

# MARA PREDATOR CONSERVATION PROGRAMME



QUARTER  
1 REPORT | 2021



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research team spent most of the first quarter finishing and analysing the 2020 intensive monitoring data. The results will follow this report in the very near future. The team has also been monitoring the collared lion individuals in the field and we hope to deploy our two remaining male lion collars during the second quarter.

The community team focuses on three broad objectives: human wildlife conflict mitigation, community outreach and conservation education.

During this quarter, the team carried out livestock herders training, purchased boma reinforcement materials (chainlinks), lion ambassadors reviews and a dog vaccination exercise to prevent the spread of rabies from domestic dogs to predators. The team also renewed wildlife club membership for the nine schools around Aitong and Talek, distributed more copies of Ole Peenko's journey and other stories and tree planting exercises as discussed in detail within the report.

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# RESEARCH UPDATE

Photo © Brian Kaelo

## Lion updates

### Movement updates

The following maps show the movements of the five collared lions overlaid with their 50% utilisation densities for this year's first quarter.

The prey availability around the territories of the collared lions and their prides in the Reserve and Mara Triangle is very low, which is mainly due to the tall grass. The lions are mostly preying on buffalo, which they have been quite successful at. Despite the low prey availability, the prides core territories have much remained the same, and it shows just how territorial lions are.

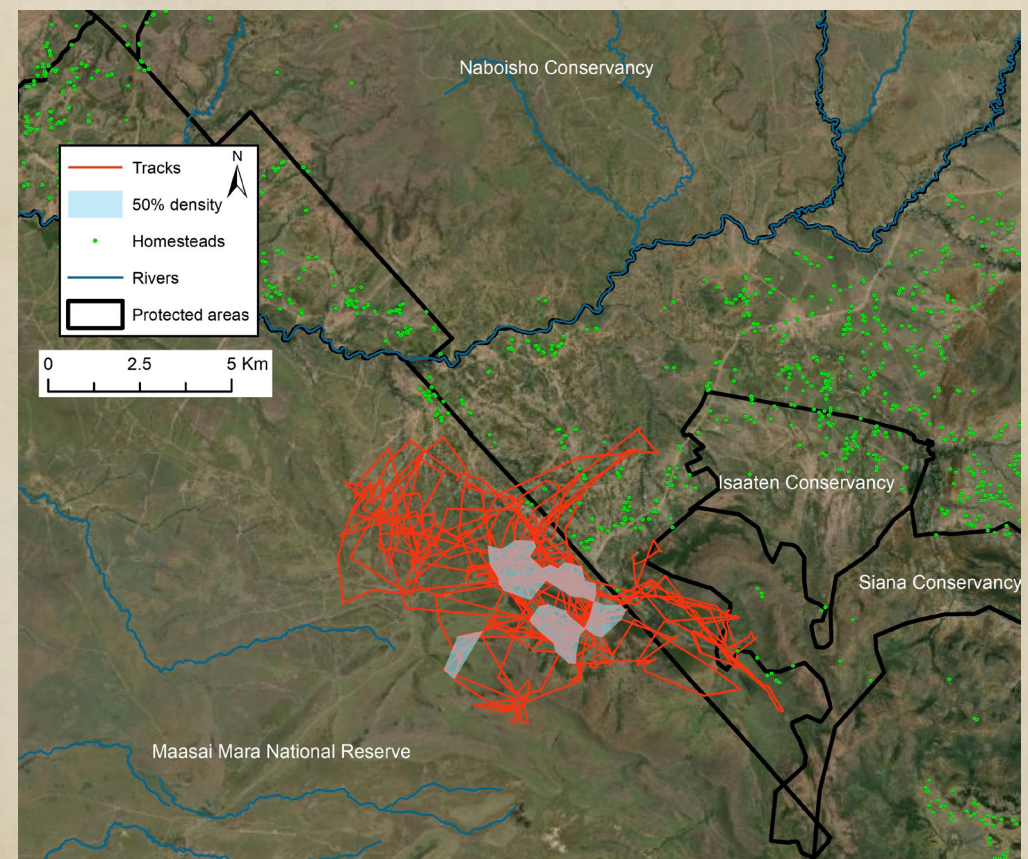


Figure 1. The KWS pride has spent a fair amount of time in Siana Conservancy during this year's first quarter. The pride continues to spill onto the community land.

