

OBITUARIES

Mark and Peter Jenkins Following in a father's footsteps, two lives cut short while on active duty

Mark Jenkins
Born: 6 May 1965
Died: 8 December 2022

Peter Jenkins
Born: 7 May 2001
Died: 8 December 2022

Tribute by Bongo Woodley

email: bongowoodley@gmail.com

On 8 December 2022, Mark Jenkins, together with his younger son Peter, lost their lives in a plane crash while directing ground operations against illegal livestock in the eastern area of Tsavo East National Park. At the time, Mark was working for the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust.

Mark was the son of Peter Jenkins, who took over as Warden of Meru National Park (NP) in 1968 (with additional responsibility for Marsabit and Sibiloi NPs) and is well remembered for transforming Meru NP into a model park. Mark's father, Peter Jenkins was an exacting man with great attention to detail and high standards expected of park personnel; Mark shared many of these attributes.

Mark was educated at Pembroke House in Gilgil, Kenya, and at Allhallows in Devon, UK. He attained a Diploma in Land Management at Cirencester, UK. After completing his education, Mark went to



Zimbabwe to learn to fly on a J3-Cub, following this to South Africa for his rotary licence and to gain work experience with a Game Capture unit.

In February 1976, the independent Kenya National Parks (KNPs) amalgamated with the Game Department to eventually become the Wildlife Conservation and Management Department (WCMD). With national parks now being run as a government department, this heralded an inexorable deterioration of infrastructure and operational capability with budgets curtailed, an inability to recruit park rangers directly, and random transfer of key personnel without consultation.

Against this background, Mark was raised and engendered by his father's achievements under KNPs. Being raised in a national park was not without risk and Mark as a toddler was severely mauled by one of George Adamson's lions. Peter Jenkins worked tirelessly against the odds during the subsequent decline and mismanagement of parks if not wilful destruction; and widespread poaching that occurred under the new entity. Such were the ups and downs of wildlife conservation in Kenya in the 1980s, which culminated in the appointment of Richard Leakey as director of WCMD in 1989, and in January 1990, the creation of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). KWS was enacted as a state corporation with, in the early years at least, financial independence and a high degree of autonomy from direct ministerial control. This attracted considerable funding to KWS, some of which was destined for Meru NP.

This was the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Mark to follow in his father's footsteps, and he joined the new parastatal. Mark was instrumental in establishing and leading the KWS Special Operations Unit, frequently at the sharp end of anti-poaching operations. Rangers were better armed, equipped, and mobilized, and hundreds of new ranger recruits were trained by the General Service Unit.

Units were urgently deployed to counter the relentless attacks from well-armed *shifita* bandits and poachers, the killing of rangers striving to carry out their duties, the robbery and murder of tourists in several conservation areas including Meru NP and Tsavo East and West NPs, the murder of George Adamson in Kora National

Reserve, the burning of Meru Mulika Lodge, and severe associated insecurity within the adjacent community areas. An estimated five elephants were poached daily nationwide, and five white rhinos ostensibly under guard were slaughtered in Meru NP. These alarming 1988/89 events were countered by the appointment of Leakey and the first ivory burn in July 1989.

Mark's career in wildlife conservation varied widely. In 1992 he left KWS and went to South Africa to obtain his pilot's licence on fixed-wing and helicopter. German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) was supporting the Uganda Wildlife Authority with the rehabilitation of Murchison Falls NP and Mark flew a Super Cub from South Africa to Uganda, where he joined the programme. At Murchison Falls NP he experienced 'exciting times' in close proximity to the Lord's Resistance Army and actions of the Ugandan Army, and he would recount with great hilarity many an outlandish and downright life-threatening experience. It was in Uganda that Mark met Clare, his wife-to-be.

Together, they went to Niassa Game Reserve (GR) in northern Mozambique where Mark used his growing experience in wildlife management by conducting a baseline survey of the depleted wildlife populations, rebuilding infrastructure and operational capability.

Following the reappointment of Richard Leakey as Director of KWS in 1998, Mark re-joined KWS in 1999, this time as Senior Warden Meru NP. He was instrumental in raising funding for the Meru/Kora ecosystem through the French Development Agency (AFD) and then formulating and implementing the project that included the translocation of black rhinos to Meru. Mark also advocated for the use of elephant collars to track the movement of elephants between and out of protected areas. This was an invaluable management tool for elephant security and was used by the NGO Save the Elephants to leverage funding for what has since become a widely used strategy. In July 1999, Leakey resigned to take up a position as head of the civil service. Eventually, perennial institutional politics with a lack of support from the top and direct security threats to him and his family saw Mark depart KWS in 2008.

Mark then worked in the Ngurumans, south Kenya and afterwards at Segera Ranch in Laikipia, Kenya where he transformed the predominantly livestock-focused ranch to a landscape prioritising wildlife conservation. From 2014 to 2016, Mark was a project

leader for the Frankfurt Zoological Society, initially in Selous GR then in Serengeti NP in Tanzania.

Mark's third tenure with KWS from 2017 was as an advisor to the Director and the Board of Trustees headed by Leakey. As always, politics in the form of ministerial overreach in September 2018 resulted in a blame game over the deaths of an entire contingent of 11 rhino being translocated into Tsavo East NP. This culminated in the eventual appointment of a new KWS Board and the departure of Mark.

He continued his career in wildlife in 2019 and 2020 with consultancies in countries such as DRC (Virunga), South Sudan, Zambia and closer to home in Kenya.

Mark started working for the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in January 2021 and focused his efforts on wildlife conservation and protection of Galana and Kulalu Ranches. These two extensive land areas fall under the Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC) and form a buffer along much of the eastern boundary of Tsavo East NP.

Following a formal agreement between SWT and ADC, Mark established a base in Lali Hills on Galana Ranch in May 2021. After that, desnaring/anti-poaching efforts resulted in numerous arrests and convictions, a reduction of the vast herds of illegal livestock in the adjacent Tsavo East NP and an increase in wildlife presence in the two ranches. Mark and the ranger teams were ably assisted in this campaign by his sons, Peter, and his older brother Myles.

Peter was following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather and had completed a BSc in environmental management at Reading University and had recently obtained his Private Pilot Licence. He was also a Reserve Officer in 4th Battalion Parachute Regiment and was destined for the Sandhurst Commissioning Course in May 2023, all of which would have stood him in good stead for his intended career, tragically cut short. Peter was greatly influenced by his father Mark, who was always very proud of the fact that he was able to stabilise management in several ravaged PAs and give wildlife the opportunity to again flourish and he was relentless in his views on this. Mark was relentless in his views on effective PA management and Peter was establishing his own conviction for the same cause.

Mark leaves behind his wife, Clare; his older son, Myles; and his sister, Siana. In April 2023, Myles was awarded the Sword of Honour by King Charles III upon passing out of Sandhurst Military Academy as the best officer cadet on the course, an achievement his father and his brother, Peter, would have been immensely proud of.

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Andrew Halliday

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Lucy Vigne

IT/web design and management

Rafael Slonik

Layout

Roshni Peshavaria

Address all correspondences, including enquiries about subscription, to

The Managing Editor, *Pachyderm*

PO Box 68200–00200

Nairobi, Kenya

Email: pachydermeditor@gmail.com

Website: http://www.iucn.org/african_elephant

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Cover caption: A greater one-horned rhino wallowing in Kaziranga National Park, March 2022.

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