

## **US CONSERVATION NGO SPONSORS KWS PILOTS TRAINING**

Eight Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) pilots have successfully undergone a basic safety and proficiency training conducted by three top U.S. flight instructors.

The week-long training was conducted by US national aerobatic champion pilot Patty Wagstaff, recently retired Air Force F-16 fighter pilot Jeffrey Rochelle and fire fighting pilot Heather Jay, thanks to funding by the Washington D.C.-based Animal Welfare Institute (AWI).

The training's base was Kilaguni Lodge in Tsavo West National Park, the same site where Charles Lindbergh composed his 1964 Reader's Digest essay illustrating the tension between industrialization and nature.

Animal Welfare Institute Public Relations Manager Marjorie Fishman noted that access to top-notch training and equipment is key to disrupting international criminal syndicates that can generate more than \$2 billion a year in retail sales.

"The criminals are always gaining in sophistication and competency," says Bill Clark, AWI's international wildlife program specialist who helps design and conduct the trainings. "Even to keep parity, we have to improve," said Dr Clark, an honorary KWS pilot-warden, who previously worked for international police organisation INTERPOL and served in the U.S Marine Corps, incorporates the best law enforcement strategies into the curriculum.

"It's one of the riskiest jobs — being a park ranger in Kenya," he explains.

As one of the few US-based organizations supporting KWS, AWI has spent more than \$300,000 upgrading instructor housing at the premiere Law Enforcement Academy at Manyani. AWI also provides KWS with essential equipment, such as night vision goggles and refurbished engines for planes.

Dr Clark, who has been supporting Kenya Wildlife Service since inception decades ago, termed the training as the best ever in 20 years with disciplined and passionate KWS pilots. "We are providing KWS with safer and more proficient pilots to deliver on its mandate," he said, adding that he prefers supporting Kenya's conservation

because of her compassionate policies and people's enthusiasm to live in balance with nature.

Presiding over the training closing ceremony, Ag. KWS Director General Prof. Charles Musyoki, said the the Airwing adds a lot of value to conservation work. He assured the pilots that the management had confidence in them and would review their physical work environment to ensure comfort.

He was accompanied by KWS Head of Airwing Michael Nicholson, Special Projects Assistant Director Ibrahim Ogle and Deputy Director Security Robert Muasya.

For more information, please contact us:

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