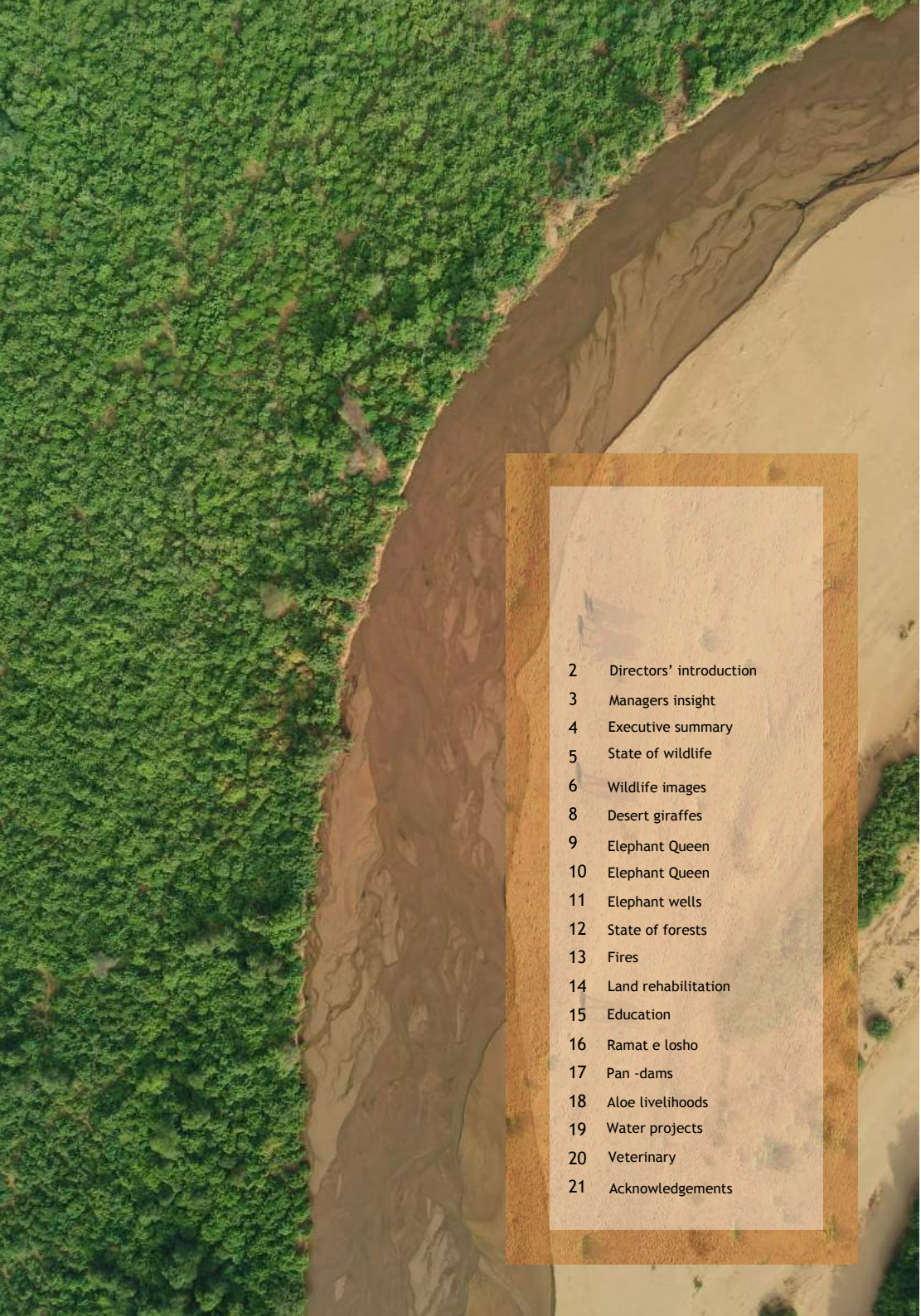




Milgis Trust

**Annual Report
2023**





Foreword from our director

Well, what a year!! 2023 started with such a drought we were all thinking, THAT IS IT!! Dry parched land, all the water sources depleted, all the animals dying and the people were REALLY hungry, so so tough to watch. We even postponed all our safaris.



BUT all has been restored. It rained in April/May - nice rain but because the water table had gone so low it dried up quite quickly and soon we were heading back to the tough times again. Thank goodness the rains came back in October and it really poured, and continued right into December. We started our 2024 with hope, amazement, trust in nature, and love for 'Ngai'. The northern country, especially the deserts are blanketed in thick grass, the mountains are flanked by vital slope saving bush, the forests are in good shape. The rivers flowing - the wildlife will recover!! It's ALL just unbelievable!

Our safaris are back on track, camels looking well, and the team completely motivated. Exciting!

Here we are with a wonderful report by Digby on the happenings of 2023 - another busy year talking Conservation, Biodiversity. All whilst encouraging the beautiful tribal people not to lose their traditions and culture, where Conservation is 100 % embedded. We must be grateful for this... Despite the last 100 years of outside influence eroding at the seams of their culture,(eg poaching and cutting trees for commercial reasons etc) the health and beauty of the NFD is still very much intact.. LETS KEEP IT THIS WAY - many many thanks to our trustees and all who support the Milgis Trust in this endeavour!!

