PARDAMAT
CONSERVATION AREA

A NEW MODEL OF COEXISTENCE

People. Wildlife. Livestock

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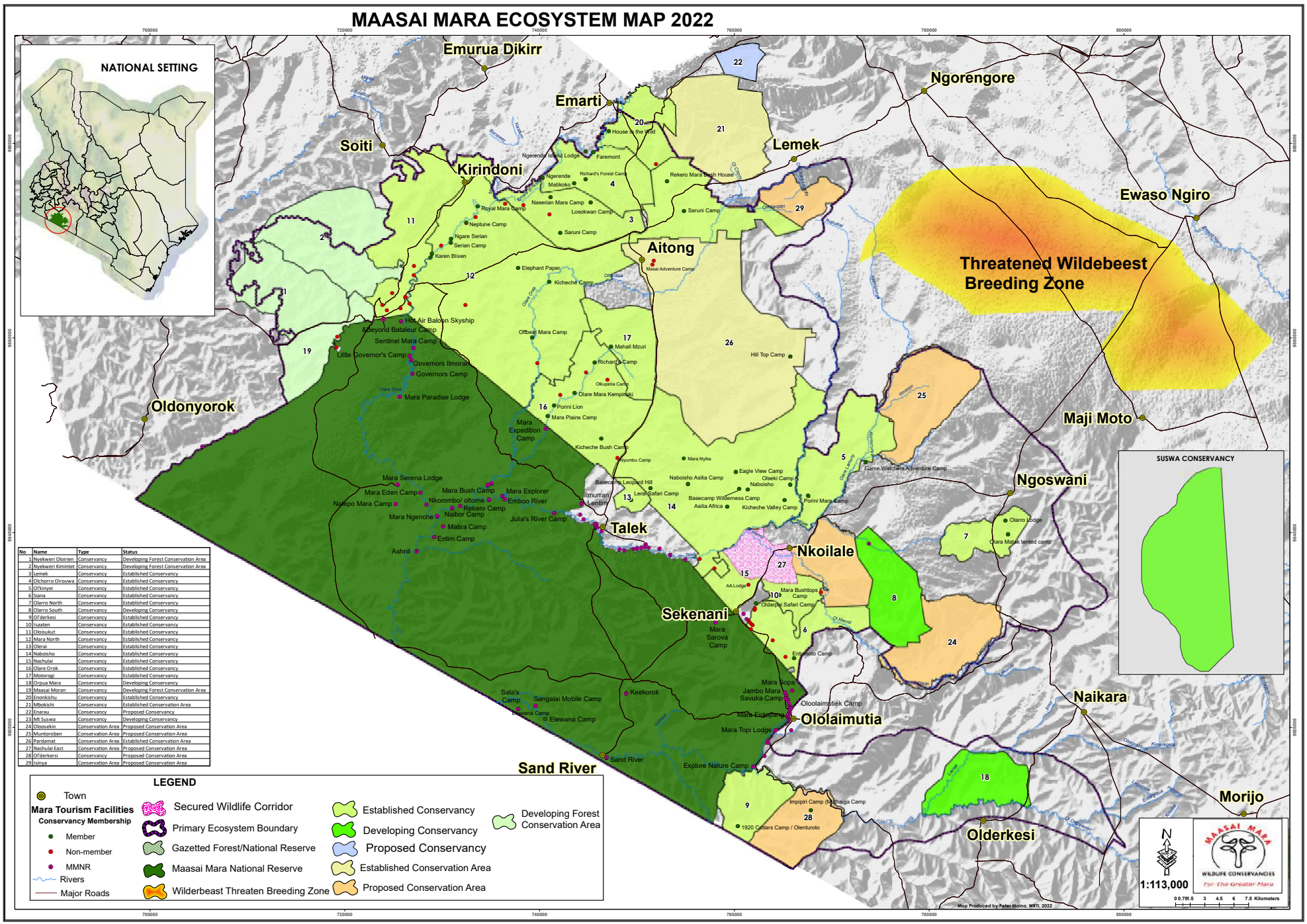
MAASAI MARA ECOSYSTEM MAP 2022



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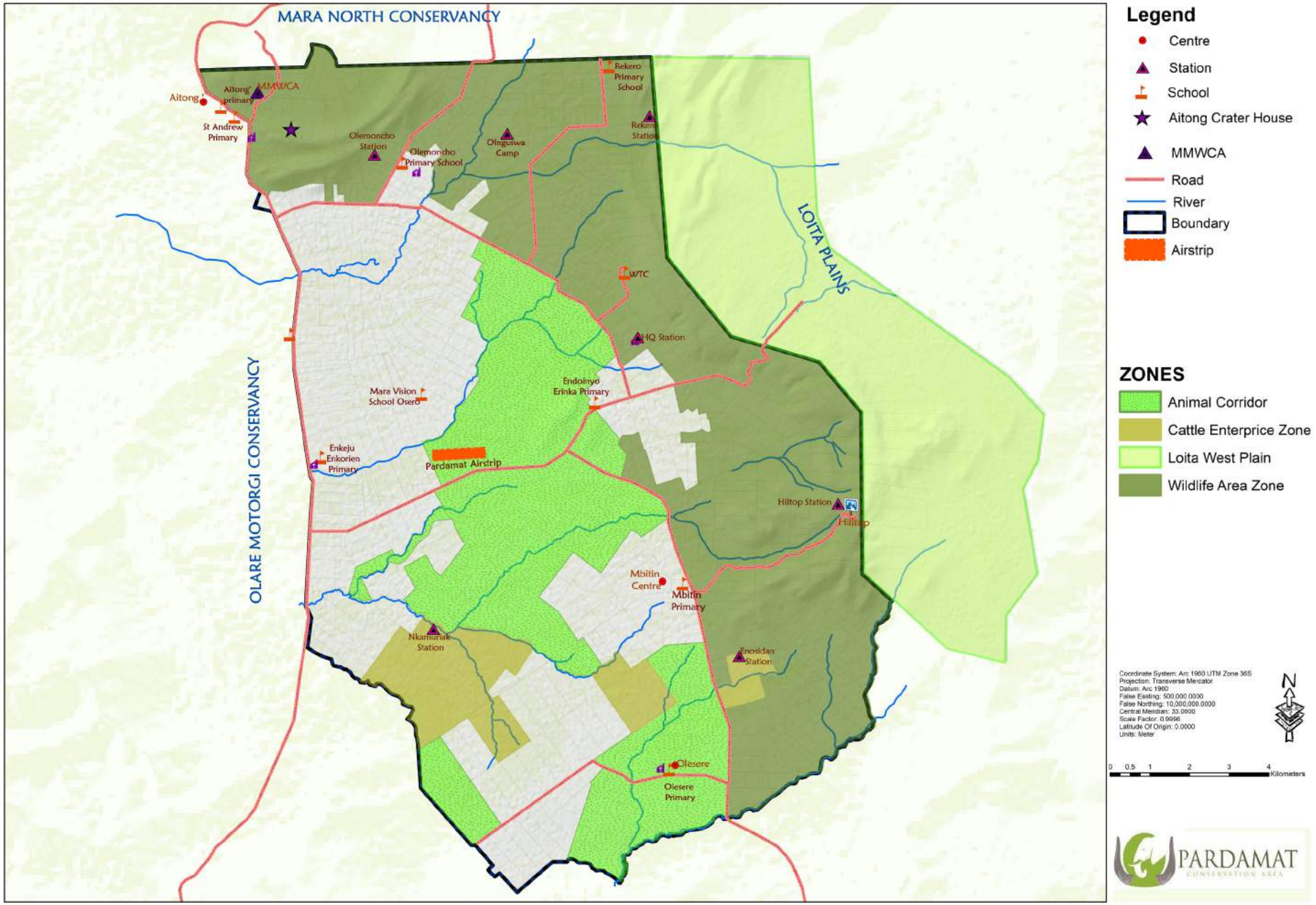
1	Nyekweri Olorien	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
2	Nyekweri Kimintet	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
3	Lemek	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
4	Olchorro Oirouwa	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
5	Ol'kinyei	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
6	Siana	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
7	Olarro North	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
8	Olarro South	Conservancy	Developing Conservancy
9	Ol'derkesi	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
10	Isaaten	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
11	Oloisukut	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
12	Mara North	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
13	Olerai	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
14	Naboisho	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
15	Nashulai	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
16	Olare Orok	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
17	Motorogi	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
18	Orpua Mara	Conservancy	Developing Conservancy
19	Maasai Moran	Conservancy	Developing Forest Conservation Area
20	Enonkishu	Conservancy	Established Conservancy
21	Mbokishi	Conservancy	Established Conservation Area
22	Enarau	Conservancy	Proposed Conservancy
23	Mt Suswa	Conservancy	Developing Conservancy
24	Oloosekin	Conservation Area	Proposed Conservation Area
25	Muntoroben	Conservation Area	Proposed Conservation Area
26	Pardamat	Conservation Area	Established Conservation Area
27	Nashulai East	Conservation Area	Proposed Conservation Area
28	Ol'derkesi	Conservancy	Proposed Conservation Area
29	Isinya	Conservation Area	Proposed Conservation Area

