

Tang Prize Foundation
&
Gro Brundtland



Milgis Trust

5 years from the Director

We were extremely grateful to Gro Brundtland for her incredibly kind foresight when she won the TANG PRIZE for great things that she believes in, 'a sustainable world' - to kindly share part of her money she won with the Milgis Trust. When we were told that this donation was to be used over 5 years, it was music to our ears. We are big advocates of longer term donations. When one has given one's life to preserving a special area on this planet, as we have with the Milgis Trust, one year donations (although every dollar donated is appreciated) are not the way forwards. They don't really reflect the donors commitment to the cause, as we would like to see. So thank you Gro and thank you TANG PRIZE.

We have seen incredible changes in the last 5 years, and the biggest one is that the Elephants now have been accepted as part of daily life again. These days one sees elephants come out at any time of the day to enjoy a drink, bathe, even wonder up the lugga in the open, when there are people with their livestock just across the other side. It wasn't like that 5 years ago, and when we first started the Milgis back in 2004 they would only come out VERY CAUTIOUSLY to drink at night and then slip straight back into the thick forest to spend the day. One never saw them, and if one did they generally were running for their lives, or ready to protect themselves.

This beautiful remote region in northern Kenya is true elephant country, it has everything they need to survive and thrive, most importantly there are NO FENCES. They can migrate with the pastoral peoples, to where it rains. By the way, elephants prefer to be diurnal creatures!

The progress at the beginning was painstakingly gradual (I don't blame the elephants, they were completely wiped out north of the Milgis Lugga). But, finally in the last 5 years they realize 'we' mean it! The first 10 years of working tirelessly with the local Samburu and Rendille people in trying to explain: "LET NATURE DO ITS WORK, AND YOU WILL SEE THE BENEFITS". Some people doubted us... With modernization, influence from missionaries, corrupt officials including the very people that were meant to look after the wild life in the game department, it became a free for all.. the custodians of the land got into bad ways and were literally destroying their future, and what they had to live off!

Just one small example was that the elephants were sadly decimated by poachers at the end of the last century - earlier hunting was practiced throughout this area, and the people who had lived peacefully with the environment and the wildlife were dragged into these ridiculous bad practices.. the elephants became dangerous, and it snowballed into a mutual hatred between wildlife and humans..

BUT

Actually the elephant is extremely important for the Samburu people. These gentle giants are meant to be there... Yes they can be very gentle if left to be! Just a few examples... The first fire in a newly married Samburu homestead MUST be lit with baby Elephant dung!.. Elephants open up very thick bush and make paths for all other beings to use, they bathe in pools of water and make beautiful pan dams for all to benefit from when the rains come, they know where to dig for water in a dry sandy lugga during the drought.. All this was lost but through our hard work, and your financial help it's all coming back!!!.. the best thing of all is the fires that the cow owners used to light to burn that thick bush, and spiral out of control into the valuable forests have almost stopped.

THANK YOU ELEPHANTS.. THANK YOU GRO AND ALL involved in the TANG PRIZE.. including our friend Jesse Chern, who came all the way to the Milgis to hand over the cheque! We are proud of you all, and very grateful!

Executive Summary

The Milgis Trust was founded in 2004 in order to protect the wildlife, habitat and pastoral people's way of life, in this stunning and very remote part of northern Kenya. Our mandate is to pave the way for a fully restored ecosystem, shared by people and wildlife alike. Poaching, deforestation and degradation of land are the main challenges facing flora and fauna in the area. We believe that wildlife and pastoral peoples can live peacefully together without borders, as they have done for so long. The majority of wildlife in the world is living behind fences - it is our priority to ensure that this does not happen. Experience has taught us that the most effective way to conserve is by dealing directly with the communities.

Elephant Protection Program

The most important aspect of the Milgis trusts work is our elephant protection program. The Milgis ecosystem is part of one of the last wild landscapes where elephants can live their lives as god intended- following the same migratory routes for centuries and peacefully living alongside the nomadic tribes of the area. However, from the beginning of the century to the 1970s this was a major sport hunting area, which to a Samburu who only kills to eat, was unfathomable. After hunting was banned in the early 70's there was an influx of 'Shifta' bandits that led to 2 decades of mass poaching. So much so that the elephants became nocturnal and avoided human contact. Since 2004, the Milgis Trust has turned the situation around and by 2015 the elephant population had increased from 400 to nearly 800 individuals. However, the increased population comes with its pressure and it takes a huge amount of work to keep these elephants safe. The threats of human-wildlife conflict, poaching, drought and habitat loss are putting a lot of pressure on this unique population.

So, In 2015 we were thrilled to receive support from Gro Brundtland, through the Tang Prize foundation. This program could not have come at a better time, and has enabled us to develop four main aspects of our elephant conservation program – communications, ranger program, elephant wells and veterinary.

