

KWS Launches National Strategies for large Carnivores



From Left :Wildlife and Forestry Minister Hon. Dr Noah Wekesa and Mr. Patrick Omondi,KWS Senior Assistant Director and Head of Species and Conservation Management during the launch

Forestry and Wildlife Minister Hon Dr Noah Wekesa on 17th February ,2010 presided over the launch of Kenya's national large carnivore conservation and management strategies.

Africa's first ever such strategies provide a clear roadmap for the conservation of cheetahs, lions, leopards, striped and spotted hyenas and the African wild dogs. They prescribe actions that need to be taken by various stakeholders coordinated by KWS to reverse the declining population. The function at Kenya Wildlife Service headquarters in Nairobi was attended by KWS Board of Trustees chairman Hon David Mwiraria, National Large Carnivore Task Force Members, NGOs, county council officials, among other dignitaries. Large carnivores are in decline throughout the world, and Kenya's carnivores are no exception.

Despite their reduced populations, large carnivores still cause problems for pastoralists and farmers and, for conservation managers. Attacks on livestock by large carnivores is a serious problem – first, because it can have a major impact upon the livelihoods of pastoralists and farmers, and, second, because it leads to the killing of large carnivores, many of which are species of local or international conservation concern. Conflict between people and carnivores poses has been cited alongside other factors, including destruction of habitats, loss of food, climate change, and increase in human population for the rapid decline in carnivore population. Dr Wekesa noted that the strategies provided ways of dealing with various challenges, citing last year's prolonged drought that strained relations between communities and national parks and reserves management. A recent, serious human-wildlife conflict zone is the Amboseli National Park and the surrounding areas. The just ended prolonged drought was the worst that had ever been felt in the area.

The number of herbivores was reduced from as many as 7000 to just 300. Already, the communities had lost over 80 per cent of their livestock to the drought. When the lions and hyenas turned to the remaining livestock, the communities were distressed, and even attacked them in return. The minister said: "The drought took a heavy toll both on wild animals and the habitats we care for. Besides, it also adversely affected the livestock of communities living adjacent to national parks and reserves. One of the consequences

of the drought was increase in human wildlife conflict." The minister cited the ongoing translocation of 7000 zebras and wildebeests at a cost of Sh103 million to restore the Amboseli ecosystem by the Kenya Wildlife Service as a show of government commitment to community welfare.

Dr Wekesa added that he expected the exercise to greatly assist in alleviating the human wildlife conflict problem and ecological imbalance. The minister noted that the success of Kenya's conservation efforts largely depended on the goodwill of communities living adjacent to national parks and reserves. "This means we have to protect the livelihoods of these communities and promote harmonious co-existence with wildlife," the minister said, commending the various interventions by KWS, including meetings with communities and lion collaring in various parts of the country to monitor their movements and feeding habits. He praised the Kenya Wildlife Service and other conservation partners for developing a framework to reverse the trend of Kenya losing an average of 100 lions in the last seven years. Dr Wekesa called on communities not to kill the lions and hyenas and pledged that KWS would do whatever it takes to protect them and their livestock. "I know there are plans to build lion-proof bomas. Let us all strive to preserve this important heritage," he concluded.