PARDAMAT CONSERVATION AREA



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Contents

Acronyms

BCEF-K	Basecamp Explorer Foundation Kenya
KGS	Koyiaki Guiding School
KM	Kilometre
KWS	Kenya Wildlife Service
MMWCA	Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association
PCA	Pardamat Conservation Area
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTC	Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara

Pardamat Conservation Area:
A New Approach to Biodiversity Protection

In Kenya's world-famous Maasai Mara, a ground-breaking model for coexistence offers a blueprint to tackle the urgent challenges of shrinking spaces for wildlife and overstretched resources made worse by climate change.

The Pardamat Conservation Area (PCA), using a unique dual-use approach to protect land for people with their livestock and wildlife, is a community-owned and led conservation initiative in partnership with the not-for-profit-trust, Basecamp Explorer Foundation – Kenya (BCEF-K) and other partners and stakeholders.

Finding ways for people, their livestock on which they depend, and wildlife to coexist and share the same space is a complex challenge. Still, Pardamat's innovative coexistence conservation model is flourishing, protecting irreplaceable wildlife corridors while generating economic opportunities.

It is one of the newest and largest community-protected zones - areas known as conservancies - in the Greater Mara ecosystem.
Unlike other conservancies in the Maasai Mara, where tourism investors lease land set aside space for wildlife only with managed grazing for livestock, in Pardamat, people live with their livestock and wildlife.

The conservancies' umbrella body in the Maasai Mara (Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association - MMWCA) and the community requested the Basecamp Explorer Foundation to help strengthen PCA, following its instrumental role in establishing the flourishing neighbouring Mara Naboisho Conservancy.

The Conservancy and its landowners developed a lease agreement that appreciates the multiple-use nature of the land. However, the nature of land use cannot attract premium lease rates, necessitating exploring other sustainability measures. One such measure is a state-of-the-art college—the Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara (WTC)—providing youth vocational training and awareness building for a more sustainable future and generating income for the conservation programme.

This dual approach of the college and PCA offers sustainable support to a community working to protect a remarkable ecosystem.

Pardamat's Significance

Pardamat builds on the long legacy of community conservancies in the Maasai Mara, the unfenced patchwork of lands leased from Maasai landowners surrounding the 373,129.1-acre-government-protected Maasai Mara National Reserve. The complex patchwork of 24 community conservancies, crucial for ensuring the stability of the greater Maasai Mara ecosystem, all work to safeguard wildlife while offering economic opportunities to the people whose land it is.

Pardamat, with 64,000 acres of rolling grasslands, hills, and bush, is not only one of the biggest of those conservancies. It is also exceptional for its innovative mixed-use model of livestock grazing, settlement, and wildlife conservation, which take place side-by-side.

Pardamat, home to around 850 families, is the first large Conservancy in the Maasai Mara, where the community stays in the wildlife protection area they have created. Many of those families living in Pardamat settled there after renting out their plots of land in other conservancies for wildlife.

However, it later emerged that PCA is critical for the health of the greater Maasai Mara area, as it has three wildlife corridors and is home to essential and rare wildlife species, including the wild dog, the pangolin and certain raptors species, thus presenting tourism potential. Further, the Conservancy is a crucial source of fresh water for people and wildlife.

"What we are doing is not making people leave Pardamat, but encouraging them to leave their land open for wildlife and to share the grazing with them," notes Johnson Soit, a local primary school head teacher in Pardamat who chairs the PCA Landowners Committee.

Pardamat covers

64,000 acre

of rolling grasslands, hills, and bush

Home to around

850 Families

> Pardamat has important wildlife corridors, without which Mara's ecological integrity would be at risk,

says Dr Irene Amoke

the Kenya Wildlife Trust executive director.

Daniel further observes that wildlife populations that left PCA when their habitat was disturbed have returned because of the conservation efforts. "We see elephants now spending most of their time in the Pardamat Hills," he notes.

The Conservancy is also home to the highly endangered pangolin. "We are very proud to have pangolin on our land," says Jeremiah Kereto, 25, Pangolin Project volunteer, working to protect the unique scaly mammals. Jeremiah helps monitor the rarely sighted animals – he has seen three in the Conservancy – and raises community awareness about them.

The biodiversity found on Pardamat lands is significant, with herds of elephants and giraffes, zebra and antelope grazing amongst domestic livestock. A pack of Painted Dogs, also known as African wild dogs, have returned and taken up residence in Pardamat after years of being absent.

Why a New Approach to Conservation

Old ways of managing land are changing at breakneck speed. In the past half- century, the transition from a system of communally-owned land shared by all who live there – people, livestock and wildlife – to individual land tenure has seen the once open rangeland divided into separate and private plots.

As settlements have grown, people have demarcated their land with wire fencing, blocking off routes for wildlife. And yet, there is no more room to accommodate people to set aside large areas exclusively for wildlife.

Lack of opportunities also presents a challenge: nearly two-thirds of the population are young, and many are unemployed, with estimates showing unemployment rates as high as 80%.

As the impacts of climate change become more acute, driving the potential for conflict as cattle herders struggle with changing weather patterns, the need for large- scale livelihood improvements becomes ever more critical.

All these factors make it necessary to employ out-of-the-box ideas to solve challenges. The community drives these ideas: landowners have a landowners' committee that makes critical decisions on conservancy governance. The Conservancy also has thematic subcommittees that allow the landowners to make decisions on important issues regarding the Conservancy's management.

