

# These dogs have a nose for helping rangers in Kenya catch poachers

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Kelvin Sanare, a ranger with the canine unit, poses with 5-month-old bloodhound Morani (left) and Shakaria (right) during their trace training in the Mara Triangle in Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya on January 24, 2018. The dogs are trained to sniff out ivory and guns at the entrances to the park. Photo by: Yasuyoshi Chiba/AFP/Getty Images

Five-month-old bloodhound Shakaria bounces through the long grasses of Kenya's Maasai Mara nature reserve. Her playful mood quickly turns to focused determination as she is ordered to track a human scent.

Straining at the leash, she pulls her handler along, following a scent until she finds a ranger hiding in the grass. The ranger is pretending to be one of the poachers she is training to sniff out.

## Protecting Wildlife From Poachers

Shakaria is top of her class of five puppies being trained by American experts to join a tracker dog unit. The dogs have become essential in the fight against poaching in the Mara Triangle.

The Mara Triangle is part of the vast Maasai Mara ecosystem in southern Kenya in East Africa. The area is home to giraffes, lions and zebras and connects with Tanzania's Serengeti ecosystem. The Serengeti was the inspiration for Disney's "The Lion King."

One million wildebeest and tens of thousands of other animals cross from Tanzania into Kenya's Mara Triangle on their annual migration. They attract lots of tourists, but also poachers seeking an easy target.

Lema Langas is a Maasai from the local community. He is the warden of the dog unit. He says the main challenge in the park was stopping poaching for the commercial meat trade, with dried meat exported to African countries including Uganda, Rwanda and others.

### **Tracking Poachers Is Hard Work**

"Thomson's gazelles, impalas, giraffes, buffalos and during migration season when the wildebeest are here they become an easy target... (poachers) put down wire traps or maybe they can chase them into valleys and use machetes to cut them," he said.

Elephants and lions also get stuck in the traps.

Rangers used to struggle to chase or spot poachers across the flat, seemingly endless grasslands. That's why the Mara Triangle first introduced two tracker dogs in 2009.

The unit now has four tracker dogs and two more trained specifically to sniff out ivory and guns at the entrances to the park.

### **Can't See The Poacher? Use Your Nose!**

"They use their noses to see, not like us who use the eyes," Langas said.

"Sometimes you are not able to see the footprint of the poachers... but when you suspect the poacher might have passed here you allow the dog to follow the scent," Langas said.

The bloodhound puppies are being trained by two former police officers from the United States. They trained and brought the first two dogs to Kenya in 2009. The new group of puppies were born in Kenya.

## **Other Tools For Fighting Poachers**

In the late 1990s, the Mara Triangle was in trouble. Out of control poaching and bad security were making it unsafe for animals and people alike. One ranger recalls "tourists being robbed, stripped and dumped on the side of the road."

Management of the reserve was then taken over by the Mara Conservancy, a non-profit group that works with the local Maasai community.

Since then, the dog unit has greatly reduced daytime poaching. At night, rangers use a camera that senses and shows heat to track poachers in the dark.

## **Community Scouts Stop Poaching Gangs**

Meanwhile, the use of community scouts and spies has slowed down local poaching gangs on the Kenyan side of the border. Langas says the majority of poaching now occurs on the border between Kenya and Tanzania.

"The conservancy is hiring the sons and daughters from this community neighboring the park ... if the community learn there is someone having a bad intention to kill an animal," they will come forward, he says.

A joint agreement between Kenya and Tanzania allows the rangers and their dogs to patrol deep into Tanzania's Serengeti. Any poachers the Kenyans find there are handed over to Tanzanian authorities.

"We are the first line of defense from Tanzania. We prevent poachers coming into the Mara and the Kenyan side," said Asuka Takita, a Swahili-speaking Japanese veterinarian, who helped start the dog unit.

## **"We Have Caught Over 4,000 Poachers"**

"There is still a lot of work to do but we have caught over 4,000 poachers in the past 18 years," she said.

During migration season, in July and August, the rangers find thousands of deadly traps set up in the park. Langas recalls removing 511 in a single day last year.

Turning poaching arrests into convictions has long been a "major struggle" in Kenya, Takita said. However, since Kenya boosted its wildlife protection law in 2013, this has improved.

Langas said that people are now being imprisoned for life or fined \$20,000 for some of these poaching crimes. These punishments make a lot of small-scale poachers decide the risk isn't worth it.

### **New Focus: Stop Poachers Who Go After Meat**

Poaching elephants for their ivory tusks draws a lot of attention. However, a 2014 report by a group working for the government warned about poaching for meat. The report said meat poaching was going largely ignored and had hit record levels in Kenya.

The report cites one case, in which a vehicle was stopped with 13,200 pounds of wild animal meat heading away from the Mara region. That much meat weighs more than 30 full-grown male lions and was worth an estimated \$11,000.

The report said that this kind of meat poaching could lead to the extinction of many species.

## Quiz

- 1 Read the paragraph from the section "Community Scouts Stop Poaching Gangs."

*"The conservancy is hiring the sons and daughters from this community neighboring the park... if the community learn there is someone having a bad intention to kill an animal," they will come forward, he says.*

Fill in the blank. Langas uses the phrase "sons and daughters" to mean \_\_\_\_\_

- (A) his family members.
  - (B) local young people.
  - (C) poachers' friends.
  - (D) animal lovers.
- 2 Read the sentence from the section "We Have Caught Over 4,000 Poachers."

*Turning poaching arrests into convictions has long been a "major struggle" in Kenya, Takita said.*

Which other sentence from the section BEST explains what "convictions" is referring to?

- (A) During migration season, in July and August, the rangers find thousands of deadly traps set up in the park.
- (B) However, since Kenya boosted its wildlife protection law in 2013, this has improved.
- (C) Langas said that people are now being imprisoned for life or fined \$20,000 for some of these poaching crimes.
- (D) These punishments make a lot of small-scale poachers decide the risk isn't worth it.

- 3 Which option describes two MAIN ideas of the article?
- (A) The Mara Triangle is part of the huge Maasai Mara ecosystem in southern Kenya in East Africa. This beautiful area is popular with wildlife that attracts many tourists to the area.
  - (B) Wildlife migrate through the Mara Triangle annually, attracting both tourists and poachers. Rangers used to struggle to chase or spot poachers across the flat grasslands.
  - (C) Trained dogs are being used to track poachers, as well as to sniff out ivory and guns at entrances to the Maasai Mara. The puppies are bloodhounds trained by United States police.
  - (D) Rangers in the Mara Triangle are using trained dogs to help track and catch poachers. The dogs are part of a larger effort by lawmakers and communities to combat poaching for meat.

- 4 Read the paragraphs from the section "Protecting Wildlife From Poachers."

*The Mara Triangle is part of the vast Maasai Mara ecosystem in southern Kenya in East Africa. The area is home to giraffes, lions and zebras and connects with Tanzania's Serengeti ecosystem. The Serengeti was the inspiration for Disney's "The Lion King."*

*One million wildebeest and tens of thousands of other animals cross from Tanzania into Kenya's Mara Triangle on their annual migration. They attract lots of tourists, but also poachers seeking an easy target.*

How do these paragraphs develop the MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) by introducing the necessity of migration for many types of African wildlife
- (B) by illustrating how the newly trained dogs fit into the Serengeti ecosystem
- (C) by emphasizing the importance of finding a way to protect the Mara Triangle
- (D) by elaborating on the beauty and popularity of the Mara Triangle for tourists