

Project Update: May 2008

Save the Elephants research camp is based in Samburu Game Reserve, northern Kenya, and we have been tracking and monitoring the population for over ten years. Our collar tracking data has shown that a lot of our study elephants migrate south towards Meru National Park and the Attan Swamps. At the heart of this migration route lies the rural community of Ngare Mara. The community are relatively recent immigrants to this area having escaped tribal conflict in Turkana land in the late 1970's when they came to settle in this area in 1978. The people of Ngare Mara are extremely poor and are trying to grow maize, potatoes and beans to provide a stable diet. These crop fields are regularly raided by elephants migrating through the area which cause serious damage to the crops and endanger people's lives. This community have become the focus of the large scale trial of the beehive fence project by Save the Elephants to see if it can help deter elephants and provide an income to the community through the sale of honey and bee products.

During April/early May 2008 we held a number of consultative meetings with the community discussing the concept and ideas behind the trial. These participatory meetings proved very successful with an overwhelming support and interest shown by the community to try out the idea. Two areas in Ngare Mara were chosen for the trials, Chumviyere and Etoro and a committee has been elected from each area to support the project development. The first activity that was started was the creation of a Beehive Workshop and training weekend on hive production lead by Lukas Lepuiyapui, my field assistant from the Ndorobo tribe who are renowned beekeepers in Kenya. The workshop is now fully underway with approximately 20 hives finished and another 30 on the way. This workshop has trained two carpenters and at least 5 assistants to make the hives which has introduced an extremely important, income generating skill to the community.



Over the last week we have been busy mapping all the crop fields and creating maps in GIS to plan the construction of the beehive fences. This will be done consultatively with the community but as we need trial and control plots I will have to lead the overall layout of the experimental design. We are working against the clock to get the beehive fences up before the first small harvest season in June-July. Then we have 2-3 months before the major harvest season arrives in October-December when the main trial and results will be monitored. This will give the beehives a decent chance to become occupied before the main crop raiding season starts. In addition, I have employed another field worker from the

community who has done some work for Save the Elephants before. Wilson is helping in many ways but particularly in translations as most of the community only speak Turkana so there is an interesting triage of Turkana, Swahili and English going on! Along with all the beehive and fencing materials, Wilson's salary will be paid for entirely by RSG funds. Thanks once again for your support for getting this participatory experimental trial off the ground.