The Journey

2016

Through their conservancies umbrella body, MMWCA, landowners approach BCEF, which had earned a reputation for supporting Maasai communities in establishing PCA.

A United States Agency for International Development (USAID) grant supports setting up infrastructure, including a conservancy headquarters and paying initial staff salaries. With that established, the Basecamp Explorer Foundation could start the key work of agreeing to lease land from the landowners.

2018

Land leasing starts with priority given to the rugged ridge of hills, the water source, a wildlife zone, and wildlife corridors. BCEF supports leasing an initial 5,500 acres for four years with support from LGT Venture Philanthropy.

2019

BCEF supports leasing an additional 10,000 acres with the support of its partners, among them the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and extends support to operations and co-funds defencing with USAID.

2023

PCA leases 19,141 acres from 329 landowners, nearly half of the area it aims to lease eventually.

Freedom of Movement:

Bringing Down Fences

The key to protecting the biodiversity in Pardamat is ensuring major corridors remain open for wildlife to move in freely alongside the residents' cattle, sheep, and goats.

Before Pardamat Conservation Area began its work, the land available to wildlife was rapidly shrinking. Around 2014, people began to put up fences, a trend that became popular across a wide area. What was once open grassland – individually owned plots, but without barriers between the areas – was rapidly divided by wire fencing, some electric with powerful bursts.

When one landowner erected fencing, their neighbours, keeping up with the people next door, worried that their cattle seemed more at risk – so they also invested in posts and wires.

It is the job of Gideon Pesi, the PCA community liaison officer, to persuade landowners to remove their fences to allow wildlife to move as it had always done. People depend on their land and livestock for all their income, so convincing them to change is challenging. But Gideon knows his community: he once herded cattle barefoot across Pardamat as a boy before studying project management in Nairobi and then returning to his home area.

"People invested considerable money into erecting their fences, so in addition to the monthly payment, when a landowner agrees to take down their fence, the conservancy pays for what they spent on the infrastructure," Gideon says.

Yet, while some landowners are hesitant to let anyone tell them what is best for their land, the conservancy officers are trying to open it up. And so, Gideon has to persuade. He has to demonstrate why conserving land is a good idea for everybody.

"The ideas of conservation, of protecting wildlife and the environment, of ensuring the health of land are concepts at the heart of every Maasai," Gideon says. "But many people still fear it is a trick to take their land: that conservation is just the work of outsiders to come and buy their land."

One of the landowners, and among the earliest conservancy members, is Wilson Sairowua.

"We wanted to have good grass for our animals, and that's why we decided to erect fences," Wilson reminisces, appreciating that the detrimental consequence of the barriers had been "different from their initial intentions."

By December 2023, PCA had removed 434.72 kilometres of fences on 5,000 acres.

434.72 kms of fence removed

With fences gone, wildlife species have returned. Many grazing animals, from antelope to zebra, happily move with the domestic flocks.
Some antelopes come closer to people's homes at night because they feel safer than being out in the bush where lions prowl in the dark.

Makanika Ole Kumum, 78, has seen the landscape change dramatically over the decades. In 2020, he pulled down fences around his 30-acre plot, which lies close to a favourite hangout of a wild dog pack, despite fearing wild animals would attack his livestock.

"In exchange for the risk, I get a payment at the end of the month," the 78-year-old declares, sitting outside his small bungalow in the centre of grazing grasslands.

"It is a balance; if wildlife brings benefits, in terms of the money we earn, then we can reduce the cattle numbers," he says.

"I said if conservation means school for the children, jobs for our young, better roads and good water supplies, then ok, I will pull down my fences," he reasons.

The Conservancy has used the uprooted poles and wires to protect small patches of planted trees within schools in Pardamat that form part of the efforts to re-green Pardamat, while some of the poles provided firewood for cooking meals for the children.

The wildlife numbers are beginning to rebound, and the lush hills and rangelands of Pardamat are, yet again, a favourite home for many wildlife species. The outlook offers hope for potential tourism investments, a key revenue stream for funding the PCA operations.

Securing Land for Conservation through Lease Payment

At the PCA headquarters, for now, a small rented tin-roof home turned into offices, livestock herder Loki Pesi is signing a 15-year lease agreement for his 40-acre block of land where he has some of his 30 cows and 80 sheep and goats.

Loki's block is in an important area, a largely wooded zone dubbed by conservancy officials as the "maternity ward for elephants". He has land elsewhere, so he will lease his block of land outright to Pardamat and move his livestock there. Other landowners will sign leases for half the amount, meaning they remove the fences encircling their land but keep their livestock grazing on their land, as they have always done. Rents paid for that are half the price.

"I saw people getting a monthly fee for their land, and with it, they can pay the school fees and other expenses," Loki notes.
Armed with the lease documents, he takes off to open his first-ever bank account, where the PCA will send his lease payments.

There is a waiting list for people to sign leases, with the conservancy managers targeting those with land in critical zones, especially in the wildlife corridors.

Terms of the lease are explained to the public at community meetings in Maa, the Maasai language, by Gideon Pesi.

While the landowners and the Conservancy are taking down fences, a landowner can still erect a fence within 10% of the area around their homestead and the enclosures where they keep livestock at night, for example.

An advocate of the high court of Kenya witnesses the lease signing and copies of the deal filed with the lands ministry.

The Hard Task of Winning People Over

Some landowners are holding out. It is a complex argument to persuade herders that removing fences and allowing their herds to move benefits their livestock. Ole Kereto Tobiko keeps the cows that his family milk on his Pardamat land. Yet he has already leased land he owns in other conservancies in Mara – areas agreed under the terms to be for wildlife alone. Tobiko explains that, in the neighbouring Conservancy of Mara North, he earns a monthly rent from leasing his land there.

“I am ‘milking’ the wild animals in Mara North with the monthly income I get there,” he remarks. “Here, in Pardamat, I am milking my livestock, so if the wildlife does not produce, I have my herd here.”

Even though in Pardamat, under the mixed-use rules of the Conservancy, he could receive a monthly income while keeping his herds still on his land, he has yet to decide about leasing his Pardamat parcel.

“I am not against conservation,” he announces, “I am just waiting to see how the situation develops.”

That wait-and-see approach is common among landowners. Steve Olkumum, a Basecamp Explorer guide from Pardamat and a conservancy member, says he has friendly debates with fellow herders, persuading them to change their minds.

He is highly doubtful that the grass the wildlife eats impacts the cattle since the wildebeest and zebras have all the space to move right across the Mara as they choose. “Wild animals would not stay for long in a heavily grazed land where there was not enough grass to go around,” he explains.

Part of winning people over includes ensuring women, most of whom do not directly receive lease fees due to landowner ownership, are included. The Conservancy works with several people to build the capacity of women in enterprise to ensure they can tap into opportunities in the tourism industry and beyond.

Pardamat Conservation Area has equipped me with skills in table banking and running small businesses. As a result, I am now making money, supporting my family to pay school fees, and buying essential items for myself and my children.

Meeyu Kisemei

Member, PCA

Protecting Livestock

Part of winning people entails protecting their livestock—a primary livelihood source. As wildlife returns to Pardamat in ever greater numbers, the risk of predators killing livestock rises, too. Many Pardamat residents rely on the traditional defence: herding their livestock into small corrals at night known as bomas, circles of cut thorn bushes and fence-posts guarded by dogs. They offer some protection – but still have weak points.

