WELCOME to this brand new design of the Grevy’s Zebra Trust’s bi-annual newsletter!

The Grevy’s Zebra Trust is a Kenyan not-for-profit organisation, founded in 2007. Our mission is to conserve the endangered Grevy’s zebra and its fragile habitat in partnership with communities.

We are based in Samburu, Northern Kenya. Our area of operation extends over 10,000km².

2011 BRINGS WITH IT NEW FOALS!

This year has seen very high foaling rates after a period of prolonged drought. We are extremely encouraged by the number of foals born in the Kenyan populations and now have the opportunity to accurately track their survival through the national stripe identification database to which partners and citizens contribute their photographs.

We anticipate that our supplementary feeding program implemented in response to the drought will maintain the condition of females and their foals as we see out the long dry season ahead.

TAking hold of my future

The Trust’s Grevy’s Zebra Bursary students convene at the annual Grevy’s Zebra Fun Day to discuss their future plans and have some fun!

A Grevy’s Zebra Bursary (or scholarship) supports four years of secondary school education for academically talented and economically disadvantaged children from our partner pastoral communities. Our aim is to build local capacity for marginalized areas and to foster positive attitudes towards Grevy’s zebra where bursary opportunities can be directly linked back to protecting the species.

Grevy’s Zebra Fun Day is full of entertaining activities taking place for all our students. This year the event was held at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy and the theme was “Taking Hold of My Future” as most of the students are in their final year of secondary school so emphasis was placed on guiding students towards achieving their goals. Activities included teambuilding exercises, group discussions, mentorship sessions, game drives, natural history lectures, and swimming (in apparently very cold water!).

The objectives of the Grevy’s Zebra Fun Day were to:

- Reinforce their knowledge of Grevy’s zebra ecology and conservation, and about the Trust and its conservation work
- Mentor students to prepare them for their final year
- Create a positive learning experience

We anticipate that through this programme, the beneficiaries will be faced with exciting new opportunities for their future careers and we are committed to tracking their progress even after they exit the program. In particular, we are interested in their potential influence within conservation, either as leaders of their community, or as professionals.

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RESTORING HABITAT USING LIVESTOCK
Belinda Low reflects on the results from West Gate Community Conservancy

Last month I was walking with Joseph and Lucas in one of my favourite sites in Kenya – the 1,200 hectare buffer zone located in the West Gate Community Conservancy (West Gate). A favourite site not just for its scenic beauty, but for what has been achieved here. We came across tracks of a small Grevy’s zebra herd, a single cheetah, we saw a giraffe who regarded us briefly before continuing to feed; and perhaps most exciting of all, we saw healthy and green perennial grasses covering what was once bare soil. All of this in a time of drought. How, then, was this achieved?

In 2006, the same year the idea of the Grevy’s Zebra Trust was conceived, I came across the innovative work of Allan Savory: “The people’s economy is indivisible from land because the only wealth that can truly sustain any community, or nation, is ultimately derived from the photosynthetic process (plants growing on sustained healthy soils). Holistic Management is a simple decision-making framework that ensures all significant management decisions are simultaneously economically, socially and environmentally sound both short and long term”. – Allan Savory.

Within the Holistic Management framework lies a new tool for managing land that has long been blamed for causing desertification: livestock. Used in the right way, livestock is essentially the solution for restoring biodiversity health. At the Africa Centre for Holistic Management in Zimbabwe, livestock has been used as a management tool for a decade with astonishing results: the return of a perennial river, the appearance of springs, so much grass that the Centre needs more animals to keep it down, an increasing and healthy wildlife population; and importantly, healthy and happy people.

Inspired by the rational planning process used for managing grazing that very effectively deals with the complexities of a dynamic ecosystem, I saw this as an ideal solution for addressing wildlife and community needs in Samburu, northern Kenya.

EL BARTA GETS CONNECTED!
In March this year the Grevys Zebra Trust Radio Base in El Barta became fully operational and brought much needed and longed for communications to our Grevy’s Zebra Ambassador team working in Samburu North. The benefit to Grevy’s zebra and wildlife conservation in general was immediate. GZT staff can now communicate with each other across the region and our base-radio operators are in daily contact with conservancies and partner organizations throughout Samburu allowing us to share information and monitor wildlife in the area more effectively.

