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Conservation project on reducing human-wildlife conflict in Nairobi National Park, Kenya

Human-wildlife conflict is a major challenge for conservation initiatives, particularly in Kenya where pastoralist communities live in close proximity to large carnivores such as lions and hyenas. Thanks to the generous support of an RSB Travel Grant, I was able to spend a month in Kenya working on a project led by University of Exeter PhD researcher Enoch Mobisa, focused on improving understanding of interactions between humans and wildlife in the areas around Nairobi National Park.

Between 9th July and 6th August, I was based at a camp in Naretunoi Conservancy, a privately owned reserve which borders Nairobi National Park along Mbagathi River. Here, working with a team of four other Cambridge students and several local conservationists, we set up camera traps in a number of key locations within the conservancy to monitor the movements of wildlife. Since Nairobi National Park is only fenced on one side (where it borders the capital city), animals are free to come and go according to their usual migratory patterns, which creates problems for those living adjacent to the park whose livestock are threatened by predation. The aim of our research was to determine which species are moving in and out of the national park, at what times, and at what frequency. The camera traps can also provide other useful information, for example by photographing poachers.



An image of white rhinos captured by our camera traps



Me planting trees at the home of one of the local Maasai people we interviewed as part of our research

Another aspect of our research involved conducting interviews with members of the local Maasai community, meeting them in their homesteads and speaking to them about their perception and experiences of human-wildlife conflict. Through this, we were able to glean some valuable insights into the human impacts of conservation, which are important to take into account when deciding how best to preserve biodiversity. The interviews highlighted a lack of awareness among many people about the ways in which they could benefit from conservation (for example, funding from local NGO The Wildlife Foundation to send children to school), and also the ways in which they could alleviate many of the problems (mainly through the installation of cheap but highly effective lion-deterrent lights). This demonstrated the importance of consistent and transparent communication between government bodies,

conservation organisations and local people, so that the interests of all parties are taken into account when decisions are made on conservation policy.

This was a fascinating and rewarding experience, allowing me to take part in vital conservation work and learn a number of indispensable fieldwork skills in the process. As someone hoping to pursue a career in science communication, it was a perfect opportunity to also develop my writing as well as my scientific knowledge, and I authored a blog about the trip for the Cambridge University Wildlife Conservation Society which was widely read. I am extremely grateful to the Royal Society of Biology for providing the funding that allowed me to be a part of this unique research project, and I hope that I will be able to build on what I have learned and achieved in my future work and studies.