Tiapukel Ole Solol, an elderly herder, describes how hyenas broke into his boma one night while he slept, killing his herd of over 150 sheep and goats.

“It was terrible, and I was so worried about the future,” he he intimates. From the community, his neighbours all came to donate one or two of their animals to Ole Solol to restore his herd.

Ole Solol has yet to sign a lease with the conservancy for his land, partly because it is not in the targeted priority zone where the conservancy is directing the available funds to open up wildlife corridors. However, the conservancy helped him erect a predator-proof boma.

The tennis-court-sized enclosure, weaving together wooden posts and chicken-wire netting, includes a topping of a slack rubber cable that he believes deters leopards.

“Since the Conservancy built for me a predator-proof-boma, I have not lost a single animal to attack,” he notes, adding that the boma was protection enough and that he had no plans to fence the rest of his parcel.

“My children have jobs in conservation, so I am happy to have the wildlife here,” he says, waving towards where several giraffes grazed in a nearby grove of trees.

Ole Solo is one of the beneficiaries of 80 predator-proof bomas that conservancy staff have helped to erect, supporting the community in return for protecting wildlife. Research shows that the rate of herders reporting livestock lost to predators dropped from 85% with traditional bomas to just over 30% with predator-proof bomas.[1]

80

predator-proof bomas erected

Livestock lost to predators without predator-proof bomas

85%

30%

Livestock lost with predator-proof bomas.

[1]Pimm, Stuart. (2017). Boma fortification is cost-effective at reducing predation of livestock in a high-predation zone in the Western Mara Region, Kenya. Conservation Evidence. 14. 32.

Preventing Human-Wildlife Conflict through Water Management

The Conservancy is helping coordinate the community to manage a critical resource: water. This coordination is important to ensure equitable access and better management of a scarce resource.

For Pardmat, the crucial source of the Koiyaki Spring lies at the base of the hills. In 2020, the Basecamp Explorer Foundation facilitated PCA to take water from the spring closer to the people using a gravity-fed pipeline. One pipe runs six kilometres west and the other three kilometres south to designated communal water points to support communities who would otherwise have to trek to the spring to collect water.

Upholding Conservancy's Integrity

Corporal Geoffrey Njampit, pushing through the tangled bushes at the foot of the Pardamat Hills, led a patrol of six men and women, part of a team of 27 rangers, dressed in neat green fatigues, complete with an embroidered badge of the Conservancy on their chest.

Kneeling, the conservancy ranger peers at the scuffs in the dust, marking the tracks of animals as they patrol along a wildlife corridor, land leased by the Conservancy to allow animals to move freely. He scours the ground, searching for signs of a pack of endangered wild dogs sighted recently nearby.

This time, the pizza-sized footprints are those of a herd of six elephants, who had been in the shade of a grove of yellow-barked fever trees.

"Our daily job is ensuring the security of the area and monitoring the wildlife," Geoffrey states.

The rangers have had a clear impact: two years preceding the formation of the force in 2016; there were more than two dozen elephants killed on the hills of Pardamat, some by poachers directly for their ivory tusks. Since 2016, there have been no recorded cases.

Corporal Geoffrey Njampit pulls out his phone to take photographs of the elephant prints and dung, which he would later upload to the WildApp with details of estimated animal numbers, movement, and GPS locations, providing daily tracking of animals.

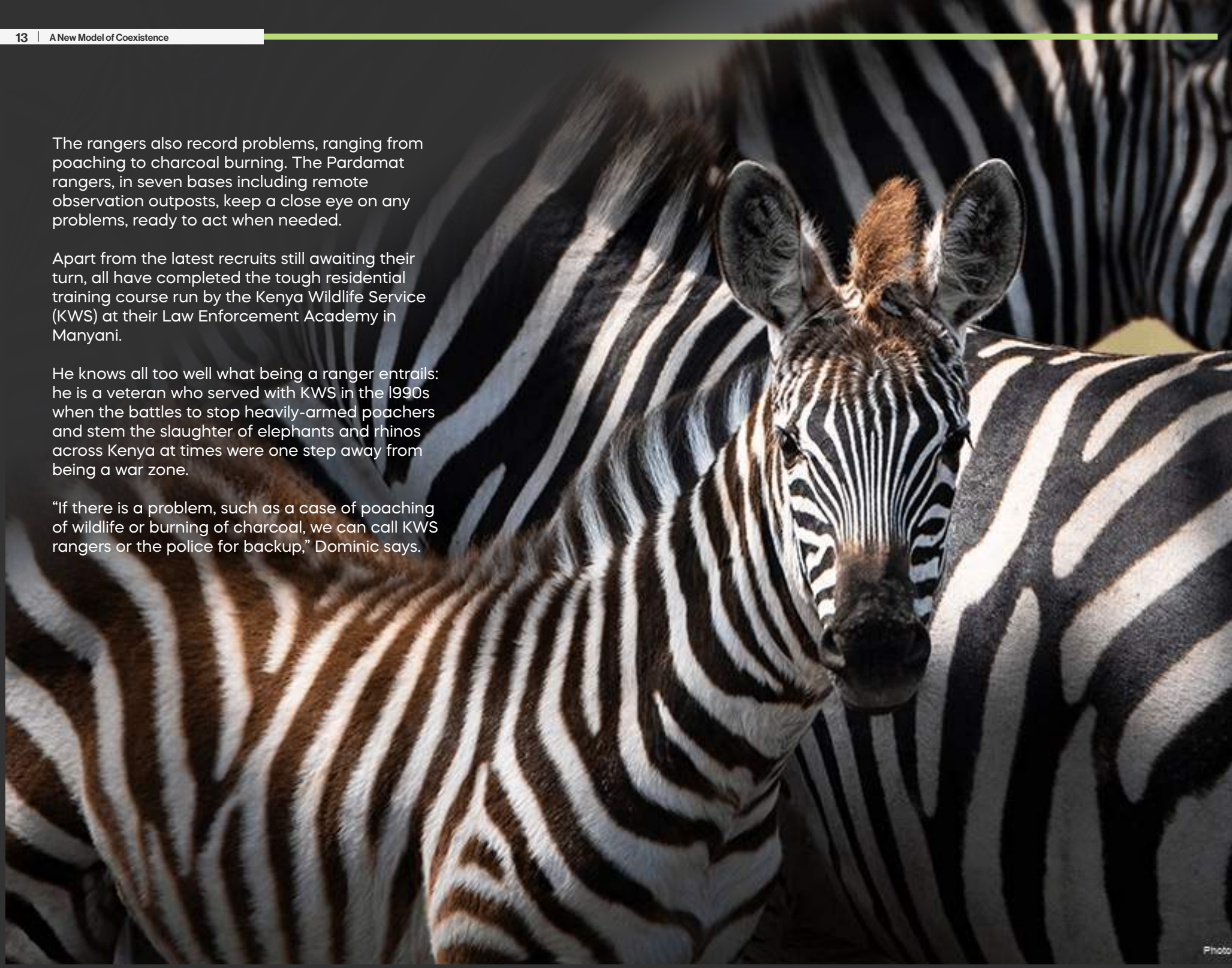
"We are community rangers, so we do not have rifles as there is no need," remarks Dominic Sitany, PCA Warden and Chief Ranger.

