



# Friends of Kenya Schools and Wildlife

Partnerships for Education and Wildlife Preservation

July 2008

## The Fireflies

Here in the highlands, when the long rains are over, and in the first week of June nights begin to be cold, we get the fireflies in the woods. On an evening you will see two or three of them, adventurous lonely stars floating in the clear air, rising and lowering, as if upon waves, or as if curtseying. To that rhythm of their flight they lighten and put out their diminutive lamps. You may catch the insect and make it shine upon the palm of your hand, giving out a strange light, a mysterious message, it turns the flesh pale green in a small circle round it. The next night, there are hundreds and hundreds in the woods.

For some reason they keep within a certain height, four or five feet, above the ground. It is impossible then not to imagine that a whole crowd of children of six or seven years, are running through the dark forest carrying candles, little sticks dipped in a magic fire, joyously jumping up and down, and gamboling as they run, and swinging their small pale torches merrily. The woods are filled with a wild frolicsome life, and it is all perfectly silent.

*From Out of Africa, by Isak Dinesen*

Since my first reading of “Out of Africa” thirty years ago, I’ve returned many times to Isak Dinesen’s description of the fireflies in the Ngong Hills of Kenya. I had never imagined that fireflies lived in Africa. Last year, we camped in an acacia forest in Shaba National Park. As night fell, the fireflies appeared. Hundreds and hundreds of them. For two nights, we watched their glimmering dance. It was not difficult to imagine children running through the woods with candles and it *was* all perfectly silent.

## Learning As We Go

Our first safari in 2002 introduced us to Africa and to the spectacularly beautiful country of Kenya. As we packed for home after 3 exciting, romantic weeks of what we thought of as a “once in a lifetime” experience, our guide, Mike Lawrence, asked if we’d “adopt a school”. Our enthusiastic “yes” was the beginning of our friendship with Mike and the birth of Friends of Kenya Schools and Wildlife. One school became four, and then five. “A few student scholarships” became seventy. Since then, with the generous support of many donors, FKSWS has helped build 4 nursery schools, 4 toilets and 2 outdoor kitchens. We support a school lunch program that feeds 58 nursery students daily and we’ve provided clean water to 4 communities. These are just some of the projects in which we’ve been involved.

In the beginning, we knew nothing about “community development” so educating ourselves has been important. We’ve learned that sometimes it’s not enough to focus on only one thing. Our primary mission is to provide education to children in rural communities. But when children are hungry or sick they can’t learn. Health care, bednets, food and clean water become critical. When parents don’t have the means to support their families, school aged children drop out of school to care for younger siblings while the parents look for work, or the children go to work themselves. When it comes to survival, income generation is a greater priority than school.

We’ve learned about the importance of empowering people, of not giving free handouts and of making sure that projects are locally owned and implemented. If *we* build a school, it is *ours*. If the *community* builds a school, it is *theirs*. We may give support with materials and other resources, but the community must make a contribution, too, perhaps through the provision of land, labor, or expertise.

We’ve learned that often, there is talent, ingenuity and motivation in people just waiting to be sparked by a new idea, a few dollars, some raw materials or a bit of training. With great joy, we watch projects and people grow far beyond anything we could have imagined. Please join us now for an update on some of these exciting activities and for a brief summary of our trip to Kenya earlier this year.

## The Adventure Begins

John and I arrived in Nairobi on Dec. 29, two days after the presidential election. We watched the announcement of the dubious results on television and the swearing in of the incumbent President, the Honorable Mwai Kibaki, moments later. Some hotel staff, supporters of opposition candidate, Raila Odinga, were visibly upset and were eager to participate in a mass demonstration called for New Year’s Eve Day in Uhuru Park. Driving past the park the next morning, we saw the General Service Unit Police in full riot gear, standing 2 feet apart, ringing the park. No one was allowed to cross the line. The Central Business District was empty of vehicles and people. Visitors were warned not to venture outside of their hotels and to consider leaving the country. We were concerned that our family and friends would worry about us and that the 7 people who were due to join us soon from Oregon would have a difficult decision to make, but we were not afraid. We decided to go ahead with our plan to visit the communities at Kachuru, Waso-Samburu Complex, Lake Baringo and Edonyio Sidai.