Here's to happy day's

Helen Douglas - Dufresne

2	Directors' introduction
3	Managers insight
4	Executive summary
5	State of wildlife
6	Wildlife images
8	Desert giraffes
9	Elephant Queen
10	Elephant Queen
11	Elephant wells
12	State of forests
13	Fires
14	Land rehabilitation
15	Education
16	Ramat e losho
17	Pan -dams
18	Aloe livelihoods
19	Water projects
20	Veterinary
21	Acknowledgements

Managers insight



Though the 2022 drought extended into early 2023, the year was a very good year for both the wildlife and the nomadic communities. After a severe drought the area received lots of rain covering the entire region. The livestock and wildlife that survived the drought got enough food and their health improved a lot. There was and still is plenty of water and pasture for both wildlife and livestock. At the same time people are now more relaxed and are available to engage in other conservation activities. Our teams, scouts, Ramat e losho, vet and young conservation clubs took advantage of this opportunity and conducted several conservation awareness meetings, filming sessions, and community engagements.

We had the pleasure of hosting the elephant queen initiative, who spent three months within our area engaging communities through theatre and film. All whilst being aware that the plentitude in pasture will lead to increase in livestock and wildlife population eventually leading to forms of human wildlife conflict. This is already affecting people, especially with hyenas whose population increased during the drought as they had plenty of food from the loss of wildlife and livestock.

We look forward to a busy 2024 as we embrace many new initiatives. Our scouts and lkiramats are working around the clock to create awareness on the return of elephants and look out for possible conflict areas.