The rangers also record problems, ranging from poaching to charcoal burning. The Pardamat rangers, in seven bases including remote observation outposts, keep a close eye on any problems, ready to act when needed.

Apart from the latest recruits still awaiting their turn, all have completed the tough residential training course run by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) at their Law Enforcement Academy in Manyani.

He knows all too well what being a ranger entrails: he is a veteran who served with KWS in the l990s when the battles to stop heavily-armed poachers and stem the slaughter of elephants and rhinos across Kenya at times were one step away from being a war zone.

“If there is a problem, such as a case of poaching of wildlife or burning of charcoal, we can call KWS rangers or the police for backup,” Dominic says.



Conservation Heroines:

Pardamat Women Rangers

The Conservancy is also changing attitudes and impacting another vital issue.

“In the past, the culture of the Maasai was that no women had formal jobs,” observes Diana Molela, 25, a mother of two girls, who started work as a Pardamat ranger in 2021. “But women have the right to go to work, and we are showing people what we can do.”

For Diana, one of four women rangers in the team, part of the work is demonstrating they support the community and explaining what the Conservancy is doing.

“We are always out in the community,” says Diana, dressed in green fatigues and a floppy, wide-brimmed bush hat.

“It is part of our work to reduce human-wildlife conflict; we all come from the area and cattle herding families, so we know the challenges they face.”

The female rangers are also helping win over other women in the community to support the conservation efforts, explaining how the leasing of land by the Conservancy provides a monthly rent income they can use to support their families.

“We listen and hear the challenges the women are facing,” says Gloria Seleina Nkoitoi, 23, another ranger and a mother of a son and a daughter. “And as we are women, they listen to us too.”

Gloria, her polished black boots gleaming, says she was pleased to be doing a job she felt was making a difference.

“I am proud to be a ranger and to be helping to protect the environment,” she concludes.

Potential Revenue Stream:
Pardamat Cattle Enterprise

On the grasslands of Pardamat, keeping a wary eye out for a lion with a spear, Elijah Kipeen is looking after a herd of 80 fat cattle. The livestock, however, is not his: he earns a salary to guard the herd owned by PCA.

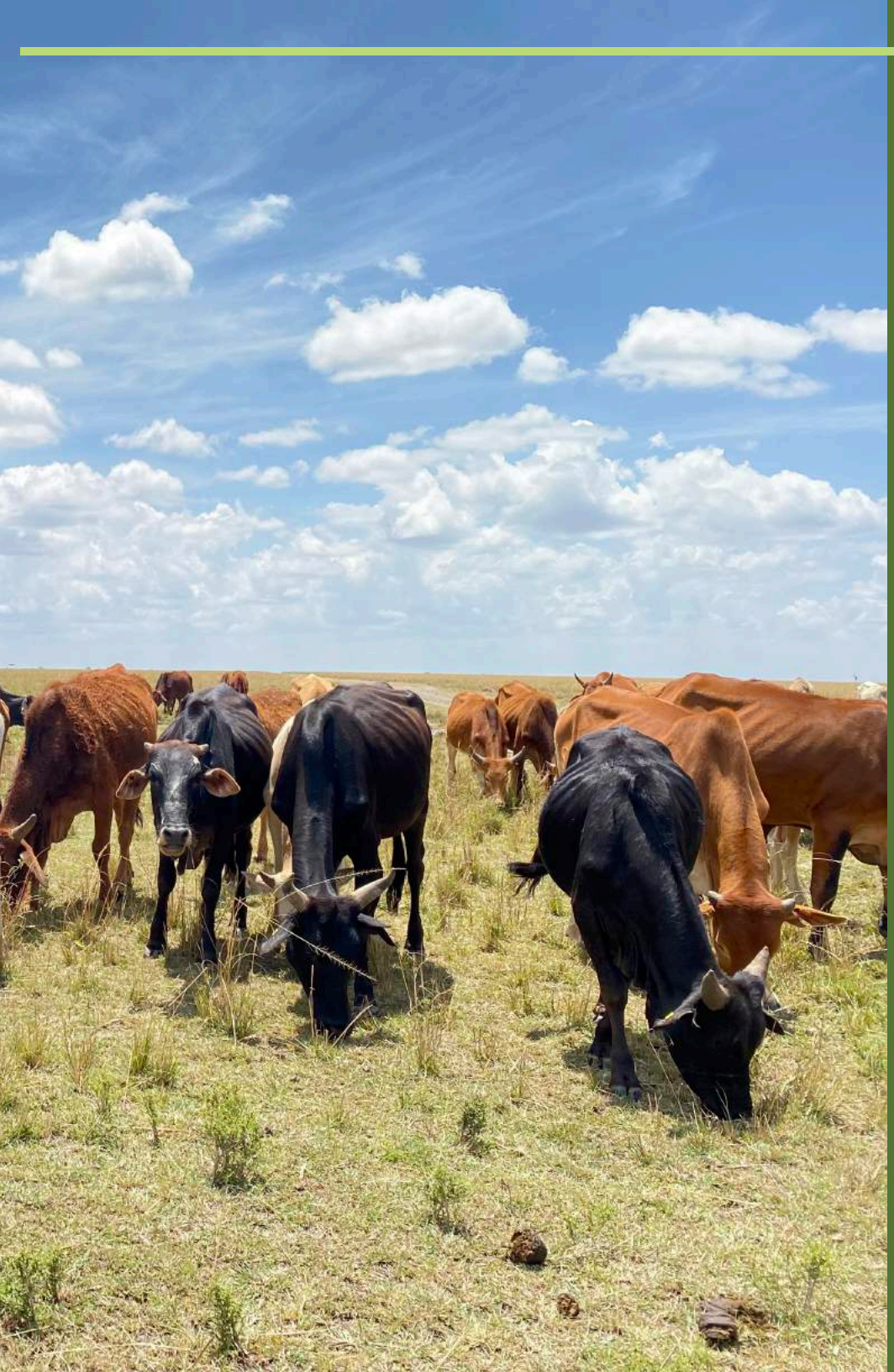
So, without income from tourism facilities, for now, at least, Pardamat is finding ways to generate revenue through a livestock fattening programme: buying thin cattle and feeding them up on fresh grass to sell for profit.

“Herders see conservancies as being for wildlife alone, but Pardamat is different,” observes Kentui Parmuat, the chairperson of the Conservancy’s livestock management committee, and himself a herder.

“The conservancy is not trying to seize land for wildlife at the expense of the traditional cattle-herding way of life; rather, it shows people that we are definitely not against livestock,” he notes.

The Conservancy began cattle operations in 2020 and has managed herds of between 80 and 150 steers.

“We would like to expand our production to 300 steers annually, but we have to increase slowly as the programme’s success is ultimately dependent on rainfall and the amount of grazing, so we face challenges when there is drought,” says Raphael Kool, the Pardamat Rangelands Manager.



Thinking Sustainability:

The Future of Pardamat Conservation Area

Land is expensive, so you must have a high-end tourist product to support the leases. For the Mara conservancies, income comes from the tourism revenue from the visitors who come to marvel at the wildlife, and the lease payments are high because the land is set aside for wildlife only, with limited or controlled grazing. Since the mixed-use model of Pardamat means landowners remain with their herds on the land rather than exclusively for wildlife, lease payments have to be lower for financial sustainability. However, to succeed, conservation must still be an attractive choice for the people who live on the land.