Challa Abdulai  
Scholarship Recipient at Kachuru

## Kachuru

We left Nairobi on New Year's Day with our friends James Gichuru and Joseph Mbucho and a car full of camping gear. After having an unexpected adventure on the first day with our car (called "sucking a valve and blowing an engine") that necessitated an overnight in a roadside hotel in Naro Moru, we arrived at the village of Kachuru about 3 the next afternoon. Headmaster Joseph Muthee and the members of the school committee showed us the new school kitchen the community built with FKSWS support where cooks prepare lunch for the 80 nursery school children each day. We visited with the families of the 10 students receiving scholarships, and the headmaster gave us reports on their attendance and schoolwork. Our commitment at Kachuru is to continue with the student scholarships.

*The following is an excerpt from a letter I wrote home:* It was getting late, so James drove us a short distance from the school to a grove of acacia trees where we could set up camp for the night. As we unpacked our tents and camping gear, the children from the village began to arrive. They came quietly, whispering to each other. Some stopped just at the edge of the campsite, arms interlaced, eyes wide. Others came closer, not talking, but watching our every move. A few found vantage points in the bushes at the edge of our camp, perhaps thinking that the foliage would hide their presence. A group of three boys walked right in with the most amazing praying mantis on the end of a stick. Its 6" long body resembled a twig with leaves attached. Light green with pink on the insides of its front arms, it would rear up on its hind legs and lunge at any movement.



Bwana P. Mantis

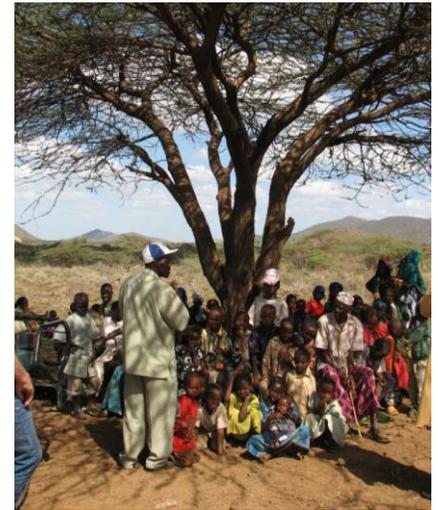
One young man climbed a nearby tree and watched us from above. A smiling little boy danced with a necklace of beads he hoped to sell held out in front of him and out of sight, a voice sang "Madame Gwen, Madame Gwen, give me a bis-quit (cookie), please." As the light faded, Headmaster Joseph and Ali Dulacha, the Chairman of the school committee arrived with a request and another man, on his way to collect firewood, stopped at the edge of the clearing and stood watching for quite awhile, saying nothing.

Joseph prepared a wonderful meal of fried fish, kale and ugali. As we sat eating, a full moon rose from behind the hills and the hyenas began to howl. Fireflies danced around the perimeter of our camp. We kept the kerosene lantern and the campfire burning through the night just in case the hyenas decided to pay us a visit, but in the morning, James was sure that he had heard one sniffing outside the tent he and Joseph shared. We only had one early morning visitor, another fire wood collector who must have thought that the best firewood was inside a 10 foot radius of our camp. After breakfast, we packed the car and drove out past the Kachuru Nursery, the school FKSWS built with the community in 2005. The 80 students were beginning the day with a song... a stark contrast to our first visit here in 2004 when there was no school and children used stones to write their ABC's in the dirt.

## Waso-Samburu Complex, Archer's Post

An hour later, at the east gate of Shaba National Park, we picked up a Kenya Wildlife Service Ranger, who climbed on the roof of the car for the ride to Waso Nursery School. Wild and remote, this is some of the most starkly beautiful land in Kenya. Nursery teacher, Luginia Akiru and other community members were on holiday until the following week, but Gregory Lesasa, a member of the school committee, showed us the new toilets and kitchen built by the community with funds provided by FKSWS. We visited with the parents of eight of the ten scholarship recipients. Our commitment here is to continue to provide student scholarships.

Back in Shaba National Park, we selected a lovely camp site on the banks of the Ewaso Nyiro River and on the way to retrieve a second ranger who would help guard our camp during the night, we saw elephants, hyena, cape buffalo, antelope, zebra and a pair of cheetah coming out for their evening hunt. We returned to camp for Joseph's delicious beef stew and rice, a cold Tusker, and slept well under the most glorious canopy of stars. We returned to Nairobi the next day.



Headmaster Muthee and students



Kitchen at Waso



Children at Waso Nursery

## Edonyio Sidai

On January 5th, we were back in the car with James and Joseph for the 2 hour drive to the Edonyio Sidai Nursery School, south of Nairobi on the edge of the Great Rift Valley. A crowd was waiting to give us a tour of the school FKSW helped build last spring and of which we'd only seen photos since it was completed. A second classroom has since been added and there was a rousing church service in progress. The 10 scholarship recipients were there with their families, and after talking and taking photos, we gathered in the classroom to remember Mike Lawrence, our former partner who was the inspiration for the developments in this community. Our commitment in this village is to continue the school sponsorships.



