

RE: RESCUED ELEPHANT CALVES START JOURNEY BACK TO THE WILD

Three orphaned elephant calves have been successfully translocated to a holding facility in Sera Wildlife Conservancy, Samburu County, a first such re-wilding initiative for a community managed wildlife facility. The rescued calves are doing well in what experts term as 'soft release' even as close monitoring continues ahead of the final release to the 'real wild'.

A team comprising Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) scientists and veterinarians, Sera and Reteti management and community representatives had visited the two facilities and confirmed that requirements were in place for the translocation from the Reteti rescue facility to Sera wildlife conservancy.

The Reteti Elephant Rescue & Rehabilitation Centre (NERRC) is located within Ngilai West group ranch of Namunyak Wildlife Conservancy (NWC) in Samburu East Sub-county of Samburu County. The NWC covers about 324,000 hectares and comprises three management units namely Nalowuon, Ngilai and Kalepo which make up NWC. The rescue facility was commissioned on July 26, 2016, following a series of appraisals and a MoU with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) after a proposal submitted on January 2014. Its objectives are to provide rescue, return (re-join rescued calves with families immediately) and rehabilitation of orphaned and abandoned elephant calves in the northern elephant range and to promote conservation education in the neighbouring communities.

To date, the facility has rescued over 47 elephants, one black rhino, one greater kudu and one zebra foal. Five of the elephants were immediately reunited with their families, 16 have succumbed to death due to weak and poor body conditions at rescue and 15 are undergoing care at the facility.

The eventual plan is to release rescued animals back into the wild and institute a comprehensive post-release monitoring strategy in partnership with stakeholders. Currently, three bulls aged above three years have been separated and weaned in preparation for the release. A soft release approach has been adopted to enhance on the survival of the calves. This approach entails releasing the calves in a temporary holding Boma in Sera wildlife conservancy and eventually release into the

conservancy. The three orphaned bulls are; Warges, aged 4 years rescued from Wamba (Samburu); Sosian, aged 3.7 years rescued from Sosian (Laikipia) and Lingwesi aged 3.5 years rescued from Iingwesi (Laikipia). The animals were rescued at a tender age and could not survive on their own. In addition to proximity of the Sera wildlife conservancy to the Reteti rescue facility, the conservancy was selected since it has a perimeter electric fence hence devoid of large predators such as lions, an enhanced law enforcement team comprising of KWS and community scouts, minimal human activity and a substantive elephant population that the bulls may integrate with.

The three bulls are the first to be released into the wild after successful rehabilitation and weaning. This release is the first of its kind in Kenya mainly due to two aspects;

- a) Both the Reteti rescue facility and the Sera wildlife conservancy are purely community projects managed by community members.
- b) There has been established an elaborate release and post release monitoring protocol aimed at monitoring the success of the reintegration. The protocol encompasses monitoring of parasite loads, hormonal balance and movement patterns. With support from Save the Elephants (STE) the three calves have since been fitted with GPS/GSM satellite tracking collars.