"That means you have to add other benefits directly linked to resilient livelihoods: infrastructure, water, primary schools, for example," says Svein, "and that means it comes with a high upfront fundraising need to ensure success."

Besides the funding needed for social programmes, there is a need for bridge funding to pay the leases until the Conservancy has tourism operators financing the leases. The Basecamp Explorer Foundation - Kenya is currently meeting the cost of lease payments. However, the Conservancy will require more resources to meet the cost of leasing land as more people sign leases, especially if the tourism investors take longer to set up facilities at PCA. The Foundation is donor-funded, so as soon as it is practicable, tourism partners, the first amongst them being Saruni-Basecamp, will be able to take on part of those leases by investing in tourism camps to ensure viability in the long run.

Conservation through Education:
The Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara

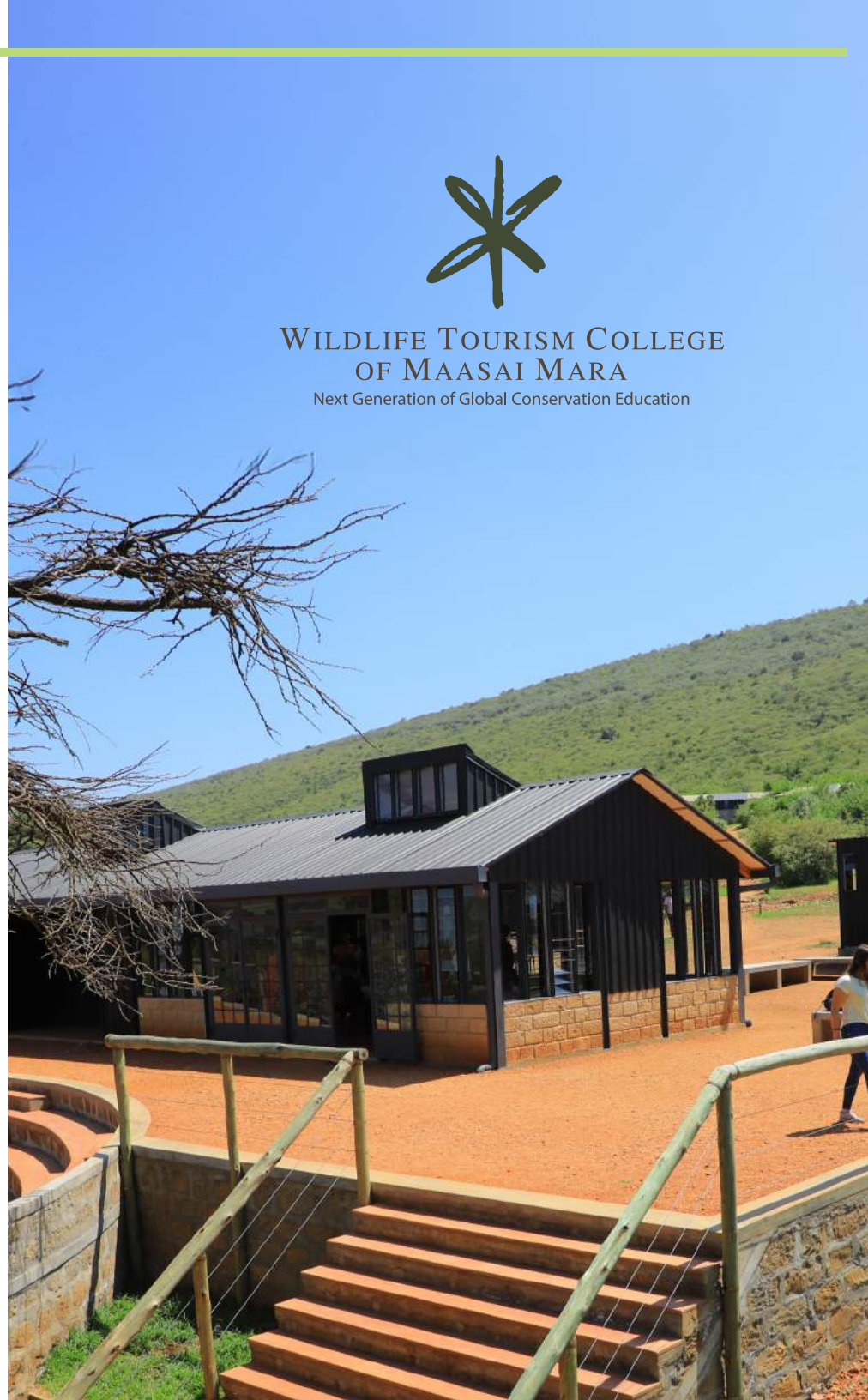
A key component of sustainability for PCA is the creation in the heart of Pardamat of the Wildlife Tourism College of Maasai Mara, a pioneering higher education centre training young people in the skills needed to get jobs supporting conservation in the Maasai Mara – and to generate income.

The modern multi-purpose community-owned centre provides training, skills, and employment opportunities for the people of this land to secure the long-term future of the remarkable global natural treasure.

Built at the foot of the Pardamat Hills, the centre brings together some of the latest ideas, with students learning in the actual nature their academic courses focus on.

“We have built a college to the highest of standards: top quality equipment, teaching staff, and, with both local and international partnerships, lifting WTC to the calibre of an international institution,” says Morris Nabaala, the WTC principal, who comes from the Mara.

It is a community-owned college based in the community and for the community, but with a global reach.



"Graduates will have skills, practical and theoretical, including internships during the course to ready them for immediate employment," Morris adds.

The college opened its doors in May 2023 to the first cohort of 40 students—16 female and 24 male. It offers government-accredited vocational certificate courses ranging from safari guiding to tourism industry skills, including camp and hospitality management. The college also offers a two-year diploma in wildlife management, with plans to introduce a diploma in environmental management. The courses provide students with information for the practical running of conservancies and ways to mitigate the growing impact of climate change.

The college aims not only to become self-sustaining but also to generate income for the wider conservancy as soon as possible.

"The college addresses a core challenge—youth unemployment," Svein says. "Our innovative model means that as we do this, we are also supporting the community by contributing to income through the lease payments."

Of the 40 Kenyan students each year, at least 80% are earmarked for local young people from across the Maasai Mara hoping to work in tourism and conservation. The rest of the spots are open to students from across Kenya.

In addition, international students who join WTC will help generate income for its operations. The college also offers a base for academic researchers from across the world studying the Maasai Mara, creating another opportunity for income generation. Additionally, the college has created jobs and business opportunities for the Pardamat community.

"We source food for the students from as locally as possible," says WTC manager Geoffrey Ouma, who has previously run several top-end international large hotels in the Mara.

Roots in Guiding School

The Wildlife Tourism College builds upon the work of the Koiyaki Guiding School (KGS), which began in 2005 in the neighbouring Mara Conservancy of Naibosho.

Training occurred in a cluster of simple single-story block classrooms and dormitories, painted green and blending into the bush. The School trained 377 guides – 293 male and 84 female.

“Those guides are champions for tourism and conservation working across the Mara and Kenya at large,” says Morris, who ran KGS before transitioning to WTC.

