



# EARTHWATCH<sup>®</sup> INSTITUTE

African Alumni Newsletter • Issue 8 2004

## 10th Anniversary Edition

It is with great pride that we bring you the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the African Alumni Newsletter - looking back on the successes of the last 10 years and forward to our plans for the future.

We report on two long standing Earthwatch projects which are now drawing to a close and three new projects, which we hope will receive great support from our African Fellows. We also look at some new initiatives including 'in-country' fellowships and the development of our Darwin Initiative in Kenya.

We are now half way through our European Commission grant, a four-year project in partnership with the Tropical Biology Association. Inside, Robert Llewellyn-Smith reports on the progress to date. There is also news from Robynne Reeve-Johnson, who has been organising our alumni events from Oxford to Madagascar.

2003/04 has been one of our busiest years to date, with 78 African Fellows joining 11 projects including: Zebras of Kenya and Conserving Kenya's Heritage; Rare Plants of Kenya; Mangroves of Kenya; Sharks of Madagascar; Madagascar's Lemurs; Carnivores of Madagascar; Lemurs and Forests of Madagascar; Saving Cameroon's Rockfowl; South Africa's Hidden Species and, in Ghana, Wildlife Conservation in West Africa.

2004 is also my first year as manager for the African Fellowship Programme and I look forward to being part of its growth and development in the years to come. As always, please keep us updated on your activities and I wish you a happy and successful year.

**Sarah Staunton-Lamb**  
*African Fellowship Programme Manager*

# Celebrating 10 Years of the Africa Programme



© Sharon Williams/Earthwatch

Fellows working on the 'Mangroves of Kenya' Project

In 1994, Earthwatch first began its African Fellowship Programme to provide practical training placements on our field research projects. In the years since, we have enabled over 750 African conservationists, NGO staff and scientists from 25 countries to join 34

projects across the continent. This ambitious programme has been an enormous success, thanks to the combined efforts of our partners in Africa, the research scientists and, most importantly, the Fellows themselves.

The programme aims to address some of the key training needs in sub-Saharan Africa – as identified by the Convention on Biological Diversity, Agenda 21 and various other regional studies. Participation has offered Fellows the opportunity to learn new skills, but has also provided a valuable forum for networking and the exchange of ideas between countries and across organisations. Over time, this should help to build the capacity of African conservation

institutions through training their staff and promoting greater international cooperation.

Our funding level since 1994 has enabled us to provide 50-70 fellowships per year on all-African teams. Importantly, our growing network of partner organisations continue to select the participants which they feel would benefit the most from joining the programme, helping to ensure that resources are wisely and effectively used.

We hope that by continuing to develop the programme and seeking new ways of delivering these needs, we can look forward to another 10 years of success. ■

## Madagascar Anniversary Celebration



© Robynne Reeve-Johnson/Earthwatch

Brian Donaldson, British Ambassador and Guillot Ramilson, Journalist

More than forty Fellows, local partner institutions, journalists and government representatives, including the British Ambassador, gathered for a dinner reception in Antananarivo on 2<sup>nd</sup> July to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the African Programme.

At the reception Robynne Reeve-Johnson, Earthwatch Programme Officer, highlighted

the diversity of Earthwatch's activities and some important recent achievements. The occasion also marked the start of a new project, *The Lemurs and Forests of Madagascar*, developed with the assistance of a European Commission grant. Guest speaker, Dr Jonah Ratsimbazafy, the Principal Investigator of the project and renowned primatologist, presented his new project investigating the endangered black-and-white ruffed lemur population of Manombo Special Reserve in South-eastern Madagascar.

This event was an important networking opportunity and gave the incoming Fellowship team the chance to meet former Malagasy Fellows. The celebration gained a great deal of publicity, including coverage in the national newspaper, the Madagascar Tribune. ■

## Darwin Initiative at Lake Bogoria



© Robert Llewellyn-Smith/Earthwatch

Workshop participants

In our 2003 newsletter we announced the successful award of a three year Darwin Initiative grant, coordinated by the University of Leicester and Earthwatch in collaboration with Lake Bogoria National Reserve, Museums of Kenya, University of Nairobi, WWF and Kenya Wildlife Service.

Now in its second year, the project is working on a range of research and capacity building activities, with data collected by Earthwatch volunteers and Fellows integrated into a wider flamingo conservation programme.

