this time both Paul and myself will be out there running for lions!

### **New Ewaso Lions Logo**

Ewaso Lions finally has a logo! Paul helped create the bold new logo, which will raise the profile of our growing project and has given our team a sense of identity. We now have stylish new shirts and decals on our vehicles bearing the logo. We hope you like it!

### **Blog, Facebook and Twitter**

Ewaso Lions has launched a full-scale attack on the Internet. We've updated our website, we continue to blog <<http://ewasolions.wildlifedirect.org>> as much as possible, and we are more and more active in growing our online community through our Facebook <<http://facebook.com/ewasolions>> and Twitter <<http://twitter.com/ewasolions>> pages. Please friend us, follow us, and send us feedback. Also, spread the word and encourage your friends to join Ewaso Lions.