

## **Project Update: November 2008**

The past few months on the Elephants and Bees project in Ngare Mara have been extremely busy and very rewarding. The trained carpenters took 3-4 weeks to construct 50 quality Kenyan Top Bar hives with integrated queen excluders. After each completed 50 hives we spent a week constructing 500m of beehive fences. For these construction weeks we had plenty of help from the community farmers which was needed as the work was physically hard in the heat of sun. After 4 months we had



completed 1500m of beehive fences using 150 beehives, 300 wooden posts and bags and bags of nails. Half of the farms in Chumviyere and Etorro have beehive fences now and half of them do not. We will be comparing the elephant crop raids and damage between these farms. If we get more funding in the future, and if the experiment works, we hope to complete the fences and give everyone a beehive fence.

We have had some complications on the project, the most difficult one has been the phenomenal persistence and damage caused by wild honey badgers. They smell the honey in the occupied hives and manage to clamber up the posts, along the thatched roofs and down onto the hives. They often damage the hives and disturb the bees as well as eating all the honey inside! It has been very frustrating trying to keep these badgers out but we have come up with a good method now, nailing 50cm of smooth iron sheets around each of the posts which means they can't grip the posts with their claws and climb up. It seems to be working.

We have had some successful honey harvests with 12-15kgs of honey being recently collected from two hives that were occupied early on in the construction process. This has given the farmers a real boost to see this valuable product coming from their hard work.

Now we are monitoring the growth of maize and beans in each of the experimental fields and waiting for the elephants to start their crop raids into the area. This won't be for a few more weeks as the maize is still undeveloped and the recent rains means that there are plenty of resources outside of the fields. This time has enabled us to conduct some short questionnaires with the farmers and we have also undertaken some beekeeping training sessions which have all been received well by the farmers. Thanks again to Rufford Small Grants Foundation for supporting the costs of this experimental trial.