Edonyio Sidai Nursery School

## Kirepari Village, Lake Baringo

On January 6<sup>th</sup> we left for Lake Baringo, 4 hours away, and the community of Kirepari, formerly called Longicharo. Because of continuing insecurity at Longicharo, members of the village moved permanently to nearby Kokwa Island last year. They settled at one end of the island near some hot springs called Kirepari, and so took this name for the new village. They had not been able to bring much with them, and so began again, almost from scratch. By January of this year, most of the community had rebuilt their homes and were settling in to the new location.

The relocation did provide some benefits. A government medical dispensary, staffed by nurse Stella Lenguris, is a short walk away. The primary students attend the Kokwa Primary School, which is much closer than their previous school. And the site is lovely.

The community asked us to help build a new nursery school, and so with materials salvaged from the old school at Longicharo and new materials that we purchased, they began construction 2 days after we arrived. They dug a new toilet and cleared an area for a soccer field just down the hill. FKSW also supplied lumber for 20 desks and benches and a desk and chair for Grace, the teacher; pencils, exercise books and curriculum materials; salary for Grace and Rhoda, the cook; and food for the lunch program. We gave scholarship funds to the parents of the 28 sponsored children. We had hoped to implement our Rotary Matching Grant water filter project at the beginning of January, but it was put on hold because of the conflict.

Last December, we helped sponsor a group of teachers and community members a week-long field trip to the Busia Agricultural Training Center and farms in Uganda. There they learned about vegetable gardening, raising local chicken, bees, silk worms, dairy cattle and goats. They saw tree nurseries and a bio-fuel program. Quite a few of the participants had never been that far from home, and they proudly told friends and family when they returned that they were now international travelers! The trip inspired the group and FKSW donated funds toward the cost of their education and accommodation at the college. Teacher Grace and several of the women started a chicken project after returning home and eventually will be able to sell both chickens and eggs.

We are committed to further development at Kirepari. The next projects will be to install a water tank next to the nursery to collect rain water and to build an outdoor kitchen for the school. The women are eager to plant a community garden and the men will meet to discuss the creation of a beekeeping enterprise. There is interest in silkworm production with the eventual goal of learning to spin and weave to produce products for sale. We have promised to support any student here who needs a primary school scholarship, and in September, will add 30 students to the 28 we already support.



Rotet Kasale and her father Abraham – Edonyio Sidai



Teacher Grace Koinale and students sing in front of the new school



New Kirepari Nursery School



Michinda Primary School sign with FKSWS logo

## Molo

Our next destinations were Molo and the smaller town of Elburgon, which lie in a lovely agricultural area in the highlands of western Kenya. The residents are predominantly farmers. There is poverty here, largely due to the fact that the timber industry, on which these towns were built, crashed when the trees that fed the sawmills were gone. Since the early 90s, Molo has been troubled by politics resulting in conflicts between the 3 main ethnic groups, the Kikuyu, Kalenjin and Kisii. This was one of the areas of major disturbance after the elections, and during our time here, we witnessed some of the trouble.

We had planned to visit several agricultural projects supported by the Network for Eco-Farming in Africa (NECOFA), including the 4K Club School Garden Project which FKSWS supports. As it turned out, we were able to visit only 2 of the 5 schools and had to cancel meetings with other groups because it was unsafe to be in the areas in which they operated. We attended a training at St. Brendan's Primary School with staff and students on school gardens and watched the students use their new learning to create a storey garden. They filled a large woven plastic bag with soil and planted kale, tomatoes and onions in holes they punched in the sides.



St. Brendan's Primary School 4 K Club in the school garden

We met one day with NECOFA to solidify our partnership and John conducted a 2-day Quickbooks workshop for staff from NECOFA, Michinda Primary School and 2 other NGOs.

Our lodging in Molo was a little house on the grounds of Michinda Primary School. The one bedroom dwelling had electricity and running water piped in from a bore hole in the backyard. Behind the house, a small two-room building contained our pit toilet in one room and bath room in the other. We brought water heated in the house for baths. Cabbage and kale from the school garden became dinner along with potatoes, onions, carrots and pumpkins leaves that we bought in the market in town. Every morning, a young man brought us fresh milk from the school dairy for our coffee. Aside from a midnight visit by a million *siafu* (safari ants) who came into the house looking for something to eat and covered the walls in the kitchen and our bedroom for about an hour, our nights were fairly peaceful.



