



Mpala Newsletter

September 2025 | Issue #34



Community Outreach Team with Women Community Groups in Amboseli

Letter from the Mpala Team

Dear Mpala Community,

September was a busy and fruitful month at Mpala Research Centre. We hosted eight student groups and workshops, and welcomed many new faces into the Mpala community.

The Mpala team, led by Chief Research Officer Dr. Nina Wambiji, attended the second International Wildlife Scientific Conference in Naivasha, organized by the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI), with many others from the Mpala community joining virtually.

The conference, themed “*Innovations in Wildlife Conservation Science and Practice for Socioeconomic Development*,” provided a valuable platform to showcase Mpala’s research and strengthen connections with NGOs, policymakers, and scientists worldwide.

Our Community Outreach team organized an exchange visit to Amboseli for women’s groups from local communities Lekiji, Il Motiok, Koija, and Tiamamut. Forty women participated in a two-day capacity building training on leadership, record keeping, sustainability and financial management. They also engaged with four women groups from Amboseli, exchanging experiences and practices.

We were excited to welcome our new MSc student cohort through the Mpala Graduate Scholarship Program. Abraham Odhiambo, from Kenyatta University, will be researching livestock disease control, Brian Kipkorir, from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, will focus on molecular surveillance of livestock disease, and Lydia Illa, from the University of Nairobi, will study biodiversity conservation for Grevy’s Zebra in changing climates. We also extend a warm welcome to Smithsonian Institute Postdoctoral Fellows Dr. Zakayo Maingi, Dr. Shaleen Angwenyi, and Dr. Dedan Ngatia, who have joined Mpala to advance work on OneHealth and Wild Dogs.

Our partnership with Daraja Academy continues to thrive, with three researchers giving presentations to the Daraja Conservation Club this month. Three enthusiastic Daraja birders also visited Mpala to learn from Dr. Babarovic’s bird lab.

We close this month with gratitude, as each of these milestones helps advance our shared goal of broadening education and research access for students both nationally and internationally.

Warm regards,

The Mpala Team

Featured Research

Ambiance: Solar-Powered Speaker for Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation



Michael Kowalski, Anderson Larpei and Community Members with Solar-Powered Automatic Playback Speakers.

Across Laikipia, Kenya, people and wildlife share land, water, and resources, but not always peacefully. Elephants can destroy a season’s worth of crops in a single night, and predators often prey on livestock, creating conflict that threatens both livelihoods and wildlife. Finding new, effective ways to reduce these tensions is critical for the future of both communities and ecosystems.

The Ambiance Project is developing a solar-powered playback speaker designed to deter wildlife safely and effectively. By broadcasting sounds, such as recordings of local tribesmen speaking in Maasai, the devices create the illusion of human presence, encouraging elephants and predators to keep their distance. Powered entirely by solar energy, the units can operate for months at a time under harsh field conditions.

Pilots at Mpala Research Centre have shown promising results: elephants reduced their foraging activity and tree damage by up to 80%, while smaller carnivores and rodents also shifted their behaviour. Remarkably, these changes persisted for weeks after broadcasts stopped, revealing the lasting influence of simulated human disturbance on wildlife behaviour.

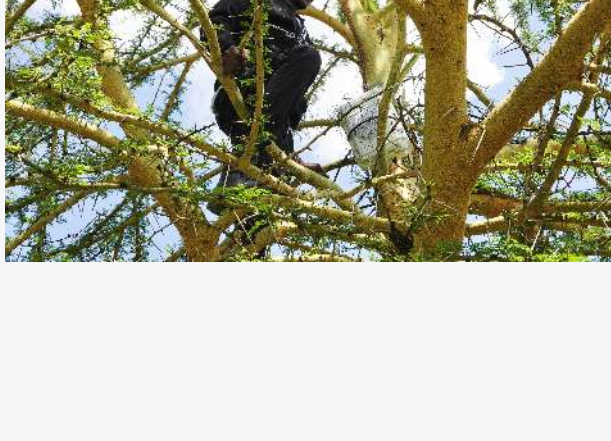
The next phase brings Ambiance into rural communities, enabling families to protect crops and livestock while contributing their own recordings to create tailored deterrent sounds relevant to local conditions. By blending community knowledge with innovative technology, Ambiance aims to create a lasting path toward coexistence, where people and wildlife can share the landscape sustainably.

[Read more about this Project](#)

Faces of Mpala

Featured Researcher: Anderson Larpei

Growing up across Laikipia with a diploma in Wildlife Management, Anderson Larpei has actively pursued his passion for conservation through wildlife monitoring, human-wildlife conflict mitigation, and community engagement. As a research assistant for the Ambiance project, Anderson has been exposed to interdisciplinary projects that have expanded his perspective and built up his confidence in leading fieldwork.



[Read more about Anderson](#)

Featured Publications



Climate and the landscape of fear in an African savanna.

Riginos, C.

The relative importance of top-down versus bottom-up processes in shaping natural communities remains a central question in ecology. In African savannas, herbivores balance acquiring forage with avoiding predation, creating a “landscape of fear.” Over four years, we experimentally manipulated tree density in replicated Acacia plots in Laikipia, Kenya, including during drought, to test how habitat structure affects herbivore behaviour. We show that ungulate habitat use varies strongly with tree density and rainfall, with both predation risk and resource availability interacting to determine foraging patterns. These findings reveal the context-dependent nature of fear and resource trade-offs in savanna ecosystems.

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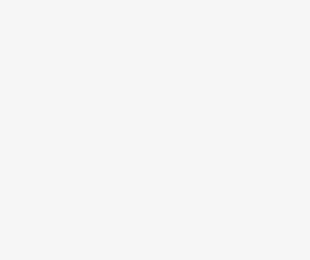


Determinants of attitudes towards predators in central Kenya and suggestions for increasing tolerance in livestock dominated landscapes.

Romanach, S.S., Lindsey, P.A., & Woodroffe, R.

Where people and livestock coexist with predators, conflict can lead to lethal control of wildlife. In central Kenya, we evaluated attitudes toward large predators and developed a novel tolerance index by quantifying how many livestock losses people would accept before killing the predator responsible. Interviews with 416 subsistence livestock farmers and commercial ranchers revealed greater tolerance among those with land title deeds. For community members, tolerance increased with potential income from ecotourism or trophy hunting and was highest among those with land title deeds. These findings highlight the importance of land tenure and incentive strategies for predator conservation.

[Continue reading](#)



Elephants mitigate the effects of cattle on wildlife and other ecosystem traits: experimental evidence.

Young, T.P., D.N. Kimuyu, K.E. Veblen, C. Riginos, J. Sitters, and W.O. Odadi.

On rangelands worldwide, cattle interact with soils, plants, and other herbivores in complex ways. Since 1995, the Kenya Long-term Exclosure Experiment has manipulated the presence of cattle, mesoherbivores, and mega-herbivores across eighteen 4-ha plots to examine these interactions. We show that cattle reduce grass cover, wildlife use, and soil nutrients, but increase primary productivity and termite abundance. Notably, mega-herbivores—especially elephants—reduce cattle herd sizes, likely by removing nutrient-rich forage and altering tree cover. These findings reveal important cross-scale effects of herbivore interactions on savanna ecosystems.

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Mpala explores solutions to current and emerging challenges by advancing transformational ecosystems research and teaching, conserving our environment, and partnering with our community.

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