Supukan Lesoloyia



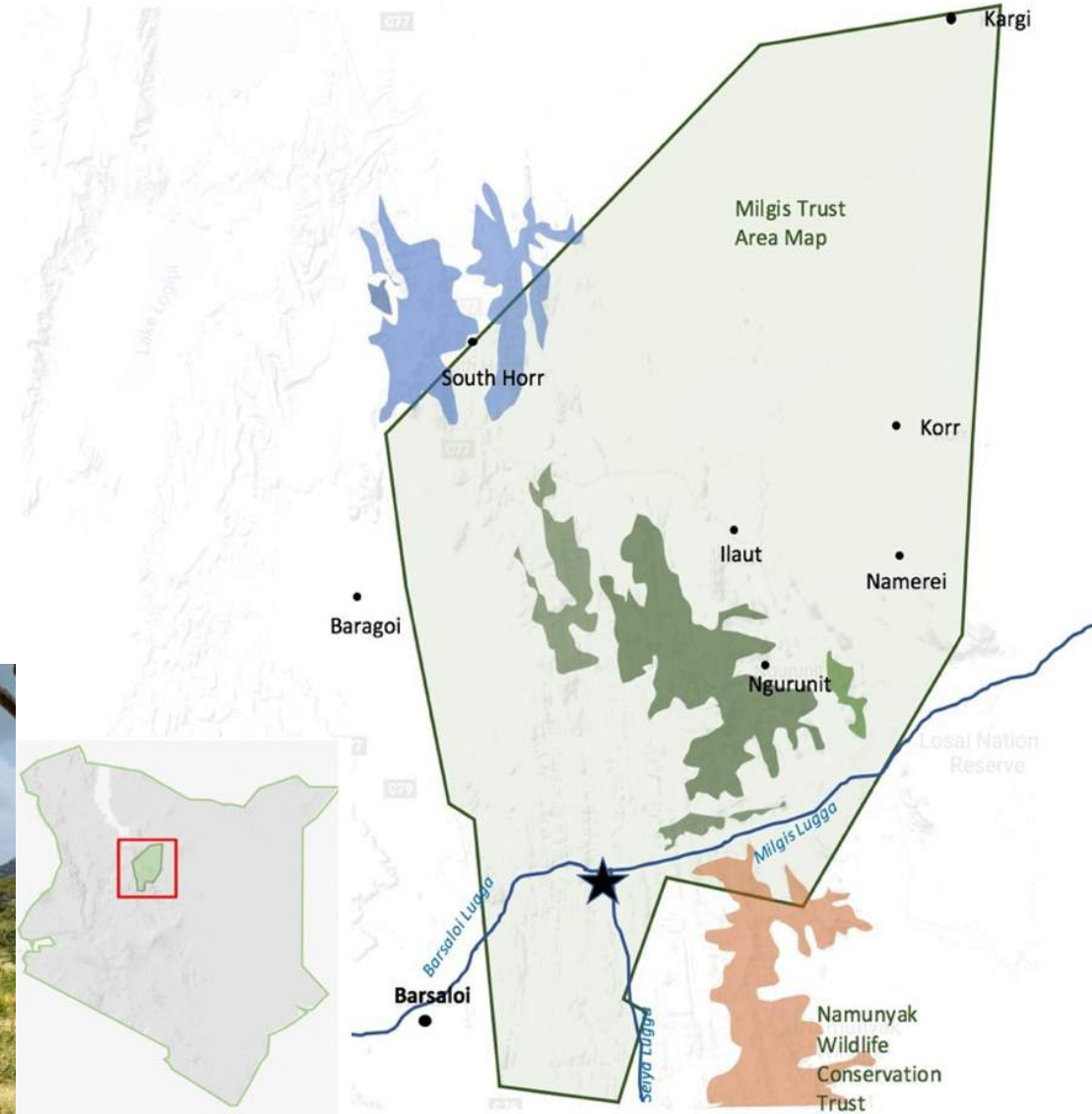
The gift of water at long last

Executive summary

The trust was founded in 2004 in order to protect the wildlife, habitat and pastoral people's way of life, in this stunning and very remote part of northern Kenya. Our mandate is to pave the way for a fully restored ecosystem, shared by people and wildlife alike. Poaching, deforestation and degradation of land are the main challenges facing flora and fauna in the area. We believe that wildlife and pastoral peoples can live peacefully together without borders, as they have done for so long.

The majority of wildlife in the world is living behind fences - it is our priority to ensure that this does not happen. Experience has taught us that the most effective way to conserve is by dealing directly with the communities. The incentive for communities to conserve materializes in the form of education, health, water, security and veterinary projects implemented by the trust. These projects are mostly a direct result of ecotourism. Therefore, giving the wildlife a very high value in the eyes of the communities! However, you cannot implement infrastructure without considering demographics and sustainable capacities of an area. We use several strategies to ensure that our community projects promote sustainable development.

Below: The Milgis ecosystem after some rain



State of wildlife

Having had an incredibly tough run in 2021-2022, it is quite amazing to see the ability that nature has to bounce back, even with the 'grand finale' of the drought in march 2023. Wildlife had been completely deprived of water & pasture - whilst affected by fires, human-wildlife conflict and increased poaching. Species that were worst affected in our area include, *kudu*, *buffalo*, *elephants*, *gazelles*, *bushbuck*, *bush pig*, *warthogs*, *klipspringers* and *Grevy's zebra*. Most of the above have had to share water sources and food with people and had been outcompeted. Baboons, vervet monkeys and De Brazza's monkeys were impacted by the above issues.

People were extremely hungry and started to go against their traditions that would otherwise prohibit hunting. Ostriches are also being killed and their eggs taken, pressures surmounted by various cultural events that needed ostrich feathers to go ahead.

The predators and scavengers have done better, as weak ungulates and livestock is easy pickings. Hyena's, striped and spotted are thriving due to increased livestock deaths. Lions, leopards and cheetahs were able to catch weak kudu, gazelle and bush pig. Consequently, we have seen significant rises in the above species.

The wildlife in the desert, with the exception of *Grevy's zebra*, has done exceedingly well. Many of these species including *Reticulated giraffe* and *gerenuk* can survive for the moisture retained in vegetation and do not need to visit watering points.

Of course with the current post-rain conditions, everything is looking prosperous and starting to procreate again. Food is plenty and water abundant. The outlook for wildlife in the next for 2024 is a positive one provided that poaching does not escalate.



An ele shares the few remaining green shoots with a herd of goats



A healthy coalition of cheetah despite the dry times



Golden Jackal, or 'African wolf'



Resident Leo's



An inquisitive Goosy



A specimen of note



Thirsty or laughing?... probably thirsty



The illusive Civet cat



A hoopoe at its nest



The mighty white headed vulture



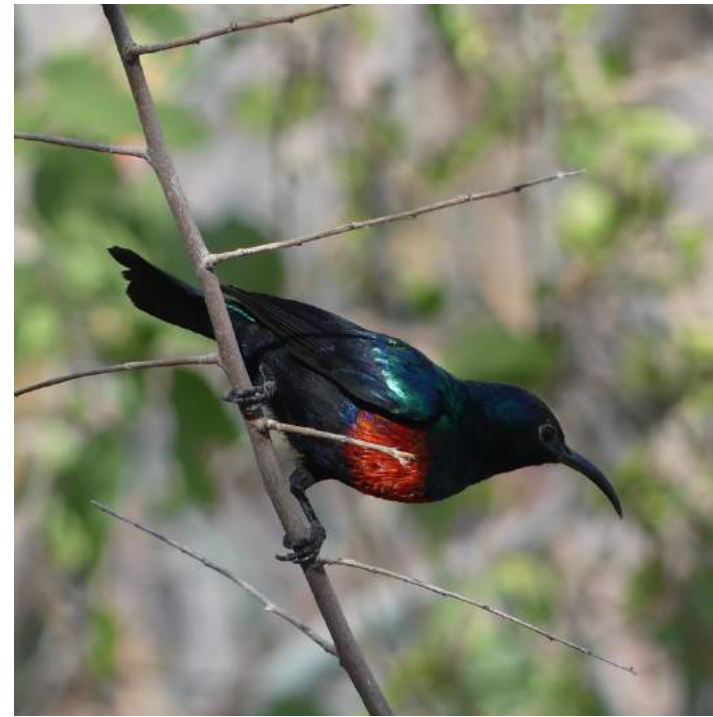
Mama and baby bustards



Menace from above



Happy gazelles with their babies



The shining sunbird!!

