



Partnerships & Collaboration

Mpala Research Centre Expands Strategic Partnerships Across Kenya

Three new agreements signed in June and July strengthen research, training, conservation, and innovation.

Mpala Research Centre has strengthened its network of Kenyan academic and conservation partners through the signing of three new collaboration agreements over the past month. Signed with United States International University-Africa (USIU-Africa) on 6 June, Bomet University on 24 June, and the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI) on 1 July, the partnerships expand opportunities for research, education, conservation, and capacity building across Kenya.

Together, these three agreements reinforce Mpala's commitment to building strong partnerships with Kenyan universities and national institutions. By expanding opportunities for collaborative research, student training, innovation, and knowledge exchange, the partnerships will help strengthen Kenya's scientific capacity while advancing conservation and sustainable natural resource management.

[Read more here](#)

Letter from Mpala

Dear Mpala Community,

The Mpala Board of Trustees has just completed its mid-year meeting at Mpala. I am happy to say that Mpala is more focused on its core mission of research and teaching than ever before. From strengthening support for research projects and completing a research strategy, to improving efficiencies in the permitting process, upgrading laboratories, developing Mpala's first institutional courses, and expanding partnerships with universities in Kenya and internationally, we are making thoughtful investments that strengthen both research and teaching excellence and the long-term sustainability of the Centre.

The Board is especially grateful to the Mpala team, whose dedication, professionalism, and commitment have kept the Centre moving forward through a year of transition. Their work has laid a strong foundation for the future, and we are excited about what lies ahead.

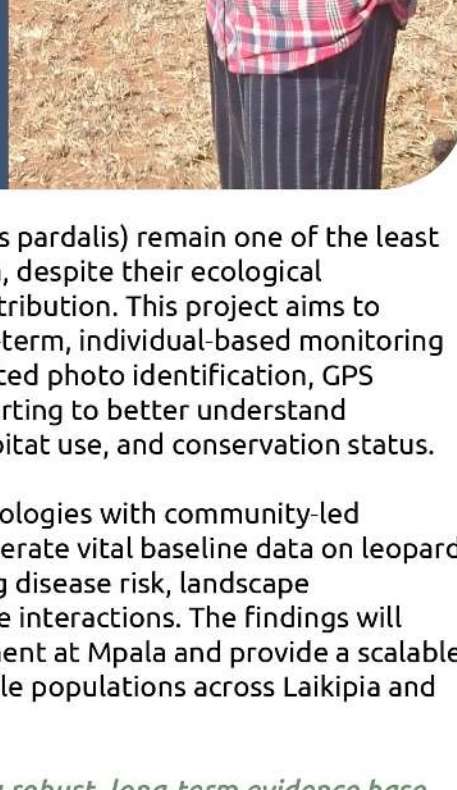
As we move into the second half of the year, I look forward to hearing about the many different ways you engage with Mpala and the impact it continues to have through research, teaching, conservation, and community.

Aly Kassam-Remtulla
Chair, Board of Trustees

Featured Research

From population baseline to landscape conservation: long-term individual-based monitoring of leopard tortoises (*Stigmochelys pardalis*) at Mpala and beyond

[Read more](#)



Leopard tortoises (*Stigmochelys pardalis*) remain one of the least studied large reptiles in Laikipia, despite their ecological importance and widespread distribution. This project aims to establish the region's first long-term, individual-based monitoring programme, combining AI-assisted photo identification, GPS telemetry, and community reporting to better understand population size, movement, habitat use, and conservation status.

By integrating innovative technologies with community-led monitoring, the project will generate vital baseline data on leopard tortoise ecology while assessing disease risk, landscape connectivity, and human-wildlife interactions. The findings will support conservation management at Mpala and provide a scalable framework for monitoring reptile populations across Laikipia and East Africa.

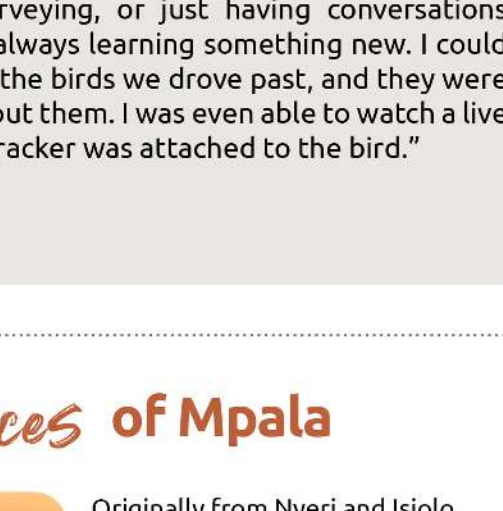
"This project aims to establish a robust, long-term evidence base for leopard tortoise conservation and management in Laikipia, delivering population estimates, an understanding of movement ecology, disease risk assessment, and mapping of human-wildlife interactions across a staged research framework."

~ Dr Jim Labisko

Guest Article

Featured Guest: Ella Narins

Undergraduate Student at St. Lawrence University, participating in the Kenya Semester Program, working with the Vulturine Guinea Fowl Project and the Baboon Research Project.

