



## THREATENED SPECIES

# Conserving Kenyan Primates is No Easy Task

Kenya has at least 19 species and 24 sub-species of primates and harbors some of the world's most threatened species.

By DR CHARLES MUSYOKI

**K**enya has formed a national task force to spearhead the conservation of primates which have been pushed into isolated areas of suitable habitat.

The task force will be charged with the responsibility of raising the profile of primates and help

resolve conflicts with people as well as change community attitudes about primates.

It will also advise Kenya Wildlife Service on primate conservation matters, including priorities for critical conservation actions for primates.

Kenya has at least 19 species and 24 sub-species of primates

and harbors some of the world's most threatened species. The most threatened species are the Tana River Red Colobus (*Procolobus rufomitratus rufomitratus*) and the Tana River Mangabey (*Cercocebus galeritus*), both endemic to the forests of lower Tana River.

According to primate experts, habitat degradation, loss and fragmentation are the major threats to the primates in Kenya. As human population continues to rapidly grow, primates are pushed into small isolated areas of suitable habitat, thus minimizing their chance of survival.

This also increases their level of interaction with humans, thus exacerbating the problem of human-nonhuman primate conflict, which is manifested in crop

raiding and livestock predation. Climate changes have further complicated the threats facing primates: the weather patterns have become unpredictable, resulting in changes in food resources. This eventually affects the population status and habitat carrying capacity, thus further threatening the primates.

Despite these challenges facing primates of Kenya, the country lacks primate conservation and management strategies. This was the motivation behind the formation of Kenya's National Primate Conservation Task Force (NPCTF). Expert advice has been sought and resulted in the formation of a panel to advise, help develop and drive the strategy forward.

This panel is known as the National Primate Conservation Task Force (NPCTF) and the members are primate and conservation experts from Kenya and around the world. Members of the NPCTF are:

- Kenya Wildlife Service represented by Dr. Charles Musyoki
- Institute of Primate Research, represented by Stanislaus Kivai or Nancy Moinde or Peter Fundi
- Kenya Forest Service – an officer to be nominated
- NEMA / Moi University represented by Prof. Geoffrey Wahungu or Dr. Duncan Kimuyu (University of Nairobi)
- University of California / Uaso Ngiri Baboon Project (UNBP) represented by Prof. Shirley Strum or Dr. Debbie Nightingale
- Amboseli Baboon Research Project represented by Prof. Jeanne Altmann or Prof. Susan Alberts or Tim Wango
- East Africa Primate Diversity & Conservation Program represented by Dr. Thomas Bu-



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- tynski or Dr. Yvonne de Jong
  - Tana River Primates team represented by Prof. David Mborora or Prof. Julie Wiczowski
  - Ol Pejeta Conservancy represented by Martin Mulama or Dr. George Paul
  - Kakamega Primates Research team represented by Prof. Marina Cords
  - Papio Project, Laikipia represented by Dr. Ryne Palombit
- All members of the task force contribute a range of knowledge and expertise, and we are very excited about working together and moving forward to address the following Terms of Reference: Advise KWS on primate conservation matters including priorities for critical conservation actions for

primates in a structured and participatory way; Integrate primate conservation, review primate research activities and advice on research and monitoring programs. This includes collating existing information to create databases on each primate species; Develop policy options for conservation and management of primates.

Steer the formulation of national conservation strategies that will ensure the long-term survival of healthy populations of primates and their habitats; Mobilize resources to formulate national primate conservation strategies and management guidelines; Enhance capacity building for primate conservation by Kenyans; Raising the profile of primates through better awareness and public relations and help resolve conflicts and change people's attitudes about primates; Co-opt members outside the Task Force committee based on expertise, funding or other reasons identified by the committee.

The envisaged strategies will provide national guidance on the conservation of threatened primates and management of relatively abundant primate species that are sometimes problem animals.

The guidelines will define the role of government, conservation partners and other stakeholders whilst raising awareness about the plight of primates and the (generally declining) population and distribution trends within Kenya. Kenya clearly has a large role to play in primate conservation Africa-wide, given that it is home to two endemic and threatened primate taxa as well as to a large number of other, less threatened primate taxa.

Dr. Charles Musyoki is a member of the National Primate Conservation Task Force (NPCTF) ■