Reserve are turning to iPad-controlled drones, night-vision goggles and Google Earth to protect wildlife from poachers. The drones were initially intended to provide aerial footage of the landscape and help track poachers and Maasai warriors but it soon became apparent that they had the added benefit of frightening the elephants and could therefore be used to steer them out of harm's way. Some elephants have been fitted with global positioning system collars, which enable rangers to track their locations on Google Earth and respond quickly if the elephants stray into areas at risk of poaching or conflict with humans. It is anticipated that drones will be at the forefront of the battle against poachers.
Source: The Guardian (2013) www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/oct/10/google-earth-kenya-maasai-mara-elephants-drones-ipad

…and find that elephant society still disrupted decades after cull

The decision-making abilities of African elephants are impaired by historical culling. Elephant herds that lost adults to culls in the 1970s and 1980s were less able to respond appropriately to other elephant calls. The research compared the behaviour of elephants in Amboseli National Park, Kenya, which have been relatively undisturbed by culling operations, with elephants in Pilanesberg National Park, South Africa. The latter comprises elephants introduced as young orphans in the 1980s and 1990s, after culls of adults and older juveniles in the Kruger National Park. When Amboseli elephants heard the call of an unfamiliar elephant they bunched together, but remained relaxed when faced with the calls of more familiar animals. In Pilanesberg the elephants' reactions showed no pattern, suggesting they could not tell the difference between friend and foe. The breakdown in the social fabric, even though it occurred decades ago, appears to have affected the elephants' decision-making processes.
Source: Frontiers in Zoology (2013) 10, 62 (dx.doi.org/10.1186/1742-9994-10-62), and *BBC News* (2013) www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-24754682

Kenyan rhinos to be microchipped in the war on poaching

Conservationists are embracing new technologies to protect threatened wildlife from poaching. In a bid to conserve Kenya's dwindling rhinoceros population and facilitate active monitoring of the animals, WWF has provided the Kenya Wildlife Service with 1,000 microchips and five scanners. The technology will facilitate the deployment of specialized tracking systems for rhinoceros horn and support anti-poaching measures nationally and regionally. It will also provide evidence that will hopefully lead to the successful prosecution of criminals involved in poaching or the illegal trade in rhino parts and will strengthen collaborations between police, customs, wildlife conservation organizations and other agencies in the fight against wildlife crime.
Source: WWF (2013) wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?211437/Microchips-to-Protect-Rhinos-in-Kenya

Ivory seized in Uganda

In one of Uganda's biggest ivory hauls in many years, authorities seized c. two tonnes of ivory, thought to be en route to the Kenyan port of Mombasa. This amount of ivory represents the tusks of c. 400 elephants. Although the rate of elephant poaching in Uganda—which is estimated to have c. 5,000 elephants—is relatively low the country is increasingly being used for the transit of ivory originating from countries such as South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Poaching has increased across sub-Saharan Africa in recent years and is controlled by criminal gangs who slaughter elephants to meet the huge demand for ivory in Asia. In response to a sharp decline in the number of African elephants CITES banned the trade in ivory in 1989.
Source: BBC News (2013) www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24582325

Small carnivores thriving in Gabon despite bushmeat crisis

Scientists from several academic institutions and conservation organizations, including Panthera, the Wildlife Conservation Society and the University of Stirling, have collaborated on a survey of small carnivores in Gabon—a country better known for its larger meat-eaters, including the leopard *Panthera pardus,* African wild dog *Lycaon pictus* and spotted hyaena *Crocuta crocuta*. Camera-trap photographs from 16 studies, field data and data gathered in the country's bushmeat markets have revealed that small carnivores are still widespread and that the 12 species included in the study are not yet threatened by the bushmeat trade. This is attributable to cultural norms, with consumption of carnivores taboo for many ethnic groups. During the survey the researchers recorded two species that had not previously been documented in Gabon: the common slender mongoose *Herpestes sanguineus* and the Cameroon cusimanse *Crossarchus platycephalus*. They also expanded the known range of the Egyptian mongoose *Herpestes ichneumon.*
Source: Mongabay.com (2013) news.mongabay.com/2013/1017-hance-carnivores-gabon.html

Galloping dung beetles

Scientists studying dung beetles in South Africa have discovered that three species of the insect walk with an unusual galloping gait. Most of the almost one million known insects walk with an alternating tripod gait, which propels them forward steadily and efficiently, moving three legs forward at a time. However, these dung beetles, all belonging to the group *Pachysoma*, bound forwards by stepping with both middle legs and then both front legs, dragging their back legs. The next challenge for the researchers is to discover why the beetles move in this way. They conducted time trials in the laboratory to investigate whether the galloping gait enabled the beetles to move faster than other insects but found that the insects that walked in the normal way were up to 50% faster. The galloping gait may enable the beetles to stabilize their vision, and future research will investigate how it affects their navigation.
Source: BBC News (2013) www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-24532396

Community-managed forest provides hope for Madagascar's threatened trees

Madagascar's iconic baobab trees are highly valued by local people but overexploitation and habitat destruction are taking their toll. The best-known species, the renala, endemic to Madagascar, is one of the island's most threatened tree species. Not only is the tree important for its seeds, fruits, and bark, it also has cultural significance. Local communities in Madagascar are now taking positive action to protect and restore renala forests, with the help of Fauna & Flora International's Global Trees Campaign and local partner organization Madagasikara Voakajy. The community at Bepeha has been granted the management rights for 6,453 ha of forest, with 400 mature renala trees. They have established a village forest management organization, demarcated zones within the forest and agreed rules governing the use of forest resources within each zone. Schoolchildren are actively involved in the project, planting and nurturing seedlings and learning about the importance of the trees.
Source: Fauna & Flora International News (2013) www.fauna-flora.org/news/conservation-milestone-for-baobabs-in-madagascar/