Desert giraffe

The desert used to be a haven for wildlife as there is space and it was mostly undisturbed. Giraffe, oryx, grant's gazelles, cheetah, African wolves, gerenuk and ostrich are among some of the species that thrive in this biome.

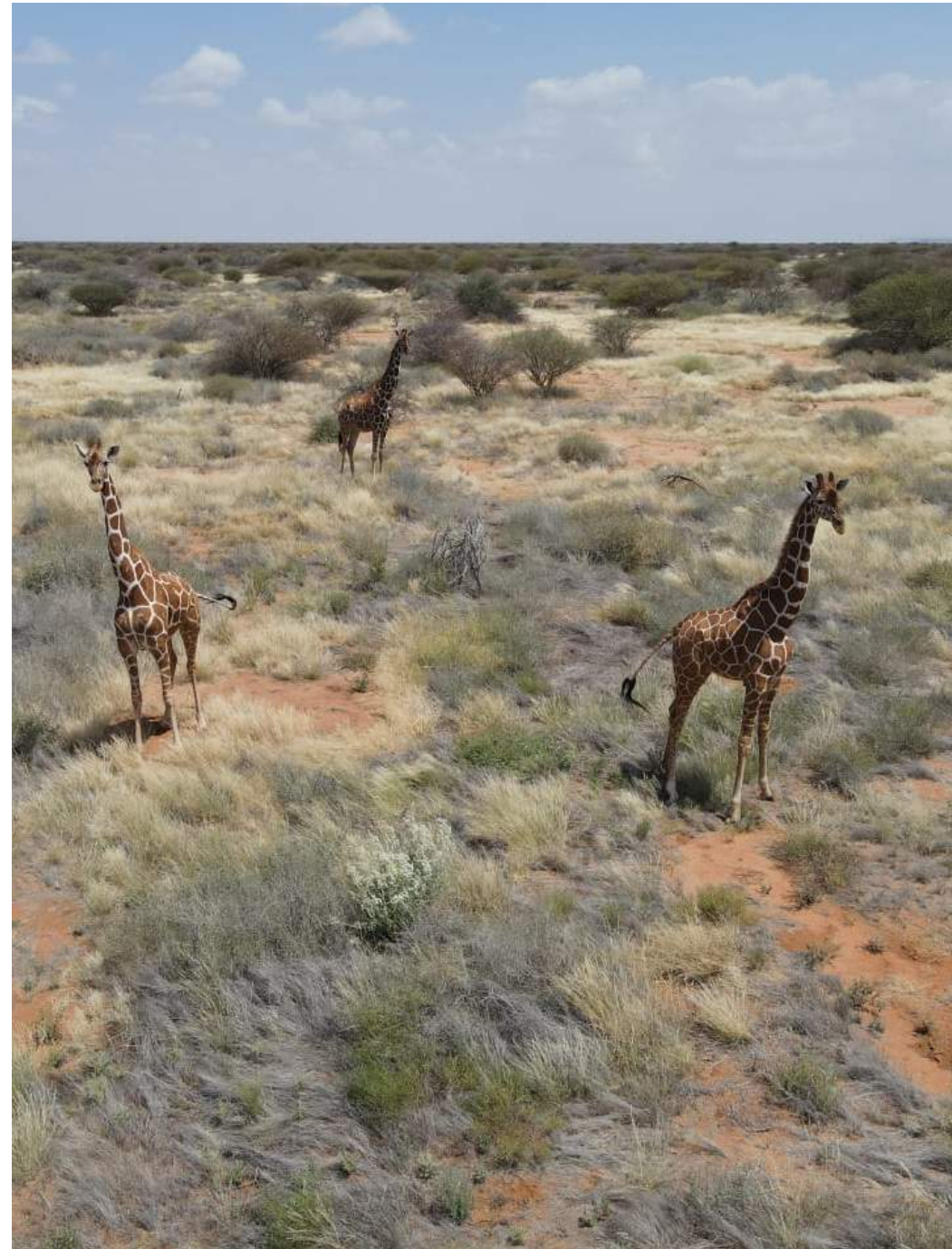
However, since the introduction of motorbikes, the wildlife in this vast space has never been more under threat. It is easy for people on the bikes to go unnoticed, running the animals down and slaughtering them for bushmeat.

Of particular interest is a remote population of endangered reticulated giraffe that live in the Kaisut desert. We have joined hands with 'Save Giraffes Now' (SGN). In 2023 they continued to support the Milgis to maintain the 'desert team' consisting of six people who know this landscape intimately. The role of this team is to monitor and protect giraffe and other wildlife in the desert. They will also be engaging with people who are coming and going on motorbikes or with livestock.

We are pleased to report the giraffe are thriving, having survived the drought. Hopefully we will start seeing some babies in the coming months of lush pasture



A team member following tracks into the vast expanse



A healthy trio in what should normally look like 'desert'

The elephant queen

We had the absolute pleasure of partnering with the elephant queen (TEQ) outreach program at the end of last year. The team have travelled every corner of the country where elephants exist in order to give people an inside perspective on the lives of these creatures. It is quite a sight to behold – a 4x4 lorry kitted with every bell and whistle needed for entertaining the masses. This includes a giant inflatable screen, projectors, speakers, props, educational materials and of course, the team themselves!

