

Wildlife Conservation

EAR NOTCHING OF RHINOS AND ELEPHANT COLLARING

by Geoffrey Chege | Chief Conservation Officer

In the last six months, a number of exciting wildlife focussed interventions were undertaken on Lewa and the immediate neighbourhood. These were aimed at enhancing our capacity to conserve and make informed decisions for adaptive management of the threatened wildlife species.

biological data for our growing population of both black and white rhinos; currently standing at 68 and 58 animals respectively.

Within the same period, and in collaboration with Save the Elephants, Northern Rangelands Trust, Kenya Wildlife Service, Bill Woodley Mount Kenya Trust and Sue Anschutz-Rodgers, three elephants were collared in the corridor that

links Lewa and Ngare Ndare Forest to Mt Kenya. All elephants were darted from a helicopter and fitted with GSM collars to ease monitoring and to track their movement across the two ecosystems. This is part of an ongoing collaborative project that has successfully reconnected an isolated population of 2,000 elephants residing in Mt Kenya to that of the Laikipia-Samburu ecosystem numbering 7,500.

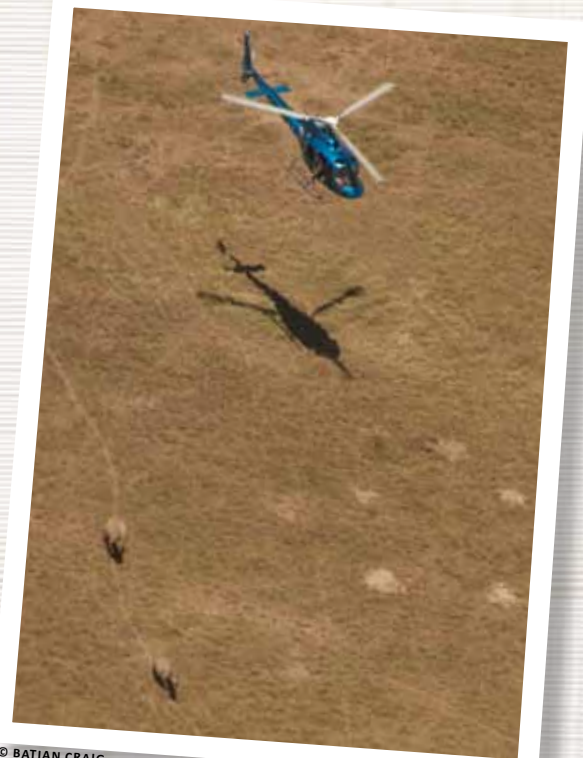
To understand the dynamics of our lion population and their interaction with prey species, one lion was also fitted with a collar. Although such collars may appear unpleasant and unnatural, the immense data gathered is crucial in helping shape the management of this vulnerable large carnivore.



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Forceps are put in place to mark the parts of the rhino's ear to be notched using a scalpel

One such project involved ear-notching of rhinos that was partly funded by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Rhinos rarely have any distinguishable mark when they are born and are only identified by the mother-calf bond. However, at three years of age, they become independent and dissociate from their mothers. Identifying any cohort of the same sex and age class becomes difficult. To overcome this hurdle, one of the universally acceptable methods is to immobilize the animals and cut numerical ear patterns to give each of them a unique identity. This ensures that no two rhinos have the same ear cuts. Animals in question are darted by a KWS vet and once the animal is down vital signs are monitored throughout the operation that takes about five minutes. Thanks to Sue Anschutz-Rodgers, who hired a helicopter for this exercise.

Over the last few months, we have managed to ear-notch eight black and four white rhinos, a critical fete in ensuring we achieve adequate protection and collect requisite



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