Spinners from Karunga Women's Group

## Molo Wool Project

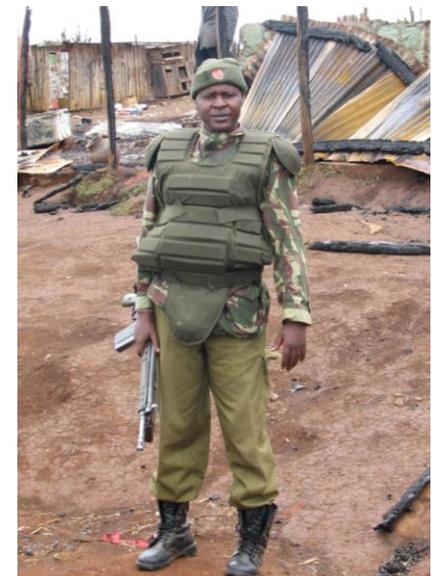
We spent a wonderful day with members of the Karunga Women's Group, participants in the Molo Wool Project. The women demonstrated their skills in spinning, weaving, dyeing and knitting and we admired the antelopes, chameleons, small pigs with curly tails and crocodiles with knitted teeth. Schacht Spindle Company in Boulder, CO and members of a Eugene spinning group had donated looms that we presented to the women, who were thrilled and grateful. Then we shared a delicious lunch they had prepared.

Chairlady Beatrice Kamau has just completed a month of classes to learn weaving with cotton, wool, and sisal. She will teach others the skills she has learned to increase the diversity of skills in the 3 women's groups involved

in this project. During the past year, we have been able to send \$8,000 back to Kenya from sales of their wonderful knitted animals. With those funds, they pay school fees for their children and are able to buy other necessities for their families.

## Scenes from the Interior

We spent most of one day touring the areas affected by the conflict. A steady stream of people moved with their possessions and livestock in donkey carts, pickups, and large trucks, fleeing destroyed homes, or leaving before danger struck. With a police escort from the General Service Unit, we drove through what had once been a small business center. Nothing remained of the shops and people were picking through the debris to remove the corrugated iron sheets that had been walls and roofs. We visited two farms where the owners had been working with NECOFA to raise indigenous trees and mushroomrooms. One home had been torched the night before and was still smoldering.



Our GSU escort standing in front of the burned out business center

## To the Coast and Back to Molo



Some of the destruction

Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife in the Kenyan government to talk, as a visitor, about how the violence had (not) affected my experiences so far. Later that afternoon, Duncan and I were interviewed for a program on Citizens' TV about the decline in tourism. It was interesting to watch myself on Kenya TV!



Passing out sanitary pads

For the next 5 weeks, I worked with Samuel and his team in Molo where more than 12,000 people had taken refuge in camps. Many of the displaced people were farmers with whom Samuel worked, but there were also teachers, accountants, business owners and other professionals. The efforts of the Red Cross and UNICEF could not meet all of the needs, so by organizing the Molo Internally Displaced Persons Support Coordination Committee (MISCC), Samuel and his colleagues hoped to work with the government and other organizations to fill in the gaps. On my first day back in Molo, we visited 10 camps. The item most frequently requested was not food, but sanitary pads for the women and girls.



A woman injured in the conflict

Every week, the camp committees would meet in a Consultative Forum to talk about their lives in the camps and what the most pressing needs. Organized and led by Samuel's team, these meetings provided an opportunity for residents and supporting organizations to work together to address many different issues. Back in Oregon, John worked to raise funds for the needs they identified. In all, he received donations in the amount of almost \$8000. With those funds we purchased sanitary napkins for 1,500 women and girls, soap for bathing and washing clothes, firewood for cooking, shoes for the children, educational materials for the nursery school programs that we helped to start in each camp, and clothing and diapers for newborns. We also helped with two special meals to feed the 1,200 children, one on Valentine's Day. The residents of the camps were so appreciative of the generosity and concern extended to them from so far away.

## One more lesson

Our days and nights in Molo introduced us to what it's like to go to bed to the sound of gunshots, to the presence of police helicopters overhead and to the sight of people carrying machetes, bows and arrows as they went about their business. We shared their grief at the loss of family and friends, homes, possessions and livelihoods, and the betrayal they felt when those losses were at the hand of long time neighbors and friends, because they were from a different tribe. We saw people abandoned by their leaders nevertheless living each day with optimism, faith and hope for better times.