An 'elephant Highway'





Project Overview

The viability of this project was immediately improved by the fact that we had a five year implementation period. With elephants it is a slow process, and results take years. There are many factors that attribute to this. Mainly, elephants reach breeding age at 12-15 years which makes any population monitoring a long-term undertaking. Secondly, ‘an elephant never forgets’ – meaning that it can take years for elephants to regain trust in an area that they were once persecuted. It also takes several years to implement a system that will work in the long run especially in this part of the world it is a must to forge a relationship with the local people, who are the custodians of these elephants.

It has taken 16 years of hard work for the Milgis trust to start seeing the change. The change making actions for elephant conservation since we started can be attributed to three main activities. These same activities are what we have focused on with the Tang Prize grant. They are as follows:

Ranger Program

- **4 Scout unit leaders**
- **27 scouts**
- **39 parttime scouts**
- **72000 wildlife sighting reports annually**
- **6000 foot patrols annually**
- **120 conservation meetings annually**

Community awareness

- **7 conservation committees**
- **Mobile conservation education unit**
- **180 community based awareness meetings annually**

Human-Wildlife Conflict

- **15 ele-friendly wells maintained annually**
- **Average of 2 emergency veterinary responses**
- **Average of 49 Human wildlife conflict incidents annually**

Scouts Program

The milgis scouts are the backbone of our operation. What makes our scouts different is that they live at home in their communities and go about their day to day lives as nomadic pastoralists. They go on foot patrols and report to our radio base twice a day. Collectively they provide an essential network of information, reporting any wildlife sightings, human-wildlife conflict and any issues that are being experienced in the community.

Through the Tang Prize grant we have been able to employ 2 unit leaders, 10 scouts and 5 part time scouts for 5 years. Furthermore, we have been able to equip them and provide training so that they are able to deal with the many challenges faced. These extra personnel have provided 25% more area coverage, meaning that nearly 2000 square kilometres of habitat is being conserved through this grant. Over 5 years we have seen a 75% reduction in human wildlife conflict in area's with scouts. The scouts presence has also deterred illegal loggers who trade in east African sandalwood.

The scouts are not only responsible for conservation, but also act as liaisons for all of our humanitarian projects being carried out in their respective communities. We believe that you can't talk conservation until you have dealt with the basic needs of the community. Other community based activities supervised by the scouts include:

- **Water Projects**

The scouts ensure that the community is sustainably utilizing water, whilst allowing the wildlife to drink from the same troughs.

- **Education**

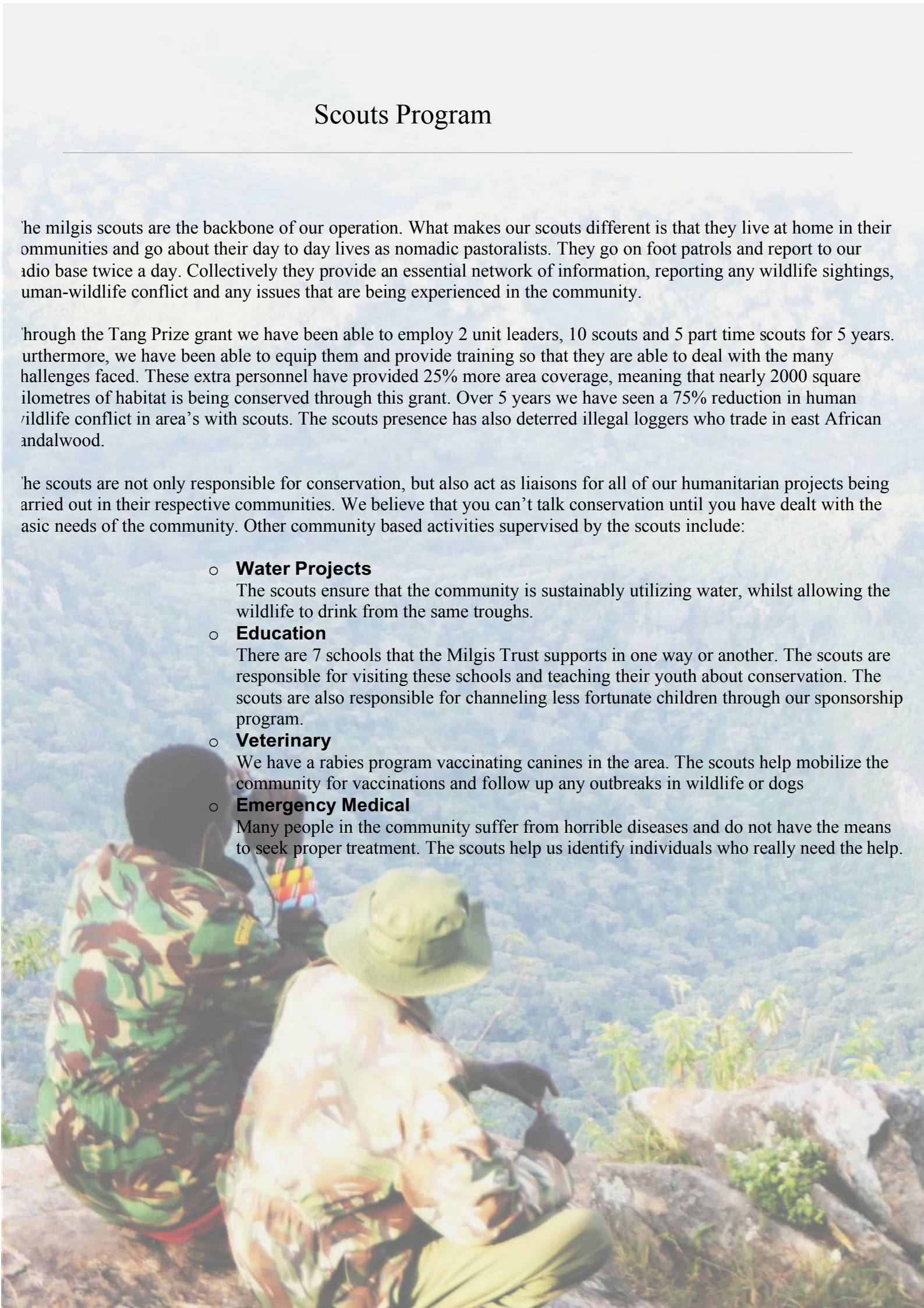
There are 7 schools that the Milgis Trust supports in one way or another. The scouts are responsible for visiting these schools and teaching their youth about conservation. The scouts are also responsible for channeling less fortunate children through our sponsorship program.

