

# Look back in wonder

The passage of time has the horrible habit of accelerating, and the **conservation challenges it brings with it seem to multiply**. So when one has a moment to cogitate and wonder where we will be in 10 years time, then it is probably right to begin with asking where have we come from.

Richard Bonham | Chairman, Maasailand Preservation Trust

**I**n the Chyulu hills, 20 years ago we had six Maasai warriors wandering the hills and collecting the odd snare, today we have 104 Maasai game scouts, mostly in uniform operating over half a million acres. Last year, these scouts, working closely with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), made over 700 prosecutions for commercial poaching, bushmeat and habitat destruction.

20 years ago a lion sighting was so common that it was hardly worth mentioning. Today, as a result of depredation of livestock and subsequent poisoning and spearing, there are few left alive. These survivors are now creeping back from the edge of local extinction with the help of our compensation scheme.

20 years ago rhino were the stuff of local folklore, mainly only mentioned in senior age group songs of macho hunting prowess. Our senior Maasai age set (now in their 60s) boast of one hunting party killing three rhino in a day, just for fun! Now we have a minimum of 14 rhino left and have a combined community and KWS ranger force of 36 men on 365-day security and monitoring duties, dedicated to protecting the rhino and their habitat.

20 years ago we got excited if we saw an elephant track. Today numbers have built so successfully that we are having to think hard about creating elephant exclusion zones to defend the trees from this elephant self-destruct gene.

20 years ago the Maasai of Mbirikani group ranch, (300,000 acres) were earning about \$15,000 a year from wildlife and related industry. Today wildlife earns about \$350,000 and that's still growing, prompting the group ranch members to allocate land to conservation status.

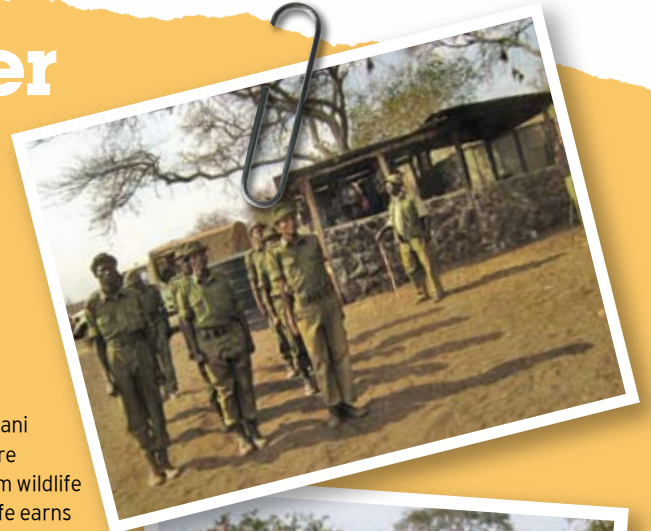
The Maasailand Preservation Trust (MPT) recognises that for the Maasai residents of Mbirikani Group Ranch (MGR) and the Amboseli-Tsavo ecosystem as a whole, the cost of living with wildlife exceeds the benefits. MPT therefore seeks to better balance the economics of everyday life for the local community and resolve human-wildlife conflict whenever possible.

## So good news and bad news

Back to the question of where do we see ourselves in another 10 years? I can only feel upbeat and positive if we can maintain the trends mentioned above and also maintain the momentum of proving, through education and economic incentives, that wildlife can economically outperform cattle ranching and provide sustenance other than what comes out of a cooking pot.

## What about rhino in 10 years' time?

We have the most important ingredients: breeding stock, habitat, and security. And, after six months of extremely difficult drilling, we have also found water in the core rhino area in Chyulu Hills. This



Above: MPT engaged Richard Kech, a former KWS rhino warden, to train game scouts on rhino monitoring and security.

Below: We've struck gold (aka water)!

presence of water means rhinos will not need to leave the protected areas to drink. Our next challenge is to get the water out of the ground to supply the rhino and rangers alike, and of course the myriad of other species that will also benefit. We are hoping to find sufficient funds to use solar power to raise and then pump the water. Solar panels are more expensive to set up but then they have virtually no running costs and are reasonably maintenance free. With this entire framework in place, there is no reason why rhino numbers will not double in the years to come.

## Thanks

Our very grateful thanks to USFWS, which has awarded a tremendous \$86,511 to pay for a new vehicle and for ongoing running costs (and for that borehole). Also to Chester Zoo (£8,241 for running costs and a new office for the game scouts), Amnéville Zoo (€10,000), the Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust (£5,000), the Van Tienhoven Foundation (€5,000), the Van der Hucht de Beukelaar Stichting (€5,000) and the Dischma Foundation (£1,500). This combined support is fantastic and we thank you all.



Working on intelligence gained through an informer network, game scouts, with the help of KWS, ambush culprits.

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