A colorful bunch of extremely talented individuals, each playing their essential role to make things happen. We have certainly learned a lot about teamwork whilst working with them! There are three main elements to the outreach:

The film- it is just unbelievable - you have to see it, not once, but at least 5 times before you appreciate the work that's gone into it. 10 years of hard work! In simple words, its about a family of elephants and all the others that live around their domain, filmed in Tsavo and Amboseli. The Matriarch is 'Athena', the enormous tusked female who is very wise. The film starts with an elephant charging the camera and inevitably all the spectators run for it!! `It is a very emotive story and shows the hardships of nature, the abundance during the good times and most importantly the intelligence and human similarities that elephants possess.

'Elephant populations have been subject to relentless poaching, culling and hunting over the years, often with the particular loss of dominant bulls and matriarchs, and at times, entire herds. Elephants are feeling, thinking, sentient beings and the trauma and devastation they have experienced has at times caused the catastrophic breakdown of elephant culture and society, a state described as 'Pervasive Pachyderm Dysfunction.' Effectively, these animals have been pushed to their breaking point and it is the effects of this that we are now witnessing in elephant behaviour. '



The spectacle that is TEQ!



The giant screen

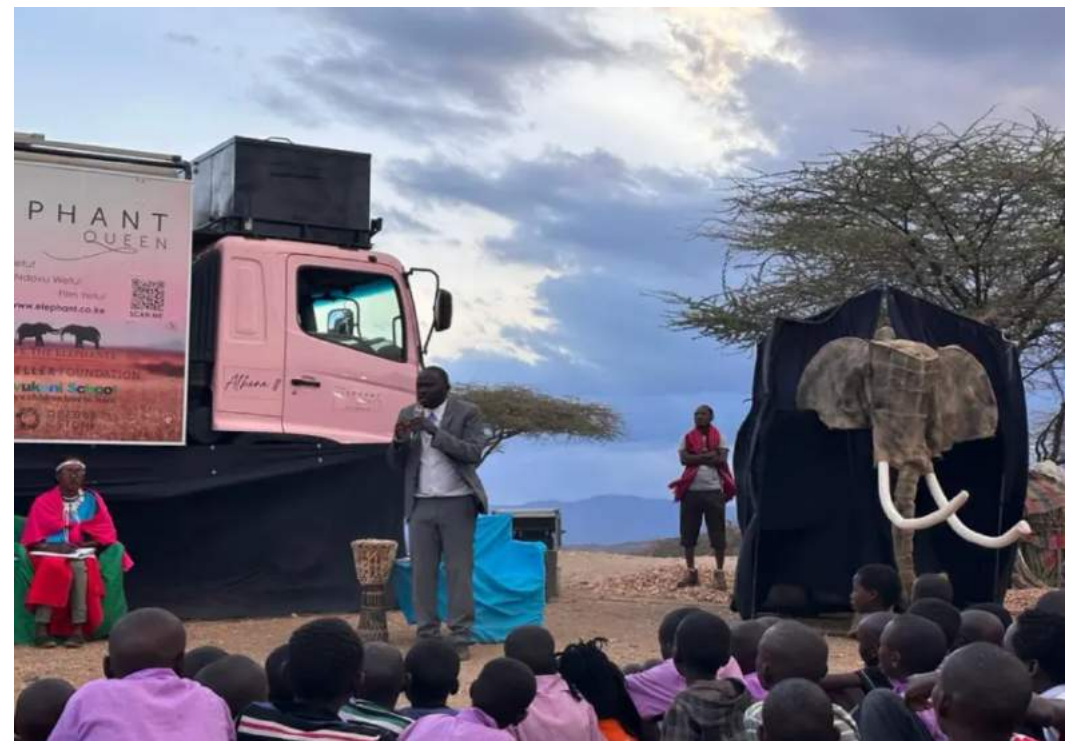
The play

So what is the drama play all about?? Its about respecting elephants, its about realizing who elephants are. The play sets a 'crime scene' where an elephant has killed a boy. It plays out into a court case between the humans and the elephants. With clever twists of humor, wit and dialogue this play brings to light just how unfair life is for an elephant. Equally, it sympathizes with the issues faced daily by people whom co-exist with elephants. Using life-sized props, music, dance and a whole lot of energy , this production is a must – see for all!

The conversation

Of course, after the film and play have been enjoyed, there is a time for serious talk. Many people have stories of loss, damage and conflict with elephants. Whilst others bring to light the cultural importance, human similarity and sheer awe of the elephant. Each and every one gets a good clap from the audience, whether they say horrible things, nice things, positive or negative. It's such fun!

With more than 6000 people reached in our area, we are already starting to see a change in human behavior towards ele's. We look forward to continuing this amazing initiative and expanding it to areas where elephants are beginning to explore their old territories and migration routes further to the north.