It was hard work building the base. It was and is also very rewarding. Using only Trust staff in the construction gave everyone involved a sense of ownership and accomplishment. We all feel proud of our achievement!

We developed a collective vision of how the landscape should look to support community and wildlife needs far into the future.

This vision saw covered soil, perennial grasses, diverse and abundant wildlife, and abundant water. Management decisions are now made towards making this vision a reality.
A first step was to facilitate the travel of five community members from West Gate to Zimbabwe on an exposure tour to see the results of holistic planned grazing in person. Equally, if not more inspired than me, these five men shared what they had seen and experienced with the Conservancy management and a decision was quickly made to establish a pilot project to test two key principles of holistic planned grazing: the physical impact of animals on plants and soil; and, plant recovery time.

Plans for the project were postponed due to the 2009 drought. As we waited for rain, an intensive rehabilitation project was undertaken. Acacia reficiens - an undesirable invasive tree species always accompanied by bare, capped soil – was cleared, and perennial grass seed planted in its place. In April 2010 it finally rained and the response of the vegetation was impressive. Finally we had some forage to plan the grazing with!

In May 2010 a grazing plan was drawn up for the buffer zone by the Conservancy with the idea that the community would contribute their cattle to graze in the area from June to October, a total of 120 days. During the planning we considered some of the following factors:

- Forage availability to determine how many animals the buffer zone would hold for 120 days, including leaving behind 50% of forage for wildlife and soil cover
- Ensuring the animals ended up closer to water at the end of the dry season so they do not have to walk as far when conditions are harshest
- Ensuring an even plane of nutrition for the animals throughout the 120 days, rather than finishing the good stuff first which is what tends to happen under normal conditions
- The location of bare, capped soil that would require breaking up using the impact of animals

The herding team also slept in tents next to the overnight enclosures (bomas) where the cattle were corralled. The bomas were moved weekly and were strategically placed on bare soil to ensure it was broken up and fertilised by the cattle.

The goal of this dry season grazing plan was to ration out forage over 120 days for 200 cattle. Six herdsmen ensured that the cattle moved in a tight, bunched herd, to create as much impact on the soil as possible and control grazing intensity.

The cattle owners were somewhat sceptical that the buffer zone would support the herd for the planned length of time. Regular cattle inspections were encouraged and there were often remarks of surprise about the improving health of their animals. On the last day of the plan the cattle were examined by their owners and a form duly signed to acknowledge release of the animal. Shortly afterwards, a livestock sale took place, with the bulls from the holistic herd fetching the highest prices. Adding further strength to this are recent reports that calves born to cows in the holistic herd are exceptionally healthy.

Eight months on from the end of the project and the area has not received any meaningful rainfall. Yet forage remains thanks to the 50% rule, and the perennial grasses are green from a recent small shower. Grevy’s zebra, which had not used the buffer zone before because the habitat was so poor, moved in while the cattle were still there. A herd of six with foals are currently using the area.

For the community the buffer zone is sacrosanct because it is their project, managed by them. We are all patiently waiting for rain; we anticipate higher productivity and expect to put larger herds in for longer periods while still nurturing plant growth and serving wildlife needs.

So, what next? During the pilot project 80 women, 80 warriors, and 80 elders from across the Conservancy were invited on an exposure tour to see the work. The consensus was that this work must expand to benefit other areas of the Conservancy, and is planned for later this year.

The buffer zone has built the foundation of what will be perhaps one of Samburu’s most important new initiatives to restoring lost habitat to support wildlife and community needs.
Using the Safaricom phone network for conservation

The Grevy’s Zebra Technical Committee is a collaborative body working to better understand the nature of the threats facing the endangered Grevy’s zebra.

In 2010 we embarked on an innovative project which uses collars to track the Grevy’s zebra. Collars are fitted around the zebras’ necks and transmit the geographical position of the animal via the Safaricom cell phone network. We then access the data from a secure internet site. We also physically track the zebras on the ground using a VHF radio receiver to see whether collared females have had foals and to monitor foal survival.

