SERA WILDLIFE CONSERVANCY







2026 HALF-YEAR REPORT JANUARY–JUNE

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Oliver Bass

MESSAGE FROM THE CONSERVANCY MANAGER



The year began with tough conditions. The failed October–December rains extended the dry season, putting heavy pressure on pasture and water, and pushing herders from Sera and neighbouring conservancies of Biliqo Bulesa, Nakuprat-Gotu, and Melako toward the Kom Triangle's remaining reserves.

This contributed to pockets of conflict and cattle rustling, with tragic loss of lives and livestock.

Through joint peacebuilding efforts involving government, conservancies, and communities, the situation was contained.

The early arrival of the March–May rains brought much-needed relief just as browse in the rhino sanctuary was depleting and supplementary feeding plans were being considered, despite limited resources.

Fortunately, the rains were adequate and well-distributed, allowing rangelands to regenerate, degraded areas to recover, and herders to return closer to home.

Livestock conditions improved, wildlife returned to traditional habitats, and women-owned grass plots flourished at the start of the rains, providing seeds for future restoration and an income stream that strengthens household and landscape resilience.

We also made progress in strengthening the conservancy's systems and wildlife protection capacity.

The completion of the 2025 external audit has strengthened accountability and improved our operational frameworks. Our rangers received training in conservation technology, including the use of drones for wildlife monitoring, anti-poaching patrols and habitat mapping.

As we move into the second half of the year, our focus will be on maintaining core operations, strengthening rangeland management, sustaining community benefits, and ensuring wildlife continues to thrive.
I thank our staff and rangers for keeping the fire burning, even through challenging times.

Your dedication, courage, and commitment to Sera are a true reflection of resilience.

Reuben Lendira
Conservancy Manager



HALF-YEAR AT A GLANCE

January–June 2026

31 **RHINOS PROTECTED**
26 eastern black rhinos | 5 southern white rhinos

0 Rhino poaching incidents

17 **ELEPHANTS REWILDED**
7 orphaned elephants from Reteti

KES 5.1M **EDUCATION BURSARIES DISBURSED**
580 students supported

Phase 01 Sanctuary Long-Term Water Project completed

174 Pairs of ranger boots donated

10 ha Women-led grass plot established

17 Vacant positions filled

23 Sera zones covered under the Northern Rangelands Carbon Project

Feature Story

Last Stand of Loicheru: Remembering One of Sera's Founding Rhinos

Territorial fights are part of life for male black rhinos. Every bull must establish and defend a home range, and clashes with rivals are inevitable. Conservation efforts have done much to reduce threats like poaching and habitat loss, but they cannot protect rhinos from the natural conflicts that come with life in the wild.

Good rainfall and abundant browse often leave rhinos in peak condition, making dominant bulls more likely to challenge rivals for territory and breeding opportunities. For Loicheru, one such confrontation would prove to be his last. On the morning of 13 May 2026, the Romeo 1 ranger team at Sera Wildlife Conservancy was conducting a routine rhino-monitoring patrol when they came across Loicheru lying motionless.

Moments later, a radio message reached the Joint Operations Communications Centre confirming the devastating news: Loicheru had succumbed to injuries sustained during a territorial fight.

The news spread quickly across the conservancy. Rangers who had spent years tracking his movements and monitoring his health struggled to come to terms with the loss. For many, Loicheru was one of the pioneering bulls they had watched grow into one of the sanctuary's dominant males.

He was born on 25 February 2009 and was among the 10 eastern black rhinos translocated from Lewa Wildlife Conservancy to Sera in 2015. He arrived as a six-year-old bull and became one of the founders of Sera's growing black rhino population before dying at the age of 17. Territorial battles were nothing new to him. Over the years, he survived several fierce encounters that left him with scars. One fight broke his front left shoulder; another left a deep wound on his right hind leg. The Romeo 2 ranger team, who had monitored Loicheru for many years, remember him as a dominant bull that rarely gave up territory. Despite his size and strength, he had a calm temperament and often tolerated the presence of vehicles, giving visitors a rare chance to observe and photograph him.

