Animals play an important role in the domestic architecture of nomadic pastoralists. Students of architecture document this unique relationship.

Story of the World’s first Packers and Movers

People not familiar with nomadic pastoralists may find it incredulous that some communities carry everything they need and set up homes at different locations along their migration routes. This lifestyle presents the most pared down form of living and the most basic sense of what may be considered a home.

The Rabaris in Kutch, the Dhangars and Dangis in Maharashtra, the Brokpas in Arunachal Pradesh, and the Changpas in Ladakh are some such nomadic pastoralist communities across India that have a distinctive tradition of carrying their homes along, usually involving a pack animal.

Packing their Homes

Through skilful packing and sequencing, usually done by the women, all of the family’s needs are packed on to the animal. The Rabaris’ herd revolves around camels, while the Dhangars use horses. The Brokpa and Changpas used the yak before but have increasingly turned to motorised vehicles.

The basic sequence of packing is divided into three broad layers: several layers of blankets tied to the animals’ back which provide cushioning; the saddle and/or the bag-like contraption containing all household belongings; followed by the upturned cot. This sequence is possibly linked to the sequence of setting up the camp - so the cot comes off first and becomes the place to store other objects.

Unpacking the Ideas

A key characteristic of these homes is that they do not have a fixed form. It emerges in the interplay of the families’ requirements, the relationships defining their ideas of domesticity, and the setting in which they build at a given moment.

Continues on page 2...
Homes on the Move

...Continued from page 1

This shifting notion is seen even more clearly among the Brokpa, who build increasingly minimal shelters as they move to higher altitudes. This fluid conception does not mean that the homes are arbitrarily set up in any way. Rather, the idea of home is understood as a body of knowledge around how to create shelter, how to inhabit a given micro-environment, and a nuanced understanding of animals’ needs as well as their own. To imagine the home as something almost intangible is an alien concept to us from settled and grounded societies accustomed to a more concrete and finite environment.

The families’ belongings are limited by what the animals can carry. They thus constantly adapt and strike a balance between what can and cannot be carried vis-à-vis what can be procured from the areas they reside in. This delicate balance requires skill and knowledge of the landscape within which the pastoralists move and dwell, acquired through the process of migration over the years.

“...This almost fluid conception does not mean that the homes are arbitrarily set up...”

Many of the Dhangars, for instance, inhabit two distinct geographies. During the monsoon months, they move to the higher plateaus and descend to the fertile Konkan region during the dry period. In each place, they constantly gauge the topography, soil conditions and availability of fodder and water, to ensure a suitable environment for camping. As younger members of the family participate in the process, they too acquire the necessary abilities to understand the needs of the animals and the equations with other communities they engage with.

Changing with the Times

The idea of a delicate balance also embeds the question of change, both within the communities and in relation to the wider world. A major change is the increased use of motorised transport instead of pack animals, as seen extensively among the Changpa in Ladakh. This fundamentally transforms the material culture of the pastoralists since they can now carry more belongings. It also replaces the process of packing and unpacking and its associated skills with the apparently haphazard aggregation of objects in the back of a truck.

In time, it is possible that this too will form a more systematic process and a new knowledge system, but given that vehicles offer fewer constraints, it is unlikely to happen in the near future. The other major change is the natural fabrics used in making the shelter, such as cotton or wool, giving way to tarpaulin or plastic. Here too, the gain is offset by a loss in the skills applied or wool, giving way to tarpaulin or plastic. Here too, the gain is offset by a loss in the skills applied.
**Down and Out: How are India’s Pastoralists coping with the Lockdown?**

Dilshad Muhammad was a Gujar who attended the Tadlih Jamea meet in Delhi. On returning to his village in Himachal, he got tested for coronavirus, which turned out negative. But the constant taunts and accusations of him spreading the disease by the villagers led him to the extreme step of committing suicide. However, no official toll has kept count of such deaths.

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As India undergoes a churning from within, pastoralists are vulnerable groups, pastoralists and nomadic tribes roam about, conserving animal biodiversity. pastoralists and nomadic tribes roam about, conserving animal biodiversity.

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**ICAR recognizes 13 New Indigenous Breeds of Livestock** by Ramesh Bhatti

In January, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) through its National Bureau of Animal Genetic resources (NBAGR), Karnal, recognized 13 new breeds of livestock in India. India has very diverse indigenous livestock—estimated to be more than 300, raised in 68 districts. Of these, 17,329 livestock breeds were recognized. Through the joint efforts of the Animal Husbandry Department, Gandhinagar, and the Agricultural University, the Banni Maldhari Association and Sahjeevan, the Banni buffalo was recognized as the 11th breed of buffalo in 2010. Therefore, 68 new breeds of livestock have been identified and registered.