The play



Everybody's opinion matters

Elephant wells

The problem

During the dry season, the warriors work very hard to dig deep wells into the Lugga's (dry river beds), and use these to water their livestock. At night the wildlife also visit the wells to have a drink as these are the only source of water. Some animals can jump in and out of the wells, whilst others simply cannot reach the water and have to go thirsty. The elephants end up completely destroying the well as they strain to reach the deep water. The next day the warrior must work hours to rebuild the well. Over time, they get fed up and can end up shooting at ele to keep them out of the area - or worse, the ele's fall into the wells - many die from drowning & exhaustion (also destroying the well). Babies that fall in are often abandoned and need rescuing.



Ele's on their knees to get some water, nearly falling in

The Solution

For the past four years we have been employing some well owners to dig a ramp into one side of the well. This means that the elephants, even babies, can drink safely. This also benefits other species such as the endangered Grevy's zebra that need to access water once every couple of days in order to survive. The wells are maintained throughout the dry months - 2021/22 has been very dry, so we have had to keep them going most of the time. We have been keeping approx 30 wells maintained, and we have seen hugely positive impacts for the wildlife.



A dangerous well



A ramp being dug by our team, everybody can safely access the



Healthy cloud forest on top of the Ndoto's



A scout blending into 'his' forested valley

State of Forests

The drought has also led to people exploiting forest resources to eke a living. Thanks to the insistence of the communities around Lenkiyou to stop this destructive trade, the East African Sandalwood situation has improved.

African Pencil Cedar

Sadly, we can't say the same for the African Pencil Cedar, which populates most of the higher forests in the mountains. Although it is illegal to harvest and trade in this wood, the communities living in the mountains have always used cedar for domestic use. In fact they have protected this species from being harvested by outsiders. However, people are more desperate than ever and are starting to sell their precious resource! Our scouts have been trying to keep on top of the situation, however its really tough to know if somebody is collecting cedar for domestic use or for commercial gain.

Aloe

Several species of aloes have been decimated

Traders are paying good money for the sap, which is mainly exported. The issue is that people are not harvesting sustainably, but are cutting the entire plant. This is another link in the biodiversity chain being removed.



Aloes destroyed for a few drops of sap

Fires

There is nothing comparable to the damage done by a fire. The dry forest and strong prevailing winds from the east resulted in several hot fires in 2022, causing unfathomable damage. Our team have visited most homesteads in mountain dwelling peoples to screen our film on 'fires, and why we shouldn't burn'. Our insistent messaging, constant patrols and close communication with herders has finally paid off. We are proud to say that even during the driest parts of 2023 we experienced no large fires in the mountain forests and only a few small ones in the low lying luggas.

Ten years ago, the below horizon would have been scattered with plumes of smoke on a hot windy day like this – particularly in the buildup to the rainy season. Progress has been made, and we keep fingers crossed that people's attitude to fires remains the same.



Land rehabilitation

Thousands of acres of grazing have become degraded - the soil is depleted of nutrients, organic matter and root structure. Meaning the when it rains, the fast moving surface water carries away loose soil. Our land rehabilitation project aims to repair damaged areas by hand. We are using a very simple system of earthworks to prevent erosion

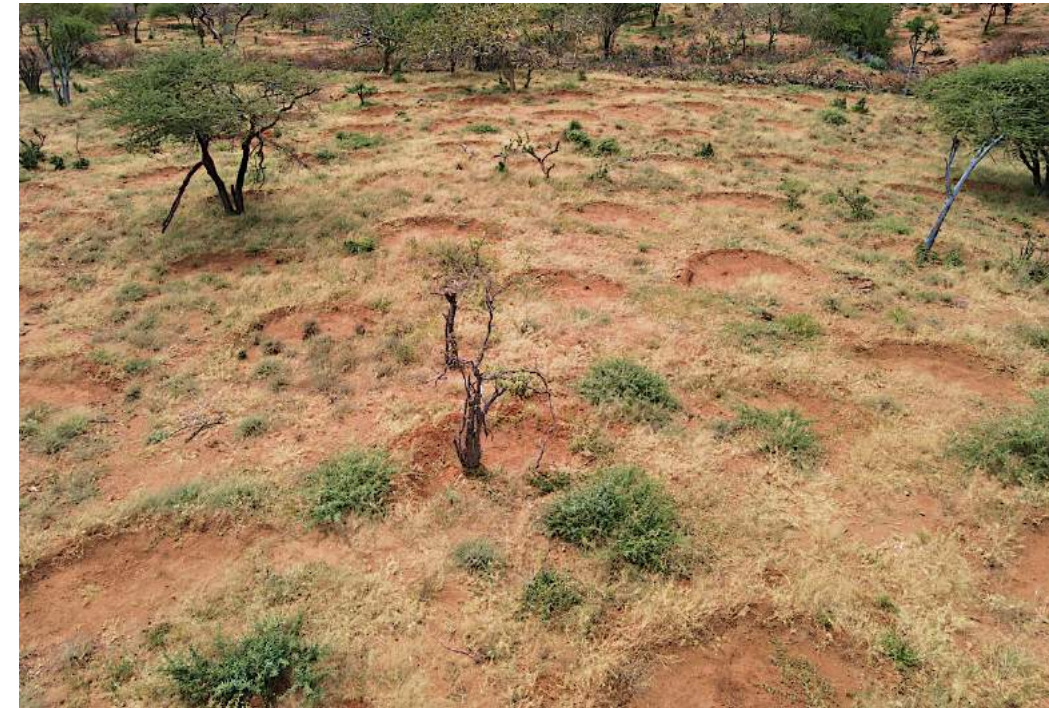
The concept is to incentivise people to hand-dig small depressions called 'bunds' using a spade/jembe. These bunds are 3-4 metres wide and are staggered in a fish-scale pattern. The runoff from rain flows into a bunds - losing momentum, it infiltrates into the soil. When one bunds fills up, the water spills over into the next one. The bunds catch seeds which in turn germinate. Over time, there is an increase in vegetation and erosion gullies backfill.