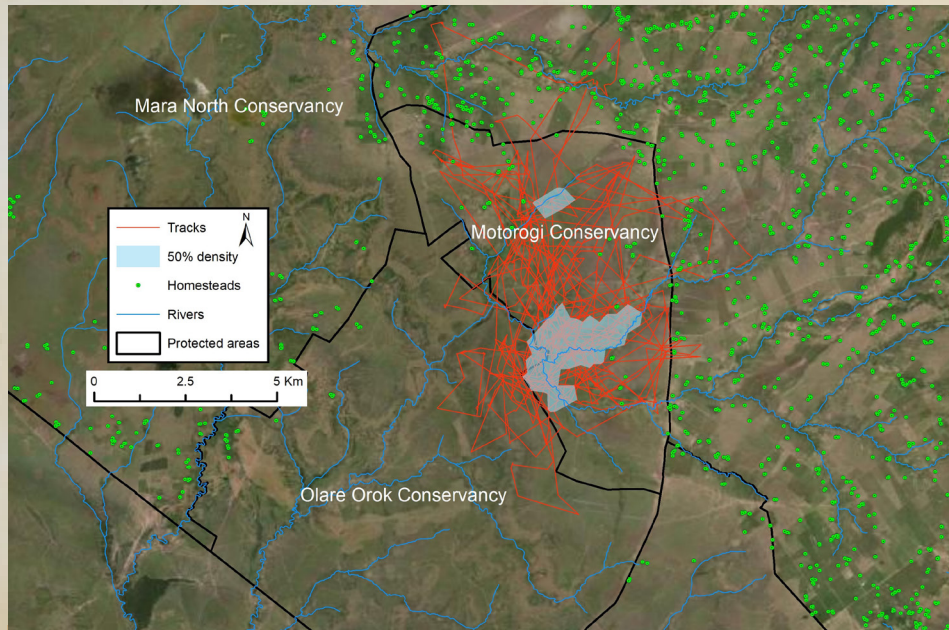


Figure 2. The Iseketa pride's core territory (50% density) remains well within the protection of the conservancy. However, much like the KWS pride, the Iseketa pride continues to spend time on the community land where it potentially could lead to human-lion conflicts.

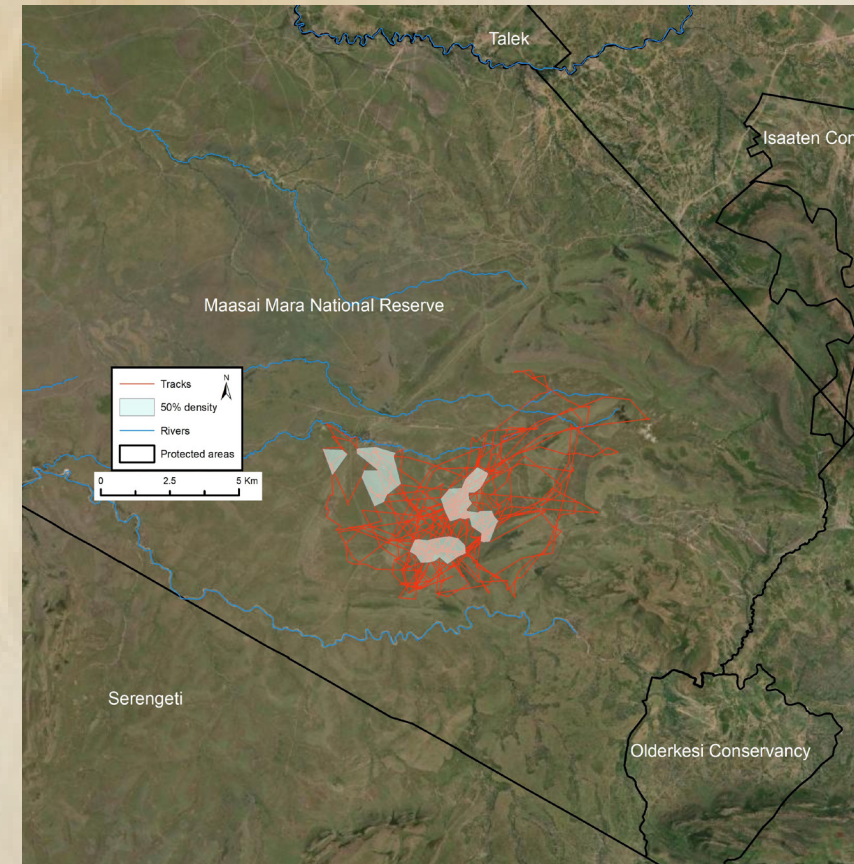


Figure 4. The Oloolomatia pride is also struggling with the low prey availability and is relying on buffalo. Their core area is fragmented and they are frequently shifting their space-use, spending much of their time following and staying with the buffalo herds within their home-range.