Many of the Molo farmers have returned to their land and like the people of Kirepari, they, too, must start over again. We have sent \$2,300 for vegetable seeds which are being planted now. John and I will return to Kenya in August to help Samuel with resettlement and the peace and reconciliation efforts he is leading. We'll attend the second Consultative Forum with 66 participants from the Kisii, Kalenjin and Kikuyu tribes and help people from these groups rebuild a school with the brick machine John donated to NECOFA. We'll help establish the first two Community Centers for Peace in Molo District, where people from "warring communities" can meet in a different way, to talk about how they can live in peace, to watch the news, documentaries and entertainment on TV, or play football. We're glad to have the opportunity to help with this effort.



Children enjoy rice, beans and maize on Valentine's Day

## Rotary Matching Grant Water Filter Project

The Catholic Diocese of Nakuru completed the installation of the defluoridation water filter at Kirepari on April 11<sup>th</sup>. The children were the first to try the filter which uses charred bones to remove all the fluoride and 95% of the bacteria from the lake water which the community uses for its domestic purposes. Excessive fluoride causes dental and skeletal fluorosis, a disease which leaches calcium from bones and teeth. The project included 3 days of community training on self-reliance, sanitation and hygiene, operation and maintenance of the filter, gender and women's role in water management, conflict resolution, and community planning. On June 21, the CDN delivered 66 individual household filters to families to remove the remainder of the bacteria. Our partner, the Rotary Club of Hurlingham in Nairobi visited the site at the completion of the \$12,400 project.



Children taking clean water from the filter

## Roosevelt ACT Class

The ACT students raised \$1,100 this spring to add two additional 8 year scholarships at Kirepari. They are now supporting 10 students with 8 years of primary school each. One of the new scholarships is for Mulan Lekaranga, a young boy who is deaf and has never been able to benefit from school because of his disability. The ACT students purchased an illustrated sign language dictionary and flash cards for Mulan. Their donation will also provide salary for nursery teacher Grace Koinale. These young people are making a huge difference in the lives of children at Kirepari!



A seminar in session

## Makindu Water Project Joins FKS

The Makindu Water Project, a local non-profit with projects, in Kenya, has joined FKS. Jeanne Lindsey of MWP brings her skills to FKS and resources that will be devoted to providing clean water in communities where there is a need. The first project we've identified will be the installation of a catchment system and water tank at Kirepari Nursery School to capture rainwater. We are pleased to welcome Jeanne and the Makindu Water Project!

## Ellen Meadows Prosthetic Hand Foundation

Our good friends Tim Bewley and Carol Fellows are directors of the Ellen Meadows Prosthetic Hand Foundation (<http://www.ln-4.org>). With an opposable digit, the LN-4 hand is easy to use and allows people to do even fine motor tasks. The foundation has distributed hands, at no cost, to people in Southeast Asia and Africa, including Kenya. We're taking fifty LN-4 hands with us in August for people in Molo District, who, like the woman in the photos on page 5, lost hands in the recent conflict. John and I will be trained to do the fitting, but we hope to have Francis Nzioka, a Kenyan who is a recipient himself, come to Molo to fit the hands and train the new recipients to use them. Samuel is working with the Red Cross and the Ministry of Health to assess the current need

**FKS Safari January 2009** Eight people (so far) are planning to participate in the January 2009 FKS Safari.

## Thank you so much for your continuing support!

Your generosity has contributed so much to improving the quality of life for many children and adults in Kenya. We hope you will continue to support FKS projects. We spend no more than 10% of donations on administrative costs. Our Board requests unrestricted donations to fund the following projects for the remainder of the year:

- \$1500 Community Centers for Peace** – For generators, furniture, televisions and DVD players to equip the first 2 Community Centers for Peace
- \$3000 School Rebuilding** in Molo - For costs of rebuilding a portion of Pele Primary School with collaboration among Kikuyu, Kisii and Kalenjin community members
- \$500 Kitchen** - For Kirepari Nursery School
- \$500 Michinda Primary School Chicken Project** – For chickens for the students at Michinda Primary School as part of their 4-K Club activities
- \$1,800 Laptop and motorcycle** - For Thomson who spends 2 days a week traveling to and from Baringo to manage our projects. An inexpensive motorbike would make better use of his time and a laptop would help him with his work.



**Friends of Kenya Schools and Wildlife** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All donations are tax deductible. You may send contributions to the following address or for more information, contact us at:

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