- **Veterinary**

We have a rabies program vaccinating canines in the area. The scouts help mobilize the community for vaccinations and follow up any outbreaks in wildlife or dogs

- **Emergency Medical**

Many people in the community suffer from horrible diseases and do not have the means to seek proper treatment. The scouts help us identify individuals who really need the help.





‘Ele friendly’ wells

The past 5 years have been dry, with very little rainfall in the Milgis area. During these times of drought all of the perennial rivers dry up, and there is no water in any dams. The only available water for wildlife is found in deep wells dug in the sandy river bed by pastoralists.

The elephants and other creatures rely on these wells, and usually visit them at night. The wells are so deep that even a full grown elephant struggles to reach the water with his trunk. Smaller elephants cannot reach and the babies often slip into the wells and drown. The elephants also collapse the wells due to their size. The result is almost always a destroyed well, totally unusable by the person who spent all day digging it. This can get too much for the warriors, who have to dig a new well every day. They can end up shooting at the elephants to deter them from drinking in the area.

Our solution has been to employ warriors to maintain access ramps into the wells. They renovate each well every morning, so that even baby elephants can walk into the well and drink safely. We had 6 teams during the height of the dry season. They simply dig a big ramp into the wells, so that all wildlife can come and go safely and without collapsing the well. This has been a huge success. After 5 years, the elephants have learned to use the ramps and drink safely. There is almost no tension between the community and the wildlife. Everybody can drink in safety.

An adult straining to reach the water





Other significant results from the past 5 years:

- 5 years ago one only saw lion tracks - now we hear and see lions quite often. Despite the threat they pose to livestock, lions are still considered an essential parts of pastoral traditions and ceremonies.
- 5 years ago Elephants were still very nervous to come out in the day time into the luggas, but now its the norm.. (elephants are vital for the health of this kind of ecosystem, relaxed elephants are much easier to live with if you are a pastoralist)
- People are beginning to realize that burning the forests is 'cutting their own throats' (sadly conservation is often 1 step forwards but can be 2 steps backwards because of fires lit by the community).
- The students that were taken on for the university/colleges all from very poor backgrounds are now showing their appreciation of what the Milgis did for them, and are fabulous ambassadors for the wildlife.
- The dams that were new 5 years ago and not able to hold water now are holding water for much longer - thanks to the elephants rolling and swimming.
- There are lots more ambassadors for Milgis because we have managed to give life back to many people with horrible health problems.
- People are now living without the threat of rabies!

Emergency veterinary

One of the few consequences of living in such a remote area is that we find it difficult and very expensive to support the treatment of wildlife veterinary cases. This has been especially clear over the past 5 years – there has been a disease passing through the elephant population and if it were not for this grant we may have lost many more elephants than we have. 2018 was the worst year and we lost 12 elephants to this disease alone. Thanks to your support we have been able to identify emergencies and bring in the necessary professional support. Fortunately, Kenya wildlife services and Sheldrick wildlife trust were able to provide the expertise and treat several of these elephants. We are extremely grateful for their support in this specialised field.



A very big thank you from all the inhabitants of the Milgis ecosystem