At the establishment of KGS, few of the people employed in tourism at the Maasai Mara were Maasai.

“We wanted to ensure that the guiding role was in their (Maasai’s) hands,” states Ron Beaton, who played a major role in setting up the KGS and was also one of the early pioneers in establishing safari tourism camps in the Mara.

“For many of the Maasai students, they already knew all about life in the bush: they were experts in tracking. The key focus was communication because so much of guiding is communication.”

It was also Ron who urged that the guides should not dress in khaki uniforms commonly worn by other safari guides elsewhere but to keep proudly wearing their iconic colourful Maasai dress of red-checked blankets, a symbol of their identity.

For Steve Olkumum, a guide who has worked for Basecamp Explorer in Naibosho for the past decade, KGS offered him the chance to pursue his dreams.

As a young herder growing up in Pardamat, he would see safari vehicles driving past, with guides and drivers from outside of the Mara.

“I didn’t think that was right,” he asserts. “My father wanted me to be a teacher or a doctor, but I wanted to be a guide to show visitors the animals of my home. I have always been passionate about wildlife and wanted to represent my community.”

After 16 years of KGS producing guides alone, prospective employers were looking for extra training to fill employment gaps in the market.

The Wildlife Tourism College addresses those needs. Relocating the School and incorporating it into the larger WTC campus in Pardamat has widened its reach to attract pupils from across the Mara and beyond. The Koyiaki infrastructure now serves as the headquarters of the host conservancy Mara Naboisho.

Blending into Nature

Approaching the new College, it takes an expert eye to spot the dark-coloured roofs nestled among the trees. Even up close, it merges into the bush. The blueprint was to fit the institution into the surrounding environment with as little disturbance as possible.

At the heart of the College is a circular open-air amphitheatre for discussions, debates and lectures. The theatre is just one of several areas across the College designed to encourage people to interact and swap ideas, a two-way exchange between local students and those from abroad.

“We wanted the design to bring people together,” says Ajas Mellbye, from Mellbye Arkitektur Interiør, who, along with fellow Norwegian architect Ingrid Bull from Bull Arkitekter, took a break from their usual large-scale commercial businesses in Oslo to design the plans pro bono.

A light-filled circular two-storey tower forms the library and study space, providing sweeping views across the conservancy.
The classrooms draw inspiration from traditional Kenyan classroom design with added touches – including ceiling dormer windows cut in to provide extra light and natural cooling ventilation. Their design allows flexibility for the potential changing needs of the college.

“We designed WTC to have as light an environmental impact as possible,” offers Ingrid.

Accommodation is in canvas tent dormitories, with a solid construction of a wash and toilet blocks attached. Wide shaded wooden veranda at the tents’ entrances provide another area for students to meet.

The College is in the wild; the thick bushes and trees between the buildings are full of birdsong at dawn and dusk. The environment made constructing it challenging, but the builders say it was worth it.

“There were almost no bushes or trees cut down, apart from the absolute footprint of the building,” says Josh Knowles, who heads the main contractor, Highmark Construction.

“We experienced one of the biggest challenges when laying foundations and ensuring we preserved the vegetation: we had to have 10 men making sure that buffalo didn’t run us over,” Knowles intimates.

The classrooms’ roofs have gutters fixed that direct rainwater to an 80,000-litre catchment tank, a significant supplement to water drawn from a nearby spring, with plans for a potential borehole to be dug, depending on needs.

Further, more than two-thirds of electricity comes from its solar panels, with the potential to expand renewable sources with funding availability.

Practical Courses to Meet Industry Needs

While the old school offered guiding training alone, WTC covers four key areas. WTC has transformed the old KGS programme into a Nature Tour Guiding and Hosting certificate, a one-year course with internship placement covering natural history and ecological studies, and how to communicate that information.

Newly introduced in 2022 are camp and hospitality management courses, ranging from front office skills and housekeeping to food and service. In addition, WTC offers two-year programmes: one in Wildlife Management, which is currently running, and another in Environmental Management, which is yet to commence. The courses provide the technical know-how for a practical application to tackle the challenges, including mitigating human-wildlife conflicts, managing scarce natural resources and other challenges occasioned by climate change.

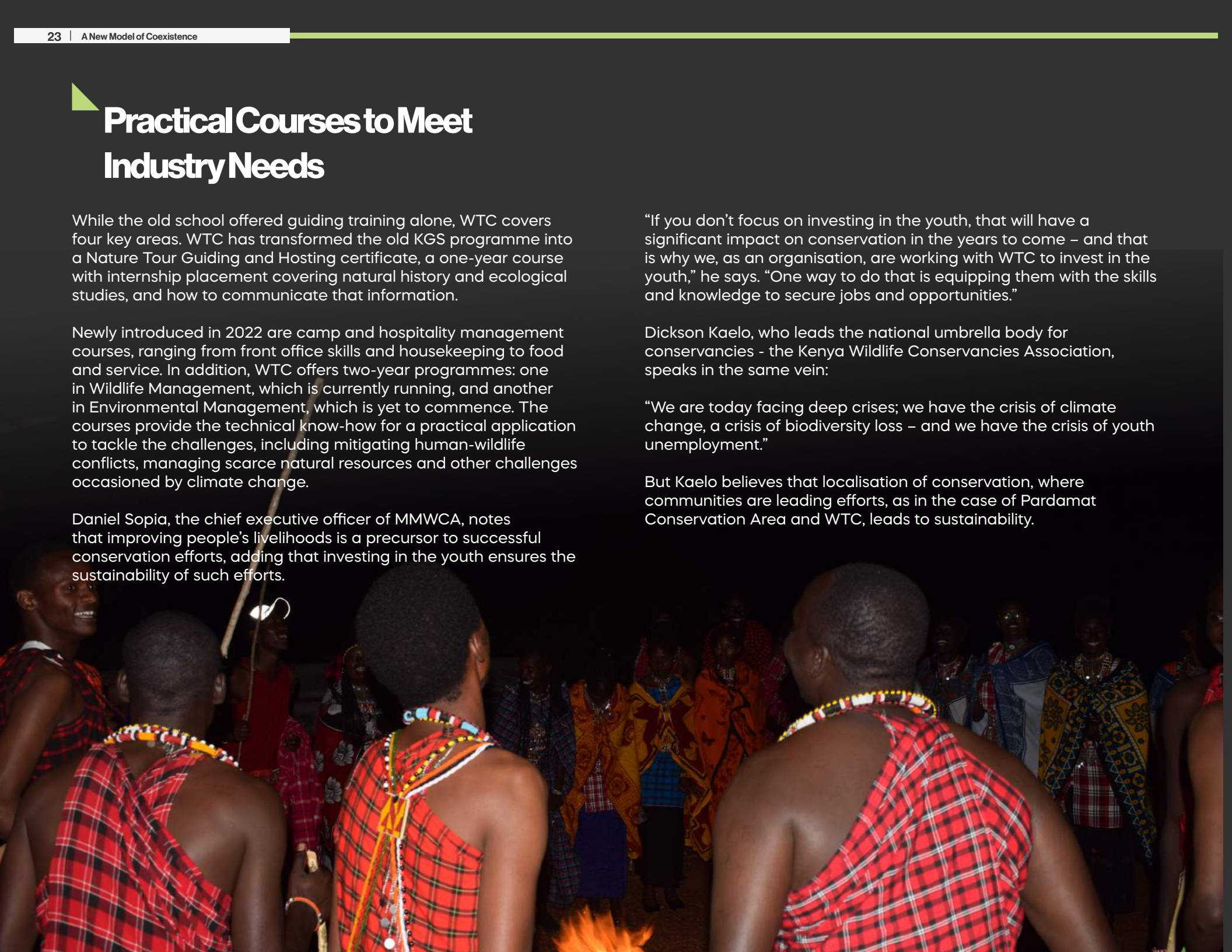
Daniel Sopia, the chief executive officer of MMWCA, notes that improving people's livelihoods is a precursor to successful conservation efforts, adding that investing in the youth ensures the sustainability of such efforts.