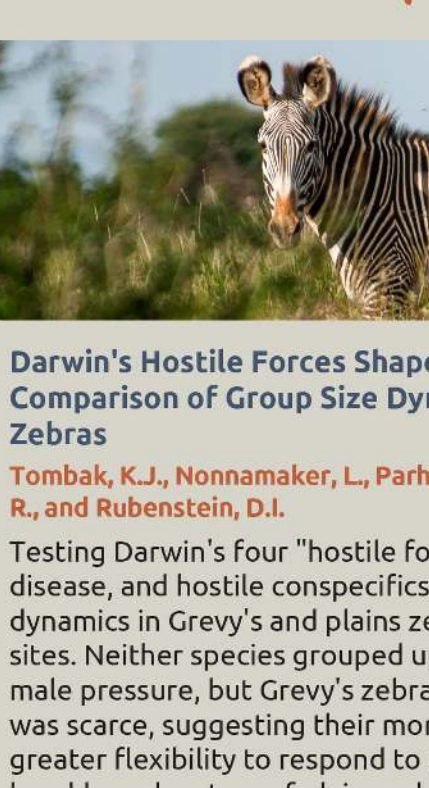


"I was one of four St. Lawrence University students who came to Mpala this past April, participating in a month-long attachment. My stay at Mpala was short, but the experiences I gained during my time there will last me a lifetime. Lucy and I arrived from Zanzibar, bringing the rain with us. We were warmly welcomed and instantly felt at home as we settled in and got ready to start working with the different research teams. We primarily worked with the Vulturine Guinea Fowl Project and the Baboon Research Project, switching back and forth between them. Outside of this, we were able to join other researchers to learn more about the different projects and initiatives taking place at Mpala.

For us, mornings that started with a 5:30 a.m. wake-up promised two things: a bright orange sky and quality time with the Guinea Fowl. The view of Mount Kenya usually wasn't too bad either. Getting to see what the Guinea Fowl team did every day was unforgettable. I got to spend a lot of time working with the fabulous researchers Flo, Kennedy, and Micah. Whether we were out collecting samples, surveying, or just having conversations while driving around, I was always learning something new. I could ask a question about any of the birds we drove past, and they were always able to tell me all about them. I was even able to watch a live capture, after which a GPS tracker was attached to the bird."

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The Faces of Mpala



Beatrice Bonareri & Faith Kinya

Daraja Academy Transition Programme Interns

[Read more about them](#)

Originally from Nyeri and Isiolo respectively, Beatrice Bonareri and Faith Kinya joined Mpala Research Centre through the Daraja Academy Transition Programme, an initiative designed to help recent high school graduates gain real-world professional experience. During their two-month internships, they worked across multiple departments, gaining hands-on exposure to conservation, research, operations, and event coordination.

Together, Beatrice and Faith embraced every opportunity to learn, from supporting field activities and collaborating with different teams to contributing to major events such as the Rhino Range Expansion Workshop. Their time at Mpala strengthened their confidence, communication, teamwork, and professional skills, while introducing them to researchers and conservation practitioners from around the world. Both credit Mpala's welcoming and collaborative environment for making their internships a transformative experience that will shape their future careers and inspire them to continue learning and growing.

By the Numbers (June)

20

chicks hatched in the Mpala vulturine guinea fowl study group

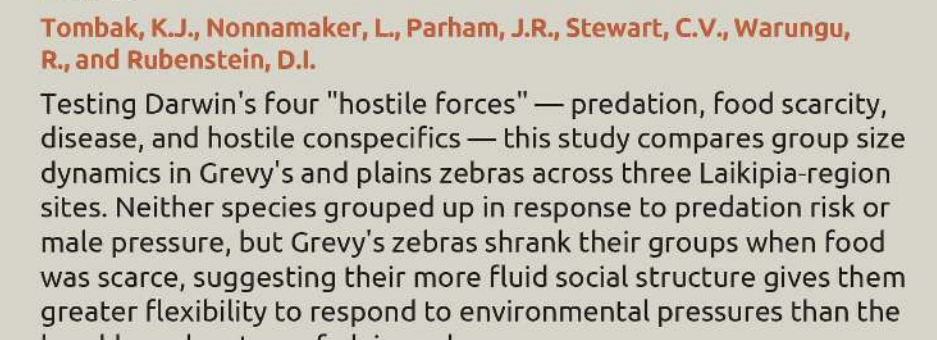
2

collared baboons predated upon, one attacked atop a tree

6

female rangers on Mpala Research Centre's ranger team, celebrating World Female Ranger Week