One output is a series of 6, 1 week workshops held at Lake Bogoria. Robert Llewellyn-Smith attended the first 'Ecosystem Health' workshop in July 2003 and was delighted to meet amongst the participants several past Earthwatch African Fellows - Ken Mwatha, African Conservation Centre (*Cameroon Rain Forests* -1999); Nickson Oteino, Ornithology Department, National Museums of Kenya (*Tanzania Forest Birds* – 2001); and Bernard Kuloba, Kenya Wildlife Service (*South African Wildlife* – 2002). ■

## Project Farewells



© Kate Humble

The Wechiau community leaders

Ghana -Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary The Wechiau Community Hippo Sanctuary was initiated to protect the area and to help develop sustainable ecotourism. In conjunction with the Nature Conservation Research Centre (NCRC) in Ghana, Earthwatch has supported Professor Oteng-Yeboah since 2000 in undertaking valuable research into the local wildlife. 45 African Fellows from 10 countries have contributed to collecting baseline data on hippos and other species - helping the local community to develop the area's first environmental management plan as well as the educational and ecotourism potential of the sanctuary.



© Jo Zarembo/Earthwatch

Co-PI Geoffrey Mungai

Rare Plants of Kenya This year Geoffrey Mwachala, a long standing Earthwatch PI, will draw to a close the research on the botanical diversity of the Taita Hills in Kenya. Over 120 African Fellows have contributed to the cataloguing of this diversity - collecting information on the conservation status of the flora and its uses by the local communities. The project has contributed to the fulfilment of Kenya's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and has proved an invaluable training tool for herbarium staff across Africa. For more details about the research project, visit: [www.earthwatch.org/expeditions/mwachala](http://www.earthwatch.org/expeditions/mwachala)

# Recent Developments

## Team Joins New Lemur Project

Ten young scientists from all over Africa took part in the first team of our new lemur project in Madagascar in July 2004. The team assisted Drs Ratsimbazafy and Jeannoda with their study into the behavioural responses of the black-and-white-ruffed lemur (*Varecia variegata variegata*) to forest disturbance at Manombo Special Reserve. The study aims to improve understanding of whether this endangered species can adapt and recover from catastrophic habitat destruction caused by cyclone Gretelle in 1997. The impacts of such destructive weather patterns are of greater importance as forest habitats become fragmented and endangered species rely increasingly on relict forest areas, as at Manombo.

*'The ruffed lemur is a flagship species for Madagascar and their conservation will also help to maintain the whole biodiversity of Manombo.'* - Dr Jonah Ratsimbazafy.

It was quite a challenge for team members to keep sight of the animals as they travelled through the forest canopy foraging for fruits and



Team members leaf pressing

young leaves. The team were also involved in mapping the many forest trails and setting up botanical plots to estimate the forest structure and composition.

To increase local involvement in the project, community representatives were invited to a reception during the first team, and former poachers are currently employed as guides. The project has also raised national awareness,

featuring in a news programme on Malagasy television.

The project staff include Rockiman Letsara and Volanirina Ramahery – former African Fellows, and Earthwatch sponsored Project Coordinator Fidimalala Ralainasolo. Research findings will be used to formulate management recommendations so that appropriate actions can be taken to ensure the survival of a charismatic lemur species on the verge of extinction. ■

© Robynne Reeve-Johnson/Earthwatch

## 'In Country' Fellowships in Madagascar

Earthwatch has made significant progress in developing research projects in Madagascar's priority areas and in training Malagasy scientists, with support grants from the Maurice Laing Foundation and the European Commission.

This year, we have used some of this money to place Malagasy scientists on Earthwatch projects within Madagascar. In 2003/4, 8 Malagasies will join 4 Madagascar-based projects involving the study of species as diverse as sharks and lemurs.

The feedback from both Fellows and PIs has been extremely positive and seems to be making a significant impact on individuals, the projects and the sharing of skills and knowledge between the organisations and institutions involved. ■

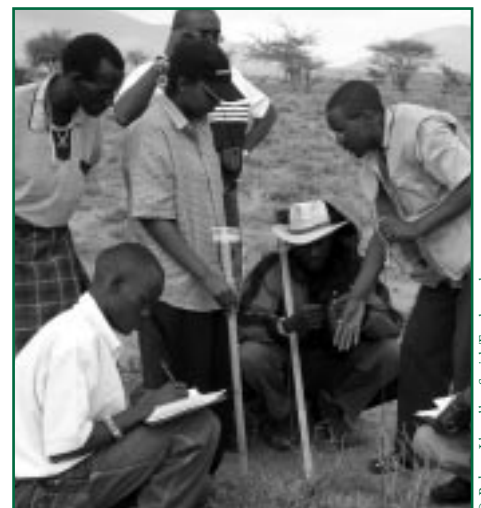
## Capacity Building in Kenya - The Samburu CRI

In November 2003, a team of 5 Kenyans from the Samburu-Laikipia region were offered fellowships to work on a Grevy's Zebra research project, led by Kenyan scientist, Dr Paul Muoria. This was repeated in May 2004 with a team of 8 local Fellows, with funding secured through the Ford Motor Company. This project was new to the African Programme in 2003/04.