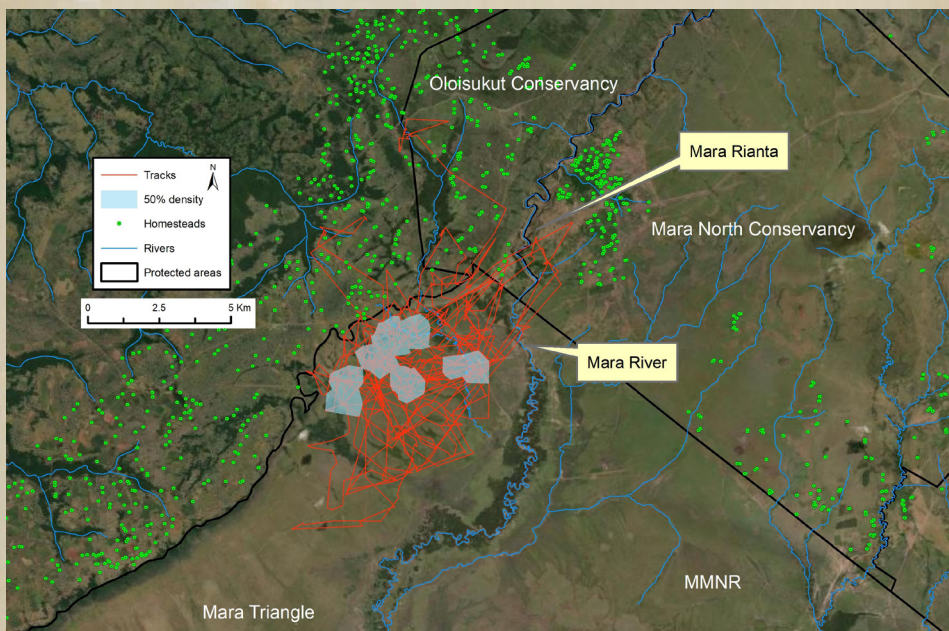


Figure 3. The Olololo pride (Angama pride) has shown some really interesting movements over the last three months. They have crossed the Mara River on several occasions and at one point traveled all the way to the town of Mara Rianta, where there is a lot of human activity. The pride has also been visiting Olosukut Conservancy.