In his home state, he is a near-absent citizen; in other states as an unacknowledged guest camping in open fields and in addition Ujjain and Khandwa as farmers he pays or help them. The local administration and civil society had to step in to resolve the issue. Such social stigmatisation of pastoralists is only one part of the story. Many are struggling to sell their produce, especially milk, like the Gujars in Maharashtra, the camel breeders in Khich, and sheep and goat breeders in Suresh and Partur in Gujarat. The Bharradis in Nagpur find themselves struggling as Haldram, their biggest customers is not procuring milk anymore. For now, several families are making ghee and mawa. Sheep-shearing and procurement of wool have also suffered in Himachal due to the lockdown.

In a meeting on March 25, the Himachal government allowed pastoralists to procure fodder and sell milk, but lack of an official notification hindered the continuation on the ground. In Punjab, The Wire reported on the harassment of several families of the Muslim Gujar community in Hoshiarpur district by unruly groups in villages. The family to whose house the livestock came — which authorities forced to sell its milk to the Swan, a rivulet of the Beas River, as they were not allowed to leave their dwellings amidst a social boycott. It was also reported that police excesses should be checked.

The lockdown has affected annual migration patterns too. Several Van Gujjars in Uttarakhand deflected their seasonal migration in the hope of the curfew being lifted. These families now face hurdles in procuring fodder as pastures in forests at this time of the year are scarce. The Van Gujjar, a community of pastoralists, was recently granted recognition by the government or its departments. If the Van Gujjars start migrating too late, it will significantly reduce their herds and therefore, their earnings. The Van Gujjars may now change from the Upper Himalayas to the Khadar region in Bipin, UP. Depending on the situation, they may even change from Palampur, Himachal and Surajpur, MPs to the Koltu in the Lajpat Rai constituency. Keeping in mind the risk of dying out which would result in the extinction of breeds.

Since government support for breeds and breeding programmes is contingent on official recognition of breeds, the bulk of populations nurtured and developed by pastoral communities remain ignored with little support. Without such support, pastoralists run the risk of dying out which would result in the loss of a significant part of India’s unique agro-biodiversity.

In the current exercise, 4 pastoral breeds were recognized. The breed descriptor and application for the Nari cattle raised by Rajasthan’s Raikas was jointly developed by Maharashtras, the Sahjan and the Sahjeevan-ICAR. Sahjeevan also identified the Dzari cattle in Dhalok district of Jajpur, for which further work was undertaken by Anand Agricultural University. WASSAN, Conant and Sahjeevan are responsible for the characterization and registration of the Shetra Puda breed of cattle in Telangana.

Other breeds recognized were: Bhute cattle from Nagaland; Kachchh donkeys from Gujarat; Srtula Karpal cattle from Goa; Himachal Pradesh, the Pura cattle, the Pura pig and Manchur ducks found in Bihar; the Mal pig from Tripura; the Gyr buffalo found in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh; and the Rajasthali sheep from Punjab.

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Desi Oon: Hamara Apna

An exhibition in Delhi highlights the world of Wool-crafts of Kutch

text by Shouryamoy Das
photographs courtesy Khamir

This January, Khamir presented Desi Oon: Hamara Apna - a four day exhibition on the story of wool - at Bikaner House, Delhi. Desi Oon showcased the indigenous wool of India through the microcosm and spotlight on the wool of Kutch. The exhibition garnered rave reviews and enthralled craft enthusiasts, design students, and many others from 10th-13th Jan, 2020.

A number of weavers, spinners, dyers, felters and designers joined hands with Khamir to organize this exhibition. The exhibits presented the subtle wisdom of sheep herding, the local craft of spinning, weaving and dyeing wool through workshops, artisan interactions, exquisitely crafted products, and photo essays. The workshops proved to be especially popular among the visitors. Hands of students from top design and architecture schools of Delhi, Jaipur, and other cities were active participants in soaking up all the flavours that were on offer!

This exhibition is a first step in a series of events planned by different partners of CfP to communicate the utility of indigenous wool to urban consumer markets. We are hopeful that the story of wool and sensitively designed woolen products will help sway consumer preferences, opening them to accepting wool in their households and closets.