This project is one of a several Earthwatch supported research projects addressing applied research needs in the Samburu ecosystem. Work in the area is conducted in collaboration with the African Wildlife Foundation and a range of other local organisations.

The teams were composed of people who are directly involved in the wildlife management or education in the Samburu-Laikipia region. They were joined by Robert Llewellyn-Smith, Programme Manager in the Environmental Partnership Department of Earthwatch Institute (Europe), who helped to facilitate the teams.

The overall goal of the project is to conduct research into the current status, distribution, threats and conservation requirements of the Grevy's zebra and to build local community understanding and support for their conservation. Fellows were trained in a variety of research techniques before collecting data over the 2 week period. ■



Fellows learning vegetation survey techniques

© Robert Llewellyn-Smith/Earthwatch

## Other New Projects



© Robynne Reeve-Johnson/Earthwatch

Fellows on the 'Blue Swallows' project

### Blue Swallows of South Africa

In September 2003, a team of 9 African Fellows, including several from organisations working on other blue swallow nesting sites in Africa, joined the first team of Cathy Dzerefos' Project to explore the habitat needs of nesting blue swallows in the northern Drakensburg Escarpment of South Africa. The blue swallow (*Hirundo atrocaerulea*) has a Red Data listing of 'critically endangered' and is feared to be the bird most likely to become extinct next in South Africa, facing threats due to loss of habitat to pine plantations, mining, agriculture, the spread of exotic plants and land claims.

### Mangroves of Kenya

This project, led by Drs Mark Huxham (*Napier University, Edinburgh*), James Kairo (*Kenya Marine and Fisheries Research Institute*), and Martin Skov (*University of Lisbon*), is conducting pioneering plantation experiments for the rehabilitation of degraded mangroves in Gazi Bay, Kenya. Mangrove forests are among the most productive wetland ecosystems on Earth, providing crucial habitats, protecting coral reefs from sedimentation, and reducing erosion. The African Fellows team were the first on this project - part of a grassroots effort in the local community to examine how species diversity influences the ecosystem's dynamics. Results and developments from this project will be included in future newsletters. ■

## Alumni Activities



© Earthwatch

Oxford event presentations

### Dinner at Kruger National Park, South Africa, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2003

Former Fellows spent an enjoyable evening recounting fellowship experiences and updating each other on their current work and other recent achievements.

### Fellow's Presentations at the Earthwatch Office, Oxford, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2004

Five Fellows currently studying in the UK were invited to give talks to Earthwatch staff. This was a great opportunity for staff to learn first hand about the applications of Fellow's experiences to their current research work.

### Call for Project Proposals

If you are at post-doctoral level and would like information about research grants for setting up your own Earthwatch project, we would be interested to hear from you. For more information, contact [re@earthwatch.org.uk](mailto:re@earthwatch.org.uk).

### Alumni Update Insert

This update contains news on former Fellows. To feature on the next alumni update, please let us know your whereabouts, any achievements and a suitable email address. ■

Contact the Alumni Network at: [network@earthwatch.org.uk](mailto:network@earthwatch.org.uk)

## Earthwatch and the TBA

We are now in Year 2 of a successful four year programme, funded by the European Commission, entitled '*Institutional and Individual Capacity Building for the Environment in sub-Saharan Africa*'. Project objectives are to develop the capacity of targeted African and Malagasy institutions through:

- transferring the necessary expertise and resources in order to enhance their own conservation training and research capabilities
- delivering short term practical field training, with an international dimension, to African biologists followed by ongoing support afterwards
- To strengthen and foster regional cooperation and exchange and maintain a network of African scientists and conservation managers.

For a first year progress update please visit: [www.earthwatch.org/europe/fellowships/africa.html](http://www.earthwatch.org/europe/fellowships/africa.html) and follow the links to the Tropical Biology Association partnership. ■

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