"If you don't focus on investing in the youth, that will have a significant impact on conservation in the years to come – and that is why we, as an organisation, are working with WTC to invest in the youth," he says. "One way to do that is equipping them with the skills and knowledge to secure jobs and opportunities."

Dickson Kaelo, who leads the national umbrella body for conservancies - the Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association, speaks in the same vein:

"We are today facing deep crises; we have the crisis of climate change, a crisis of biodiversity loss – and we have the crisis of youth unemployment."

But Kaelo believes that localisation of conservation, where communities are leading efforts, as in the case of Pardamat Conservation Area and WTC, leads to sustainability.



Locally Based, International Reach

The College classrooms' design allows international lecturers to teach remotely, enabling the institution to access learning resources and lecturers worldwide, with the WTC principal noting that they are collaborating with international colleges, universities and experts. The WTC partners include the Southern African Wildlife College, based in the Greater Kruger National Park, and the Wisconsin-based Madison Area Technical College in the United States.

Other strategic partners are Aarhus University in Denmark, Oxford Brookes in the United Kingdom and the United States, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, the Norwegian University of Life Science and Colorado State University.

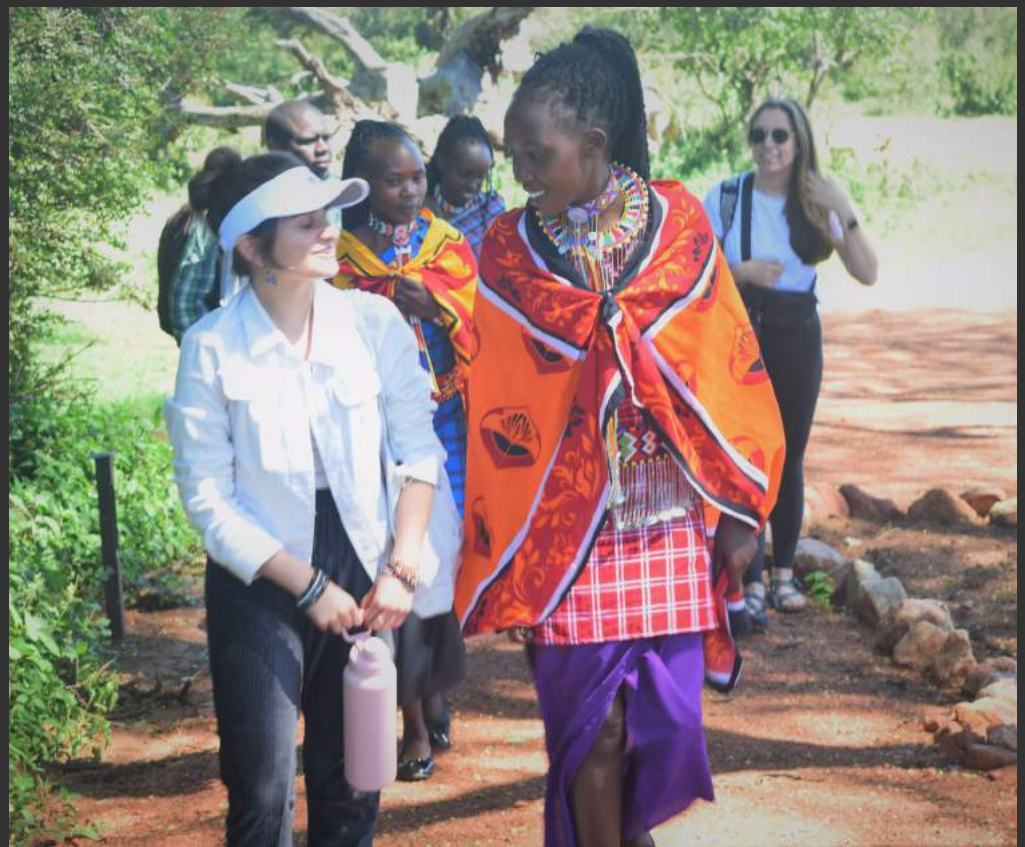
The College also plans to provide a physical base for the One Mara Research Hub, a collaborative platform of critical conservation researchers from Kenya and abroad. The hub coordinates efforts to provide comprehensive information, identify knowledge gaps and facilitate researchers to compile the needed data on wildlife and their migratory routes, people and settlements to facilitate practical conservation efforts. Providing a logistical hub for researchers at WTC will make it easier to enable collaboration between the researchers and students, with an easy two-way exchange of ideas and support. Additionally, the College offers a convening space for community meetings, conferences and research gatherings.

Another key partner facilitating collaborations in education is EDU Africa, which offers specialised courses covering two weeks to six months for individual study programmes and faculty-led trips for educational organisations, including schools, colleges and universities.

"It is exciting to be involved in both the WTC and Pardamat, not only because of the positive changes that are happening there, but to be able to contribute to that in a real way," says Sean Anderson, managing director of EDU Africa.

Anderson observes that the unique location of WTC is perfect for a host of topics, from ecology and biology, carrying out camera-trap monitoring to learning about the community-based conservation efforts happening right on their doorstep. At WTC, the international students stay at the same campus as Kenyan students unlike in other locations where the international students can be somewhat isolated from the communities they have come to learn from.

"That is a huge benefit to the learning experience; that exchange is really powerful to study alongside their Kenyan peers," Anderson concludes.



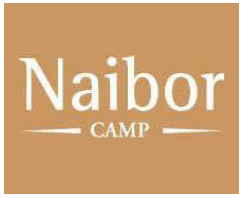
Working with Partners to Meet Education Cost

The WTC annual fee per student is USD 2,400, a steep amount for any student. To help the local students access education, the College collaborates with partners to provide scholarships and internship opportunities. The Tourist Partners backing the College will offer students internships as part of their course's practical element – a useful way to scout for new hires.

For more information, visit *www.wtcmara.org* or send an email to *info@wtcmara.org*.

Scholarship Partners

Internship Partners



About Basecamp Explorer Foundation - Kenya

Basecamp Explorer Foundation – Kenya strives to help protect the most critical wildlife ecosystems in East Africa and aspires to see healthy ecosystems whereby biodiversity and humanity live in harmony. The work of the Foundation revolves around four key pillars: supporting the establishment and strengthening of wildlife conservancies, restoring and protecting nature, education and building resilient livelihoods. The Foundation works in the Maasai Mara in Narok County, Kenya's Southern Border, Samburu and Kenya's North Coast.

For more information, visit **www.basecampexplorerfoundation.org**

Pardamat Conservation Area Partners

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