ABOVE: Designers and students of art, design and crafts thronged the exhibition. Many of them were found absorbed amongst the craft exhibits.

RIGHT: The retail space had fabulously handcrafted woolens. The buyers did not miss a beat in claiming their textiles of choice.

PASTORAL PUZZLE!

Can you find the answers to these clues about various facets of pastoralism, which are hidden throughout the current Pastoral Times?

V R X N M Z K A U F D S I
D J S C G R W Q S C V B H E
F Q U H I O P E O A Z U A S
H W T A B E Z N X M C T N T
J E U N U S H I E L I N G A
I R A G C B O V P R E O A Z
Q V Y P L N X M U Y A U R W
A X K A N D H A R J N A K I
S Z E D T A Y D V C O T G K
T N L N B G L O F Y G E S N
Y A J V U R A Z E S A W A D
M A A S A O Y W U O V Y F
O I A F H U T R E W L B O T
P T Y A E B E D O U I N H

1. The bag-like contraption tied on a camel’s back which carries all the belongings of a Rabari family during migration
2. Nomadic pastoralists of Leh and Ladakh who keep goats that yield the prized Pashmina fibre
3. This village in Bihar claims to host Asia’s largest cattle fair
4. Establishment of this National Park, whose name means ‘endless plains’, displaced several Maasai pastoralists in the 1950s
5. These ‘desert-dwellers’ are nomadic Arabs known for herding sheep, goats and dromedary camels
6. Cattle-keepers in Maharashtra, and one of many communities severely hit by the national lockdown
7. Cattle breed found in Gujarat mainly survives on grazing and is mostly used for household milk consumption
8. Shepherds, cowherds and weavers from this pastoralist community in Maharashtra are known as Hatkars, Ahirs and Khutekars respectively
9. This community from Odisha practices pig pastoralism
10. Upland pastures in Western Britain where transhumant pastoralists used to take their cattle for grazing in summers

Camel Milk Chocolates

Aadvik’s Handmade Camel Milk Chocolates represent the refined elegance. These exquisite assorted chocolates, available for the first time in India, will leave you mesmerized. Now available in Butterscotch, Almonds and Pan flavours.

Order your favourite flavour from www.aadvikfoods.com
The Story of the Yak’s Fur
by Dakar La

‘My grandpa once told me a story about the buffalo and the yak. A yak is a large ox with shaggy hair and large horns, found in Tibet and Central Asia.

Centuries ago, Yak used to live in India. At the time, the creature did not have the long, thick and shaggy hair that it now has.

It was also believed that Buffalo was the Yak’s uncle. The Buffalo used to have long, thick and shaggy hair, which the Yak now has. The Yak had heard stories of the beauty of the land of Tibet from a herd of Tibetan antelope when they came to visit India. And so he decided he must go to Tibet to find out.

He began on his journey but didn’t succeed because the road to Tibet was hard to navigate. It was also very cold and unbearable for an animal like the Yak. And so he came back to India. But of course he did still want to go to Tibet. He knew he needed to plan well before he tried again, and so approached his thick furred friends for help. About that time they would all go to Tibet together. Now Yak had to get some fur for himself. He went to his uncle, the Buffalo, to ask for his fur but his uncle refused even after Yak assured him he would give back his fur along with lots of salt, once he returned from Tibet.

With no option left, Yak stole some of his uncle’s fur.

The next day at sunrise Yak and his furry friends began their journey. They crossed the Brahmaputra with great difficulty and reached the border between Tibet and India. As they were crossing the river, a pack of wild dogs attacked them. After a long struggle, they fought off the dogs and carried on their journey towards southern Tibet, now Lhasa.

Back in India, as time passed, Buffalo began to realise that his nephew had duped him. Buffalo then learnt that one must not be gullible.

Dakar La is a school student studying in Darbhunj. He submitted this story in a competition organised by Antarna Foundation.

“Since the beginning of the lockdown, the daily number of calls has gone up by 4-5 times. This shows that many pastoralists do not have access to vets, as also that they find our methods useful.”

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The Travelling Teacher

An interview with Dr. Balaram Sahu, who runs Patha Paathshaala, a travelling ‘People’s University’ that shares traditional ‘people-oriented-technologies’ with pastoralists in Odisha.

by Puneet Bansal

Can you introduce Patha Paathshaala to our readers?