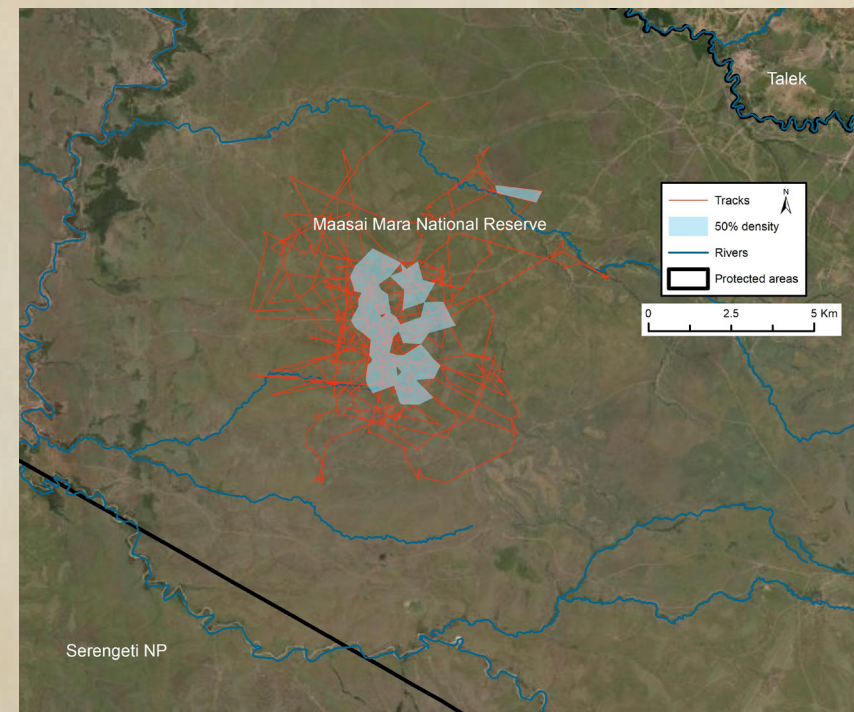


Figure 5. The collared sub-adult male lion and his four brothers from the Rocky Valley pride are showing some unusual behaviour. They are still with their natal pride in the Reserve (see more details below).

# The sub-adult males of the Rocky Valley/Black Rock pride

Lions display sex-biased dispersal, meaning that all males born into a pride must leave that pride at some point, usually before they reach sexual maturity. A very wide range of dispersal ages has been recorded (20-45 months in Hwange, Zimbabwe; 20-65 months in the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater, Tanzania; 36-60 months in Kruger, South Africa), and studies in Hwange showed that young dispersers (less than 30 months old) suffer high mortality, meaning it is advantageous to disperse when older. The timing of their dispersal is primarily determined by a male takeover – when new males enter the pride and evict the territorial males and their male offspring. In the absence of a male takeover or the absence of the fathers, dispersal can be delayed, and will typically be initiated by increased aggression from the pride females.

The Rocky Valley Pride successfully raised five brothers, who are now 45 months old. One of these males was collared in September 2020 so that we could track their dispersal. Since

their fathers disappeared last year, we had anticipated that a pride takeover was imminent, and the young males would be forced to disperse. Late last year, they left their pride and resided in the Rongai area for a few months, where they were frequently sighted with the Serena North Breakaway pride, leading us to suspect that they might settle there. However, they have now returned to their natal pride.

It is likely that in the absence of new males entering their natal pride, perhaps partly because the five brothers offer a formidable defence, these young males have been able to delay their dispersal. For now, the pride females are still tolerating them, perhaps due to the protection they offer, in combination with their proficiency at hunting buffalo. While this delayed dispersal is quite unusual in the Mara, at 45 months they are still more than a year younger than the oldest dispersals witnessed in the Serengeti. They will of course eventually disperse, and will have a very good chance of surviving given their age and group size.



Figure 6. The Black Rock sub-adult males taking down a buffalo for the pride. Photo taken by Sankhesh Dedhia.

## Collaring concerns

We have been receiving many concerns this quarter regarding the collar on the young male from the Rocky Valley/Black Rock pride. The main concern is that the collar is too tight.

The well-being of any collared individual is a top priority for MPCP. We try to monitor the collared individuals on a regular basis, where possible. The collar of the young male in question has been thoroughly examined by our team. The collar might appear to be too tight, but in fact it is the lion's mane that is making it falsely seem so.

The collars weighs less than 1% of the lion's body weight. This corresponds to a medium sized 20 kg domestic dog wearing a collaring that weighs less than 200 grams.

As you can see from our recent photos, there is a gap between the collar and the neck. You can also see the collar's GPS unit at an angle which means that the collar has rotated. As long as the collar can rotate, there is free movement around the neck, and as long as there is free movement, the collar is not tight.



Figure 7. The gap between the collar and the lion's neck demonstrates that the collar is still loose.



Figure 8. The collar can freely rotate around the lion's neck. The GPS unit is usually situated on top of the neck between the ears but because of movements, the unit (and the collar) has rotated.

# Cheetah Updates

## Cheetah Births & Mortalities

Over the last quarter we recorded a total of seven new cubs that came out of their lair, from two different cheetah mothers. Both sets of offspring were born in December 2020. One female (Selenkei) gave birth to four cubs in Olare Motorogi Conservancy (OMC) while the second cheetah (Neema) had three cubs, also in OMC. We recorded a total of nine cub mortalities, four of which were Selenkei's.