These collars are providing vital data on Grevy’s zebra movements including corridors between key areas and how they use water and grazing resources within the landscape.

The information will help partner community conservancies to enhance resource management for Grevy’s zebra and other wildlife, with the long-term aim of increasing the population.

GREVY’S ZEBRA WOMEN SCOUTS STAR FOR THE CAMERA!

WorldWomenWork which supports women in conservation is a partner on the Grevy’s Zebra Scout Program. Last year they filmed a fantastic “webisode” highlighting the role of the Grevy’s Zebra Scouts and the work of the Trust.

In February, a French television crew came out to film a documentary entitled “Des Femmes et des Zebres” (Of Women and Zebras). Irene and Rosemary enjoyed starring in their everyday role as Grevy’s Zebra Scouts and despite being rigged up with hi-tech sound equipment attached to their necklaces and belts, they were not in the least bit intimidated and made us very proud! Both films will soon be available for viewing on the Grevy’s Zebra Trust website.
LIVING WITH DROUGHT -
A SAMBURU PERSPECTIVE

Joseph Letoole, Holistic Management Coordinator for West Gate Conservancy introduces an alternative path to increasing community resilience to drought

The increasingly unpredictable rainfall in northern Kenya is raising questions about how pastoralist communities can be assisted to cope with more frequent and serious droughts.

Simply put in the Samburu language, “enkolong” (drought) means lack of forage. The problems facing pastoralist communities are linked to poor grazing management. With unproductive rangelands as a result of unplanned grazing, we continue to suffer in a world of changing climate patterns.

By addressing only the symptoms of these problems - which include drought, erosion, and biodiversity loss - we end up becoming dependent upon charity organizations and government social protection programs. This diverts attention from focusing on the root cause of these problems which includes how management tools (especially livestock) are being used on the land and the effects of these tools over time.

We must take control of our future by implementing coordinated planning of our resource use in every season so that we can build resilience to environmental extremes.

A True Pastoralist (poem by Joseph Letoole)

His passion never fades away
His hopes to achieve never die
His mission and goals never change
But his strategies to accomplish his mission always change
And that is why pastoralists are always nomadic in nature
His migration patterns always change
His adaptability techniques to his harsh environment are practical
And that is why pastoralism has stood the test of time in today’s world
Always living with aridity and that is life in northern Kenya

The Grevy’s Zebra Trust is proud to announce a new partnership with the Irwin Andrew Porter Foundation! IAPF is committed to supporting our community-led rangeland restoration work. The project will be located in Meibae Community Conservancy, a key partner of the Trust. Together with the community we aim to improve the condition of the habitat to better support Grevy’s zebra, other wildlife and community livelihoods. This will be done by building Meibae’s capacity to implement holistic planned grazing which employs livestock as a land reclamation tool.
INVESTIGATING WATER USE BY GREVY’S ZEBRA

Peter Lalampaa is back doing his MSc fieldwork!

Away since September 2010, Peter has been studying hard in the UK for his MSc in Conservation Biology at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, UK. In May 2011, he came back to northern Kenya to undertake his fieldwork.

His research is investigating water use by Grevy’s zebra in the West Gate and Kalama Community Conservancies under two different settings:

1) No/low livestock use (where water is reserved for wildlife)
2) High livestock use (where water is shared between wildlife and livestock)

His methods included setting camera traps at selected water points at night to record nocturnal visitors. During the day, Peter used community field assistants to record all activity from a secluded viewing point. He will also compare water points visited by collared Grevy’s zebra in relation to the water points selected for the study.

His work will provide a baseline of Grevy’s zebra watering behaviour in the dry season when they are most negatively affected by limited resource access. Information on when, how frequently, and how far Grevy’s zebra travel to water will be gathered.

The study will also generate additional information on other wildlife species using the water points, including predators.

Based on these results Peter will be able to make recommendations on future water management interventions to ensure a win-win situation for Grevy’s zebra, other wildlife, livestock and people.

Peter graduates in September and we wish him the best of luck with completing his degree!