Patha Paathshaala, a People’s University on the Move, is a travelling school/class imparting training to people at the grassroots about low input-based small skills related to livestock-keeping, herbal remedies for animals, indigenous poultry keeping, herbal pesticide making for crops, fisheries, irrigation and natural resources management.

“Classes are attended by farmers, pastoralists, women, students, and others. We make use of stories, rhythms, songs and anthologies to teach, which the people can remember easily and also pass on to their friends and peers. I usually carry some booklets and visual aids to show to the participants.

Patha Paathshaala must be a fun class to attend! How did you come up with the idea of starting such a school?

When universities, Koshi Vigyan Kendras and other government agencies conduct training, people who are not involved in farming or livestock keeping are made to attend them to fill the quorum. These reluctant participants end up losing their daily wages. Women rarely attend as they did not have much formal education. Pathe Patshala gives them a chance to attend classes and not feel excluded from the education process.

English often acts as the medium with trainers using much jargon alien to the participants. It made me think that such training should be at a place, time and in a language convenient to the people.”

Indeed, education’s importance cannot be overstated. What is the idea behind the ‘people-oriented-technologies’ taught in your training programmes?

In a rural context, there is a lot of indigenous knowledge and ‘people-oriented-technologies’ in people’s daily lives. Many have been scientifically validated by different agencies. All we need is to capture them so that it empowers people with the knowledge. The tools and ingredients for these are locally available. Women and farmers have immense faith in them. My motto is to tap into their skills—something they can do by themselves, without help from others.

For example, there is a herbal remedy for diarrhea in livestock used by farmers. It can be summed up as a rhyme: “Doj jo buj pathe Harida, dahi ado khaa. All one needs to do is to make a mixture of 150 gms of harida (turmeric) and half a cup of dahi (curd), feed it to the animal two times a day for 3 days. It costs 10-15 rupees. This simple low-input skill is affordable for a villager, as medicines cost a lot. It is scientific too as turmeric contains bio-molecules like curcumin and dahi contains RNase and probiotics which kill the bacteria.

People do not perceive such remedies as alien and readily accept them. We need to scientifically describe these and give it back in a language they can understand. In my book ‘Khowpe yopar, thapar to cure cows’, now translated into English, every such technology is described in rhyme in Odia.

How interesting! Could you tell us more about how Patha Paathshaala has helped pastoralists in the region?

Patha Paathshaala gives the pastoralists remedies to treat animals on their own. We also run a Tete-Vet programme. Pastoralists call us whenever they have a problem and we give them detailed information on the ingredients needed, how to procure them, and then use them.

Periodically, pastoralists invite us to conduct trainings. We have published booklets in local languages for them, covering several relevant topics for pastoralists, like breeding. Since the beginning of the current lockdown, the daily number of calls we receive has gone up 4-5 times. This shows that many pastoralists do not have access to vets, as also that they find our methods useful.

How has pastoralism contributed to your own knowledge bank?

Patha Paathshaala is a platform for the cross-pollination of knowledge, especially between different groups or communities inhabiting separate geographies, who may not be communicating with each other. This is also true for pastoralists.

You have also worked with pig pastoralists. Can you tell us something about it?

Pig Pastoralism is prevalent in East and North-east India. The Kifus are a community in Odisha practicing pig herding. Society gives them a tough time and people are generally hostile towards the pigs who are blamed for destroying crops and spreading diseases like swine flu. It is well established that swine flu is not spread by pigs but human transmission, which I always mention in my public interviews.

Finally, what has your experience of running Patha Paathshaala taught you?

I was once taking a class in a Maoist-affected tribal area of Nuapada district in Odisha. Initially there were about fifty participants, that later swelled up to about two hundred people. The class was on herbal remedies for diseases in goats. After the class, they requested me to participate in a spontaneously arranged community feast, giving me a grand farewell later. On our way back, my companions told me that some of the participants were Maoists. I did not however feel threatened at all while I was there. Rather, they were very courteous and kind to me. This experience taught me how working with love can conquer all odds.

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Job Alert!

CENTRE FOR PASTORALISM is looking to hire a GRAPHIC DESIGNER!