Featured Publications

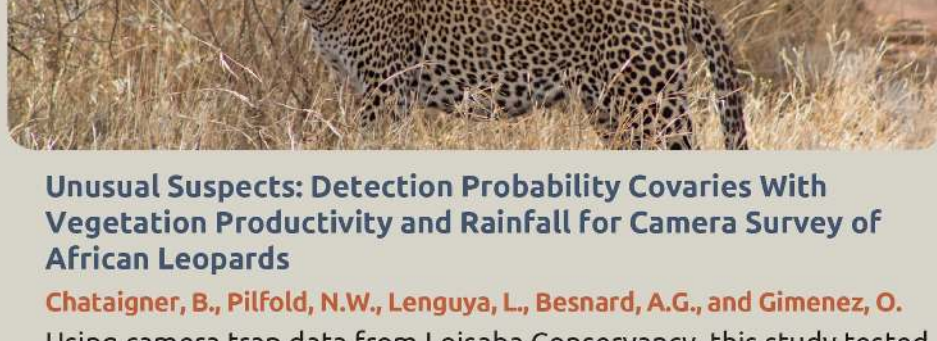


Darwin's Hostile Forces Shape Social Scaling in Equids: A Comparison of Group Size Dynamics in Grey's and Plains Zebras

Tombak, K.J., Nonnamaker, L., Parham, J.R., Stewart, C.V., Warungu, R., and Rubenstein, D.J.

Testing Darwin's four "hostile forces" — predation, food scarcity, disease, and hostile conspecifics — this study compares group size dynamics in Grey's and plains zebras across three Laikipia-region sites. Neither species grouped up in response to predation risk or male pressure, but Grey's zebras shrank their groups when food was scarce, suggesting their more fluid social structure gives them greater flexibility to respond to environmental pressures than the band-based system of plains zebras.

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Diet-Microbiome Covariation Across Three Giraffe Species in a Close-Contact Zone

Videvall, E., Gill, B.A., Brown, M.B., Hoff, H.K., Littleford-Colquhoun, B.L., Lokeny, P., Musili, P.M., and Kartizinel, T.R.

Using DNA metabarcoding on reticulated, Masai, and Nubian giraffes sharing a contact zone in Kenya, this study found no consistent link between diet and gut microbiome. Geography predicted diet, while species identity predicted microbiome composition instead.

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Unusual Suspects: Detection Probability Covaries With Vegetation Productivity and Rainfall for Camera Survey of African Leopards

Chataigner, B., Pilfold, N.W., Lenguya, L., Besnard, A.G., and Gimenez, O.

Using camera trap data from Loisaba Conservancy, this study tested six factors shaping leopard detectability, finding vegetation productivity and rainfall significantly affect encounter and image-capture rates, offering a path to more reliable population estimates for this elusive species.

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News Brief



Mpala Teams Cycle and Run in Support of Girls' Education at Race 4 Daraja

Category: Community & Education

Two teams from Mpala, one cycling and one running, took part in Daraja Academy's annual fundraising event, Race 4 Daraja. Alongside students from Daraja Academy, the Mpala teams joined the race to help raise funds in support of girls' education. With many Mpala employees being Daraja Academy alumni, the cause remains especially meaningful to the Centre and its wider community.



Mpala Early-Career Networking and Skill-Building Sessions Continue to Grow

Category: Professional development & mentorship

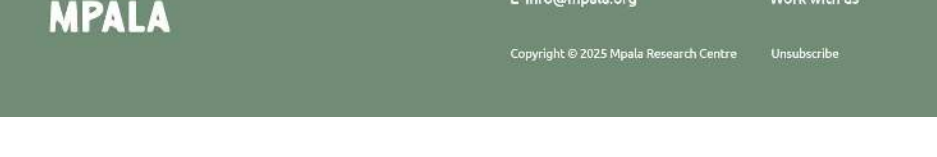
Throughout June, Mpala hosted three more Early-Career Networking and Skill-Building Sessions as the program continued to expand, settling into a weekly schedule for the summer. Led by Dr. Daniel Rubenstein, Dr. Jim Labisko, and Dr. Megan Sullivan, the sessions explored Mpala's history and future, pathways into academia, and the power of networking respectively, providing valuable insights and professional development opportunities for early-career researchers.



Clifford House Renovations and Upgrades Completed

Category: Infrastructure

Following several months of extensive renovations and upgrades, Mpala's Infrastructure team has successfully completed the refurbishment of Clifford House. The project transformed the building into a modern, comfortable, and fully functional residence, enhancing accommodation for researchers and visitors while supporting Mpala's long-term commitment to maintaining high-quality facilities across the Centre.



Princeton Postdoc and Students Represent Mpala at Lewa Safari Marathon 10km

Category: Community

A team from Princeton University represented Mpala Research Centre at the Lewa Safari Marathon 10km Executive Race. Postdoctoral researcher Isla Duporge and students Ana Maria, Wilson Moyer, Caspar Smith, and Jon Dong delivered a great performance, finishing in 1st, 5th, 9th, and 19th places. The Lewa Safari Races raise funds to support wildlife conservation and community development initiatives across Kenya.

Support MPALA



Africa's painted dogs need more than protection. They need a landscape that works for everyone.

African wild dogs disappeared from Laikipia for decades. Since 2000, the Samburu-Laikipia Wild Dog Project has worked to bring them back by fostering coexistence between wild dogs, people, and livestock entirely outside protected areas. The work is ongoing, and every contribution helps keep it that way.

Supporting Mpala helps ensure that Mpala can continue to facilitate critical research like the Samburu-Laikipia Wild Dog Project.

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