Figure 9. Neema with her cubs

## New Cheetahs

We added two new individuals to our database this quarter. The first encounter was of a female that showed up early this year in the southern part of the Reserve around the Sand River area, not far from the Serengeti border. Guides named her Nashula, which means mixed in Maa, as she was seen frequently crossing over to Tanzania. Nashula had three cubs who were approximately seven months old. They have also been seen in Siana Conservancy. The other new individual we encountered was an adult male that was sighted in Olarro Conservancy. We do not know where he has come from.



Figure 10. Nashula with her cubs

## Interesting observations

Selenkei's son from her 2019 litter dispersed at a very young age of 13.5 months (the average cheetah dispersal age for Mara cheetahs is 16 months). After leaving his mother, he joined a sister, called Sila, from Selenkei's 2018 litter, who had three seven-months-old cubs herself. The group has now been together since November last year. This male might end up dispersing together with Sila's three cubs.

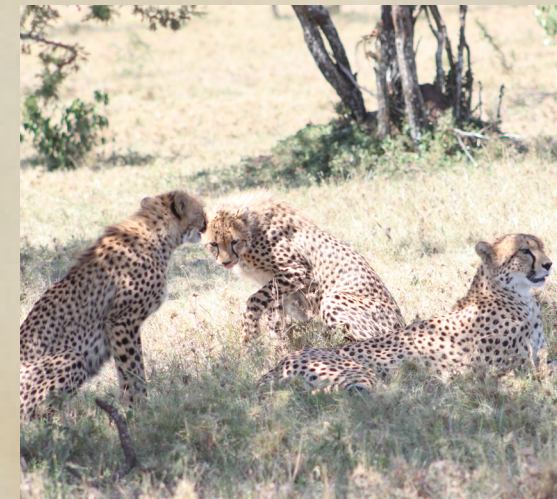


Figure 11. Nabaya with her cubs

Early this quarter, we received news of an unidentified female that showed up in Olarro North Conservancy with three cubs, approximately a year old. After a longer investigation, we were finally able to make a positive ID of the mother, who was named Nabaya. She is a daughter of Natasha from her 2017 litter. Our last sighting of Nabaya was in April 2018, when she was still with her three siblings and their mother, just before dispersing. All four littermates vanished until recently, where one of them reappeared.

# Wild dog Updates

The original pack that MPCP began to monitor was the Pardamat/Lemek pack, from which we documented an active den and the successful raising of eight out of nine pups, three females, four males and one unidentified sex, has split up as mentioned in previous reports. The remaining Pardamat pack consists of eight wild dogs: the alpha female, the three original adult males and four of their offspring (the three females and the one unsexed). For the majority of this quarter, they have utilised an area around the northern part of Pardamat and into the Ol Kinyei side (not the conservancy) and have been almost impossible to track. Furthermore, they are causing a great deal of conflict, preying on sheep on an almost daily basis. One of the biggest challenges is a lack of proper herding practices, and we believe that if this could change, then human-wild dog conflicts would decrease. In order to come up with solutions to this problem, MPCP's community team conducted training sessions for livestock herders in villages around the area where the wild dogs roam. Read a more detailed description on this under the community section.

The four male offspring dispersed and joined the pack of four females in Enonkishu Conservancy. However, one of these females is strangely by herself and so most often the Enonkishu pack has seven individuals.



Figure 12. Seven of the eight members of the Enonkishu pack.



# COMMUNITY UPDATE



## Mara livestock herders' trainings

Following the outbreak of COVID-19 which led to reduced tourism activities coupled with the heavy rains that was witnessed in Mara last year, most conservancies remained open for grazing during this period. The tall grass in the Maasai Mara National Reserve (MMNR) saw mass migrations of herbivores into the contiguous conservancies where livestock grazing was occurring, triggering predators to follow them. This coupled with the reappearing of wild dogs in the Lemek-Pardamat hills contributed to increased day-time livestock depredation based on reports from the community and MPCP's lion ambassadors.

In response to the above, MPCP organized four trainings for livestock herders in villages around Pardamat, Mara North, Enoonkishu and Naboisho conservancies. The objectives of these training were: To equip herders with skills on good herding practices which will help reduce the occurrence of HWC incidents, create a network of livestock herders who can report conflicts and sighting of predators to the Lion ambassadors and other relevant authorities and to sensitize herders on laws regarding compensation and penalties found in the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2013



Figure 13: Herders from villages around Enoonkishu conservancy pose for a photo after one of the training sessions.