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CIP is an equal opportunity employer.
As times change, humans and animals struggle to continue their celebration of myriad cultures and traditions, at the Sonepur Cattle Fair

A fortnight after Diwali, on the day of Kartik Poornima, Sonepur, a village in Bihar located at the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Gandak 30 kms from Patna, hosts what is described by the tourism department as ‘Asia’s largest cattle fair’. It goes on for close to a month. In the past it attracted traders from as far as Central Asia. The cattle fair is held in commemoration of Vishnu who in his Harihar Nath avatar rescued the devout elephant Gaj Grah from being maimed by an attacking crocodile while paying him obeisance. In this backdrop, the Harihar Nath temple, the holy dip in the rivers and the ceremonial bathing of elephants are central to the carnival. The fair is also historically significant as Chandragupta Maurya is believed to have bought elephants for his army from here. But with changing times, the fair is changing too.

ABOVE: A boy carries fodder to the camp for his cattle. The Sonepur Pashu Mela wears a different look these days. Gone are the crowds of animals, and bargaining over them isn’t the first order of business on the minds of visitors. Instead, clothing and handicraft stalls, those selling sweetmeats and other hawkers line the dusty fairgrounds. Celebrities peddling everything from hair oil to batteries vie for visitors’ attention from the hoardings.

ABOVE: A vendor polishes the horns of his cow to attract customers. A place where some 15000 animals were once sold, ‘Gai Bazaar’ wears a comparatively deserted look these days. Old timers say cow politics has hit the Gai Bazaar hard. Cattle traders complain that business—on a decline for a decade—has virtually dried up these days. The worst blow came in 2017 when the central government banned the sale of cattle for slaughter at animal markets. Many farmers stopped bringing milch animals fearing attacks by vigilantes. Cattle traders say it was wrong to link slaughtering of animals to cattle fairs.

This article was first published in a different form on https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8285313/Flock-Hundreds-SHEEP-overrun-Turkish-city-coronavirus-lockdown.html

Text based on https://scroll.in/article/946389/indias-restriction-on-cattle-sale-has-dulled-the-shine-of-asias-largest-animal-festival

Ritayan Mukherjee is a Kolkata-based photography enthusiast and a PARI (People’s Archive of Rural India) Fellow.
A Chinese proverb proclaims “Wait, and grass will soon enough be milk.” While this may point to the many uses of this ubiquitous plant, it also asks us to be patient to see nature transform itself into newer wonders. Graham Harvey foregrounds grasses and grasslands to transform itself into newer wonders. Harvey says, “The scientific revolution that characterized the 19th century, which marked the beginning of modern science, was based on the assumption that nature and the natural world could be known and understood. This assumption was based on the idea that the natural world is a machine, and that its parts and processes can be understood by analyzing them.” Harvey foregrounds grasses and grasslands to transform itself into newer wonders. Harvey says, “The scientific revolution that characterized the 19th century, which marked the beginning of modern science, was based on the assumption that nature and the natural world could be known and understood. This assumption was based on the idea that the natural world is a machine, and that its parts and processes can be understood by analyzing them.”

She Leads Hikers along Egypt’s Sinai Trail, Rejecting Bedouin Gender Norms

by Salma Islam

Umun Yasser, considered a trailblazer for Bedouins, actually started as a guide in 2015. Here she first hiked with British trail developer and conservationist Ben Hoffler to build a trail. Despite their suggestion of her husband, Ibrahim Elabed Sarey, Hoffler was scouting routes for the Sinai Trail which is being restored to female tourists, with a special agreement on that occasion for some male journalists to attend. The 16 female hikers and six male journalists were however not permitted to camp overnight in the wilderness and returned to the village before sunset. Still, this marked a milestone for the Bedouin community.

“The other tribes had objected before the trip because they thought it shameful for women to hike,” Umun Yasser said at their family home. “I don’t think it’s shameful, so I’m not concerned. I believe what I’m doing is right because work is a good thing.”

Autumn marks the start of another hiking season, generally running through spring, and trail guides can make roughly the equivalent of $40 per day. The trail which aims to help the tribes by attracting tourism money, covers more than 360 miles and can take six weeks to complete. Umun Yasser expects to lead solo trips, including mixed groups — possibly with overnight stays. She also expects to co-guide a mixed-group with her husband involving overnight camping. “I feel very proud,” says Umun Yasser of her work guiding hikers on the Sinai Trail.

Movies

“Many have spoken for us... now we speak for ourselves”

Oloosho is a short film created by six members of the Maasai community from three distinct clans who were fighting for over twenty years to protect their territory. The community’s land—a sandwiched between the Serengeti and Mara and Ngorongoro—was under threat from foreign companies and the Tanzanian government, who were interested in the existence of the Maasai and creating a luxury game hunting reserve.