Before



A lot of work to be done, too late in many places



1 year later

Education

Student Sponsorship Program

Although the scale of our student sponsorship program has reduced significantly due to lack of funding, there are still a number of students who we are still supporting. Two more university students have graduated, whilst four secondary students completed their studies.

Conservation Education program

By providing a well-rounded education, we aim to improve adoption of conservation strategies among young community members. Our CE team has continued to work with local schools, establishing conservation clubs. Activities include screening documentaries, putting together plays, land rehabilitation and anti-plastic campaigns.

Schools

We are still supporting small pre-schools in the area. We maintain our mandate to only support 'eco' schools. Our level of support varies depending on the location, and level of government support being given. Suruan, for example, receives a lot more help because they are so remote and are usually last in line when there is books, food or maintenance budgets being supplied by the government.



- **Currently supporting 13 secondary & 2 University Students**
- **3 University Graduates**
- **4 secondary graduates**
- **5 schools supported**
- **15 schools enrolled in conservation education**

Suruan school, right at the top of the Ndoto's accessible only by a long hike!

Ramat e losho

(Preservation of the Society)

Our 'family planning' program is so much more than helping people to access contraception. As seen above, we do not even call this project 'family planning' due to the negative stigmas surrounding the term.

We currently have 2 REL officers who are working on creating a more sustainable future for people living in our area. Currently the immense pressures on the land have been leading to overgrazing, lack of water, poaching, deforestation and soil erosion. People are also suffering from poor living standards, starvation and unemployment. These issues can be indirectly attributed to the increased number of people and therefore livestock.

On average our team have been engaging approx 250 people per month. This engagement involves screening educational videos , having discussion's and debates and understanding peoples perspectives on sustainability. People are shown where to go to receive consultation, and what to be aware of when spacing children.

The nomadic people need space if their culture and livelihoods are to survive. This space is quickly disappearing, and therefore threatening the existence of pastoralism.



All hands on deck for an REL rally, promoting family planning, waste management, fires and all things sustainability

Pan - dams

Ironically, one of the toughest times to get drinking water is during the onset of the rainy season. When it does eventually rain, most of the water is carried into the lugga's. The luggas become torrents of mud for several weeks, covering any useful wells. Our team implements small catchments that harvest rainwater - a saviour to the people and animals living around who have been walking huge distances to find water, to suddenly be blessed with a dam full of water which may last a month or so. Not to mention all of the wildlife that benefits here, especially elephants!

The dam building team have been very active, trying to put in as much water storage as possible. The drought has meant that the majority of dams are empty which creates a window for de-silting and rebuilding weakened dam-walls.



2023 Overview

- **65 pan-dams maintained**
- **14 new pan dams**
- **Erosion gullies backfilled**
- **Water project support**



Happy camels and a full dam in Kasipo



A new dam near in Nonchura

Aloe livelihoods

The escalation of land degradation has significantly impacted livelihoods. Paired with drought, people now cannot make ends meet. Many children have had to drop out of school, and there has been an increase in illegal activities to put food on the table.

We have been wanting to look into aloes for many years, but have not had the right platform to do so. So, it is a very exciting prospect to be exploring. There has been fast growing trade in wild aloes from the area, particularly *Aloe secundaflora* and *Aloe turkanensis*. The local trade is in the sap from the leaves, which is a valuable ingredient in the pharmaceutical industry as a laxative. Unfortunately, most of the wild aloes have been destroyed due to unsustainable harvesting techniques and unscrupulous buyers who don't care about the plants. Additionally, the current local harvest techniques do not allow for harvesting of aloe gel, which would be a potential additional product.

At the end of 2023 we found a supplier who could provide thousands of Aloe seedlings as well as a market for the products. We have since partnered with five womens groups to establish plantations in pre-existing fenced areas such as schools and dispensaries. 14,000 plants have been established and will need nearly three years to reach maturity, after which it is possible to harvest the plants twice a year for up to seven years.

This program is another building block in the quest to attain a diverse and sustainable stream of income in a landscape that does not cater for traditional cropping.



Carefully removing a seedling so that we can re-use the bag



A very happy womens group in Loikumukum

Water projects

The importance of our water projects has been especially highlighted this past couple of years. People and wildlife are competing for water, with humans usually coming out on top. However, in areas that are served by our projects, there has been more than enough water for everybody! Most of the projects have got separate troughs for wildlife & livestock.