NEW GREVY’S ZEBRA WATER TROUGH

In June, Richard (Field Operations Director) and David (GZT’s driver) applied their building skills to the construction of a water trough dedicated for Grevy’s zebra and other wildlife.

The trough extends out from an existing borehole in Manyatta Lengima (Laisamis) to an open area away from the livestock troughs. The Trust is providing fuel to the community for water to be pumped from the borehole during the dry season when water becomes a limiting factor.

We hope this additional water source will alleviate the pressure on Grevy’s zebra which travel to the Milgis River to drink water and often encounter treacherous mud which has trapped over 30 Grevy’s zebra since November 2010, with several dying of exhaustion. The Trust has also set up a community volunteer rescue team to patrol the expanse of mud during high risk periods and extract Grevy’s zebra and other animals if they become trapped.

The Grevy’s Zebra Trust enhances access to and availability of water for Grevy’s zebra in 3 ways:

Construction of dedicated wildlife troughs at existing boreholes used by people and livestock (see below)

Digging out wells during severe drought conditions to ensure water remains accessible

Leaving hand-made troughs full at night if the water level has dropped too low

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WE WELCOME NEW TEAM MEMBERS!

Last year, the Board of Trustees created two new key positions in order to complement the Trust’s growth over the last few years.

Richard Wales, Field Operations Director

Richard joined the team in August 2010 as Field Operations Director. He is responsible for managing and developing our field programmes with a major focus on building local capacity.

Originally from South Africa, Richard has an MSc in Conservation Biology from the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE), University of Kent, UK. He brings with him extensive skills and experience which he has obtained from working on conservation projects in three different continents over the last decade.

Richard has already achieved a lot in the short time he has been with us, including constructing the El Barta radio base, streamlining the security, monitoring and community work of the Grevy’s Zebra Ambassador Programme, and mentoring our field teams. He is currently focused on coordinating and monitoring the drought response effort being implemented in Laisamis.

Simon Lekembe, El Barta Regional Coordinator

Simon joined us in January 2011. He was born in one of the communities that we partner with in El Barta called Barsaloi, and therefore knows the area and its people very well.

Simon has a Bachelor of Tourism Management from Moi University, Nairobi, Kenya and is an avid wildlife conservationist. He has also played a lead role in catalysing peace marches led by the Samburu youth. With ethnic tensions being one of the main barriers to conservation in El Barta, this is an incredibly important skill and motivation to have.

Simon leads the work of the Grevy’s Zebra Ambassadors and collaborates closely with our partners in El Barta, including the communities, the Kenya Wildlife Service, the local government Administration, and the Milgis Trust. The aim is to promote peace and conserve Grevy’s zebra and other wildlife in the region.

During a recent aerial survey of El Barta, Simon has proved to be an observer with an iron stomach!

Lucas Lepuiyapui, Research Assistant

Lucas joined the team in May 2011. Previously Field Assistant to our colleague Dr Lucy King at Save the Elephants when she was doing her PhD research, Lucas is well trained in field data collection. As highlighted in our June 2011 edition of the Grevy’s Grapevine, Lucas is focused on collecting photographic survey data.

Our longest-serving member of staff Rikapo Lentiyoo was promoted to Conservation Officer in January 2011 in recognition of the multi-faceted work that he undertakes. This ranges from coordinating drought response activities such as supplementary feeding and digging out wells to ensure Grevy’s zebra can still access water, to managing the team of Grevy’s Zebra Scouts and following up on reports of Grevy’s zebra mortalities.
A MESSAGE FROM THE GZT BOARD CHAIR

Five years ago I, and two of my colleagues Belinda Low and James Munyugi, started talking about what we could do to make a difference for the endangered Grevy’s zebra. We shared our dream with others, and out of that grew the Grevy’s Zebra Trust, a locally and internationally respected institution, which devotes 100% of its time and energy to conserving Grevy’s zebra in partnership with communities. We strive to strike a lasting balance between community needs and the imperilled existence of this rare zebra and its habitat. Thank you for joining us in our dream of saving Grevy’s zebra from extinction, together.

Martha Fischer