During the training, several topics were covered including; the ecological importance of predators, predator identification exercise, good herding practices and laws regarding compensation and punishments in WMCA 2013. More than one hundred herders were trained and encouraged to pass the skills and information to their colleagues. The herders were also issued with Maasai shukas to motivate them (Figure 13). Through such training exercises, MPCP will continue to increase awareness and equip communities with skills to reduce the occurrence of livestock predation which contribute to negative perceptions and retaliatory killings of predators in the Mara.



## Boma reinforcement

Livestock depredation inside bomas at night is a major cause for retaliation as it results in large numbers of livestock killed mostly as a result of stampeding by livestock. Weaker traditional bomas are the major targets of these attacks due to their ease of access by predators through holes in bomas. MPCP through its lion ambassador Programme carries out household outreaches to encourage farmers to improve their bomas and adopt the use of predator

proof bomas. MPCP purchased thirty-three triple twist chain-link wires (Figure 14) which will be used to reinforce bomas that have frequent predation incidents. The aim of this initiative is to support boma owners in conflict hotspot areas to reinforce bomas through a cost sharing mechanism (farmer receives chain-link wire and he buys other materials and pays construction costs) to help reduce conflicts and improve attitudes towards predators.



Figure 14: Triple twist chain-links procured to support boma reinforcement efforts in the identified conflict hotspots.

## MPCP's Lion ambassadors team review

MPCP's Lion ambassador team third review was held in Talek on 26th March 2021. The objective of this exercise was to provide a platform for discussions on work progress and give feedback on areas that needed improvement. Unlike the previous reviews where the objective was mentioned above, this review included two more exercises that were deemed critical to the future of the Programme. The two exercises



Figure 15: MPCP's lion ambassadors brainstorm during their third review session held in Talek.

were a brainstorming session on the future of the Programme (that generated new ideas) (Figure 15) and a SWOT analysis of the Programme (Strengths, Weaknesses, opportunities and Threats) to enable the Programme improve its performance.

## Northern Mara Rabies & canine distemper vaccination campaign

During this period, MPCP took part in the 5th Annual Northern Mara Vaccination campaign organized by Enoonkishu conservancy. The campaign was supported by MPCP/KWT, Global Alliance for Rabies, TNR Trust, World animal protection and others. The objective of the campaign was to fight the spread of rabies through vaccination of domestic cats and dogs in areas where the interaction with wild carnivores is imminent. The primary focus areas were villages closer to areas where wild dogs have been sighted around Enonkishu, Lemek and Pardamat hills.



Figure 16: MPCP's community team members Michael Kaelo (holding a puppy) & Daniel Korio (in the background) taking part in the vaccination campaign at Enchorro o sidan village outside Naboisho Conservancy.

The three-days' campaign resulted in 1,444 cats and dogs being inoculated in villages around Enoonkishu, Pardamat, Mara North and Lemek conservancies. Follow up vaccination campaigns will be held annually to limit spread of rabies and canine distemper into wildlife populations especially wild dogs. It was canine distemper that eradicated the Mara wild dog population in the early 1990's

# Wildlife Clubs activities

During the reporting period, the nine wildlife club schools that MPCP works with resumed learning in January after a long break following the outbreak of COVID-19. This resumption enabled us to carry out planned activities discussed below.

## Renewal of membership

MPCP renewed membership with Wildlife club of Kenya for the nine Wildlife Clubs; its 347 members, 18 patrons. The schools were issued with membership certificates while the members received membership cards valid throughout 2021.

MPCP is also excited to welcome Molibany primary school in Talek (Figure 17) into our wildlife club cluster this quarter. The club has two patrons who will be actively engaged in steering club activities as well as coordinating with the community outreach officer to ensure smooth running of the clubs.



Figure 17: Molibany primary school wildlife club members and patrons welcomed into the cluster of schools MPCP works with and issued with reading materials.

## Printing and distribution of Ole Peenko's Journey and Other Stories book

The first edition of Ole Peenko's journey and other stories wildlife club book was printed and distributed to each of our 347 club members across the nine schools. The book features two stories which revolve around issues of co-existence with wildlife. It follows a young boy who embarks on a series of journeys within his community with surprising results. A second story that covered wildlife social interactions sought to bring out empathy towards wildlife conservation from the readers. Interactive activities were there to break monotony and peak interest of the readers. And, lastly, in support of the national government's efforts to curb the Coronavirus spread, a child-friendly COVID-19 awareness section was added to increase the readers access to correct information and help calm their young minds by assurance from the scientific proven facts on how to properly conduct themselves.