His name, Loicheru, means "the one who brings fortune", a name that reflected the role he played in Sera's conservation story. His final battle took place near Ikipeperian, close to the Loloswan waterhole. During the fight, his rival, Loitemu, drove his horn into Loicheru's abdomen, piercing his intestines and inflicting fatal injuries.

Loicheru is the second rhino Sera has lost to territorial conflict, according to Conservancy Manager Reuben Lendira.

His death, he said, is a reminder that some risks remain unavoidable, even in well-managed conservation programmes. "This is a huge blow for us. We have lost one of Sera's iconic and pioneering black rhinos," Lendira said.

He noted, however, that Sera's investment in conservation technology, including EarthRanger, GPS tracking, digital radio communication and drones, allows rangers to monitor rhinos closely and respond quickly to incidents. It was this system that enabled the Romeo 1 team to report Loicheru's death immediately after discovering him.

The loss was also felt well beyond the conservancy. Community members, many of whom have supported rhino conservation since the sanctuary was established, shared in the grief.

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"Our hearts felt very heavy when we heard the news about Loicheru. We have all dedicated our lives to protecting these critically endangered animals, and losing one of them affects us deeply," says Hussein Leparmarai, Chair of the Sera Sanctuary Committee.

Rhino Sanctuary Manager Albert Leturuka says Loicheru's death was deeply personal.

> **"Loicheru was one of those rhinos every ranger knew well. We had monitored him for years and watched him survive countless territorial battles. Losing him was difficult because he was part of Sera's story.**

Though his life ended in a battle, Loicheru leaves behind an enduring legacy. He sired a female calf, Nesere, born to Nteekwa, contributing to the next generation of eastern black rhinos at Sera. Today, the sanctuary is home to 26 eastern black rhinos and five southern white rhinos, a population Loicheru helped establish.



WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Protecting wildlife is one of Sera's core mandates. During the first half of 2026, conservation teams combined community engagement, ranger patrols, technology, training, and partnerships to strengthen wildlife protection in the sanctuary and the wider landscape.

Elephant Rewilding Programme

- 17 elephants moved from the Rhino Sanctuary into the wider ecosystem. Seven of these were orphaned calves from Reteti Elephant Sanctuary.
- The elephants were rewilded as part of Sera's elephant rewilding and habitat management programme, in collaboration with Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Save the Elephants, Kenya Wildlife Service and Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, with support from San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance.

Rhino Protection

- Sera Rhino Sanctuary maintained its zero-poaching status throughout the reporting period. This reflects the conservancy's continued commitment to black rhino recovery in northern Kenya and to community-led approaches to endangered species conservation.



Wildlife Monitoring





- 30 members of the rhino monitoring and security teams completed a three-day refresher training in rhino monitoring and law enforcement. The training was facilitated by WWF-Kenya and APRLS and funded by Save the Rhino International.
- 6 additional digital cameras were provided to improve rhino identification, body assessment and field photography. A laptop was also provided to the Rhino Research Officer to strengthen reporting, communication and data management.
- In April, Conservancy Warden Johnstone Lemerketo and Wildlife Database Administrator Mercy Leporole participated in a wildlife monitoring meeting convened by The Nature Conservancy under the Northern Rangelands Data Program. The meeting focused on strengthening the use of EarthRanger and smartphones for wildlife monitoring.



Conservation Technology

- In March, Sera's Sanctuary Manager and drone pilot participated in the 2026 Global Conservation Technology and Drone Forum in Nairobi.
- The forum brought together scientists, policymakers, technologists and rangers to explore how drones, artificial intelligence, sensors and data systems can support biodiversity protection and ecosystem restoration.

Ranger Welfare

- 174 pairs of boots were donated by the Game Rangers Association of Africa to support ranger welfare and field teams. The donation fulfilled a commitment made during the previous year's Africa Ranger Congress.
- 125 camel bags and 54 water bottles were donated by Kampur Travel Diaries to support Sera's field teams during the reporting period. These portable water bags and bottles have been essential in keeping rangers hydrated during long patrols, helping them monitor for longer and more effectively.



Wildlife Security

- In June, Sera formally transitioned management of the 9-0, 9-1 and 9-2 anti-poaching teams from the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT).
- The transition follows NRT's strategic shift towards an enabling role focused on building the capacity and leadership of community conservancies to manage their own conservation programmes.