At the beginning of 2023, people on the eastern side of the Ndoto's were so desperate for water and everybody is asking for help, dams, water projects, rock catchments - anything that they could get. Of course, it has since rained, a huge amount. So things are a lot better and the water tables have at least been re-plenished. However, ironically even during the rains, water can be an issue. The luggas, where everybody has clean wells, flood and fill with mud. So unless you have a rock catchment or dam, it can be equally hard to get water. This the importance of our water projects even during the good times.

Our maintenance team have had to work around the clock to ensure that all 15 projects are in working order, and that water is being managed during periods of low water. During dry times like these the solar panels become dusty very quickly so must be cleaned daily.

Sadly it is not always plain sailing and we had an unfortunate incident in December 2023. One of our water projects at lugga Murran was completely destroyed as a result of two communities having an argument over land use. We have since had to remove the entire project. Sometimes it is one two steps forwards one step backwards.

- **15 Water projects Maintained**
- **180,000 + people benefitting from clean water**
- **Essential support for nomadic people who are migrating**



A desperate Grevy's zebra is given a chance to drink at a water project



Murran water project damage

Veterinary

Rabies is a prolific problem, with outbreaks occurring regularly in remote communities. It is largely spread through the canine population - particularly domestic dogs and hyena's. The Samburu rely on these dogs to accompany the livestock during the day and to ward off predators from their homesteads at night.

However many people fear their dogs and are terrified of being bitten in case they get rabies. There is no treatment for rabies! This has resulted in people mistreating their dogs. Some people are too scared to feed their dogs, and would kill a faithful hound at the first signs of illness. The result used to be an unhealthy population of dogs that were unable to protect the livestock. Predators would make the most of this and make off with lots of livestock. The outcome was almost always the persecution of a lion or leopard. However we now have been able to vaccinate more than 70% of the dogs in our area on an annual basis - that is nearly 3,000 dogs every year!

The Milgis is now teaming with lions!! And a large factor in their return has been the rabies vaccinations. Dogs are now much more alert and are able to prevent predators from eating the livestock - mitigating human-predator conflict and allowing lions to go unscathed.

Our Annual vaccinations have been impacted quite heavily by the drought. Many of the dogs have left the area with the livestock to go and search for pasture. Therefore there are only around a third remaining at home. So this year we have been limited to 1,500 vaccinations.

- **1500 Rabies vaccinations**
- **Reduced human-predator conflict**
- **Increased lion population**



One of the more placid dogs



Our mobile vet team + government vet

A very big thank you to all our wonderful Supporters

- The late Halvor Astrup, for huge support and for establishing a Norwegian connection
- Our hardworking trustees
- JAC and JANC supporters and Christen Sveaas
- Knut Brundtland
- Milgis Stiftelsen Board
- *Cecilie Malm Brundtland*
- *Anette Krosby*
- *Ina Astrup*
- *Clementine Munch Thore*
- The Symington family
- Arnulf and Tove Bergum in memory of Lene Maria
- Edward Peake
- Viveca Ax:son Johnson
- Lis Woods & the Kijani team
- Pirjo from Finland
- Olav Dunn School
- Norina Weiler
- Susan & Richard Myers
- Jan Haakon Pettersen
- Susanne Garrison & Rich Clise
- Patrick Webb (Catman) for years of incredible support.
- Mike & Dee belliere
- Franzi Krummel
- Beverly Orthwein
- Richard and Cathy Hahn
- Mark & Vicky Deeble - Stone
- Etienne Oliff
- Kate Flynn
- Joseph Knoertzer
- Stephen and Kathy Isaacs and friends
- Raleigh & Heidi in memory of Helga
- Darren Almond (for the beautiful photo series Fullmoon@Milgis)
- Gro Brundtland through TANG PRIZE
- The Simpletons
- Florian and Suzi Weischer
- Jonathan and Gillian Knowles and Maeve Murray Smith on education through Toto Trust
- Gavin Hogg for creating the beautiful Ldoilo CD
- Andrew Brudenell Bruce and his team for running a marathon

And all others who have played a part in their own way!

- Stella Deane for hundreds of hours of devoted work for the Trust
- Nick Tims - who swam the English channel for the Milgis
- Sarah Bourghardt from Sweden who raced in the hardest ski race (90km) and walked (90km) for the Milgis
- Rachel Temple for all the work on reports!!
- Carolyn Roumequere
- Diana Roberts, for all the help she gave us with grant applications!
- Doug & Sarah Connon
- Nick & Jane Prentice
- Rupert Watson & Mary Binx in memory of George Drew
- Grete Davey
- Christian Lambretsch
- Morten Werring
- Frazer Douglas
- Maryjka Beckmann
- Private Journeys
- Jeremy Block
- Fuzz Dyer
- Sir David and Lady Newbigging
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- The late Gilfrid Powys
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- Student sponsors
- The late Chuck Lathrop
- Bygdøy skole



Milgis Stiftelsen
(Norge)



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SAMBURU



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