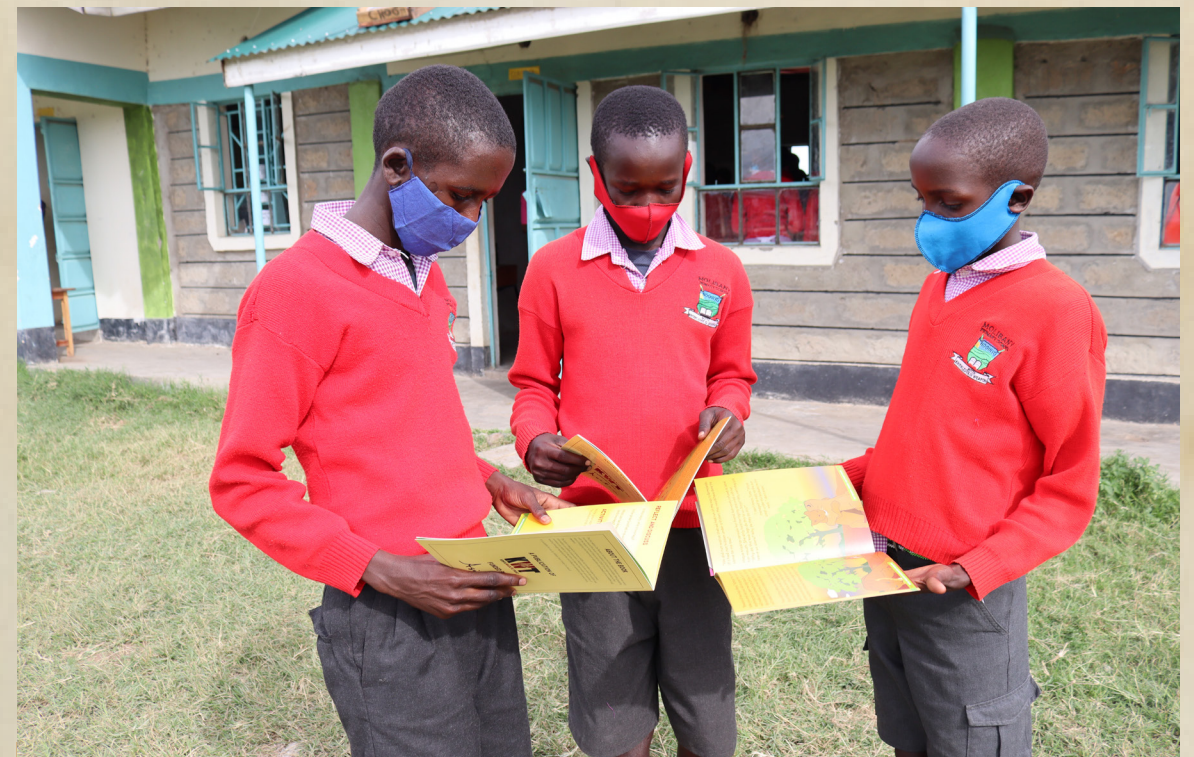


Figure 18: Wildlife club members from Molibany primary school glance through their copies of Ole Peenko's journey and other stories.

# Tree planting

MPCP purchased 1000 indigenous tree seedlings and distributed them to the nine schools in efforts to increase forest cover and build capacities of members to tackle climate change through increasing tree cover in the school compounds. The seedlings were planted on the onset of the long rains for better growth. The trees will also help reduce surface runoff which leads to the formation of gullies through soil erosion. Wildlife club members were assigned trees for protection against domestic browsers and to ensure watering is done when there is no rain. MPCP's community outreach officer joined club members from Mara Girls Leadership school in the tree planting exercise (Figure 19) and encouraged them to be good stewards of the tree woodlot that they were establishing.



Figure 19: Wildlife club members from Olkurroto Primary school with their headteacher receiving tree saplings from MPCP ready for the tree planting exercise.





**Mara Predator Conservation Programme**

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