These particular Maasai communities were resettled in their current home – Lolondo - from lands that constituted the Serengeti National Park in the 1950s. Several violent evictions have been carried out by the authorities, like one in 2009 and another in 2015, sometime after this movie was shot. Although this particular project was cancelled in 2017 with allegations of corruption against officials and the company, Maasai lands continue to be threatened after Lolondo was brought under Ngorongoro Conservation Area, and the threat of eviction remains.

Oloosho is a powerful movie in which the community members, very concisely and eloquently, talk about their relationship to their land and animals, the problems they face like lack of access to clean water, and their ongoing struggle to protect their land, while demanding the Government recognize their rights, all in 15 minutes.

Oloosho will resonate with many in India, especially when the Maasai describe the attempts to violently evict them and how they are forced to migrate as migrants, and not citizens. As they speak for themselves, these proud pastoralists tell us how anything other than living where their ancestors are buried is a violation of their rights.

Trivia: Did Goats discover the wonders of Coffee?

Coffee, grown worldwide, traces its heritage centuries back to the ancient coffee forests on the mountains of Ethiopia. The legend, however, is that a heutego discovered the properties of coffee after eating the berries of a certain tree. Kaldi reported his findings to the abbot of a local monastery who made a drink with the berries and found that it kept him alert through the long hours of evening prayer. Thus began humanity’s affair with coffee.

The story is however considered apocryphal by some researchers, and first appeared in a written account only in the 17th century. But if the legend holds true, coffee lovers should be grateful to Kaldi’s enterprising goats.
Pastoralists choose Wildlife over Real Estate Millions

A lease-payment programme pays Maasai pastoralists for protecting wildlife instead of selling their lands to real-estate developers.

by Leopold Obi

Nairobi, Kenya: Loise Matunge would have been enviably wealthy had she agreed to sell even an eighth of her expansive land which lies by one of the world’s few national parks located within a city.

With Nairobi niggly advancing towards Athi River and Kajiado County, where Matunge lives, the 73-year-old often receives offers from developers eyeing her 170 acres of prime land to turn it into property worth millions of shillings.

But the Maasai pastoralist won’t yield an inch. She and several fellow pastoralists from Kitengela, the town that borders the metropolis to the south, have opened up acres of their land to the community wildlife conservancy for pasture returns.

Their selfless act, offering their farms for wildlife conservation rather than giving in to soaring pressure from the eager real estate market, is best appreciated when standing at the nearby Embakasi Primary School. At the school which sits between Athi River town and Nairobi National Park, one’s eye easily takes in the panoramic beauty of the adjacent wildlife haven.

Thirst for Education

The wonder of watching the zebras, ostriches, wildebeests and cattle grazing side by side doesn’t last long as the mushrooming skyscrapers extending towards the park quickly soar into view.

“We are given cheques a few days before the school opens, which is convenient because I channeled the money directly to school fees,” explained Karusei, who agrees that the money the school opens, which is convenient because

Earning Dividends

Tatuya Semoi Karuei, who has leased 60 acres of his land to the conservancy, says he uses the proceeds from the lease programme to educate his three children in high school and college.

“She and several fellow pastoralists who hail from Kitengela have opened up acres of their land to the community wildlife conservancy for pasture returns.”

“Where are our Beautiful Camels?” Syria’s Bedouin Wonder

Nomadic breeders say their prize herds have been scattered by the ongoing civil war

F rom a rented room in Athens, Saleh Suwaidan recalls his family’s former life as Bedouin camel breeders in Palmyra. By April each year, Mr Suwaidan, 32, would have been busy training the finest from his herd—improving their speed and honing their fitness for the big Palmyra race.

With more than 2,000 acres of land around the park under the community conservancy for wildlife, the animals here can now use the park as a fall back grazing area.

The conservation efforts are paying off too. Nicken Parmsia, the area chief, observes that the project has significantly contributed to the rise in wildlife population, especially of lions. “There were about nine lions in the National Park in 2003, while now there are 42 lions and 27 cubs. We advise the community to not sell their land because they can still retain it and get school fees for their children,” Parmisia pointed out.

The lease-payment programme, spearheaded by The Wildlife Foundation (TWF), was started in the year 2000 with funding from the World Bank. At the time, it had 55,000 acres of land under lease.

Darkest Time

The programme ran into trouble in 2014 when the World Bank funding ended, throwing the initiative into disarray, with a number of locals selling off their land. The period between 2014 and 2016 was the darkest for the park and its dispersal areas.

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