- The specialised, multi-ethnic teams are equipped with drones and K-9 units and support anti-poaching operations and patrols across the Sera ecosystem, including Melako, Biliqo, the Ewaso River landscape and parts of Isiolo and Marsabit counties.
- The handover was witnessed by members of the Samburu County Security Committee, the Samburu East Sub-County Security Team, Kenya Wildlife Service, representatives from NRT and Sera Conservancy management.
- In addition to wildlife protection, the teams will continue working with communities to promote peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife and help address climate-related human-wildlife conflict.

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Feature Story

7 Orphaned Elephants Complete Rewilding Journey into the Wild



In northern Kenya, elephant calves sometimes lose their families to prolonged drought, human-wildlife conflict, or the death of their mothers. Alone and vulnerable, few survive without intervention.

When an orphan is found, community members, rangers, or wildlife officers alert authorised rescue centres such as Reteti Elephant Sanctuary or the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust. There, the calves are treated for injuries or illness, bottle-fed, and given intensive care until they are strong enough to begin the next stage of rehabilitation.

But rescue is only the first step. Before an orphaned elephant can return to the wild, it must learn survival skills its mother would have taught it: where and what to eat, how to find water, especially during the dry season, how to recognise danger, and how to navigate the landscape.

Once they are old enough, the calves are moved to Sera Wildlife Conservancy, where they begin the next and most critical stage of their journey: the rewilding transition. Unlike a rescue centre, Sera offers something human caretakers cannot—a landscape shared with wild elephant herds. Here, the orphans gradually spend more time with wild elephants and less time around people until they are ready to live independently.

One of Sera's greatest strengths is its resident wild elephant population. Over time, these herds have come to accept the orphaned elephants, allowing them to learn through natural interactions rather than from people. The first four orphaned elephants arrived at Sera in 2019. Later that year, six more calves joined them, bringing the total to ten. Like any conservation programme, rewilding came with challenges. Two elephants were lost during the severe drought that hit northern Kenya in 2022, and another was killed by a lion before it had fully developed the instincts needed to survive on its own.

Despite these setbacks, the programme showed encouraging results. Monitoring by conservation teams revealed that the elephants were becoming increasingly independent, venturing beyond Sera into neighbouring Namunyak Wildlife Conservancy and other connected habitats.

As elephant numbers inside the Sera Rhino Sanctuary grew, management recognised the need to balance elephant numbers, habitat health, and the sanctuary's growing rhino population.

The recent release of 17 elephants therefore marked a major milestone for elephant conservation and an important habitat management decision. By releasing elephants that had completed their rewilding journey into the Greater Samburu Landscape, the conservancy reduced browsing pressure inside the sanctuary, created more space for wildlife, and allowed vegetation to regenerate.

For Reuben Lendira, Conservancy Manager at Sera Wildlife Conservancy, the release reflects the success of both the elephant rewilding programme and the sanctuary's growing rhino population.

"When Sera Rhino Sanctuary was established in 2015, it was mainly to protect black rhinos. We now have 26 black rhinos and we've also introduced white rhinos. And because these populations continue to grow, we have to make sure there is enough space and habitat for them," says Lendira.

Among those 17 elephants were seven rescued calves from Reteti. Their release marked the successful completion of years of rewilding, allowing them to live independently once more.

"The Sera elephants helped shape our release protocol, leading to the successful release of orphaned elephants into a community-managed landscape and setting a global example for community-led conservation.

With tracking technology, we can now follow Shaba, Warges, and the other released orphans as they roam freely across northern Kenya," says Peter Lenasalia, Reteti Manager.

David Daballen, Director of Field Operations at Save the Elephants, says the journey of these orphans does not end with the release. It is also providing lessons that extend far beyond Samburu.

"Radio tracking has allowed us to follow these elephants long after their release, giving us insights into how hand-raised elephants adapt to life in the wild. Those findings will form the basis of how we manage such situations here and in other landscapes facing similar conservation challenges."

The programme is built on a partnership between Reteti Elephant Sanctuary and Sera Wildlife Conservancy, with support from Kenya Wildlife Service,

Save the Elephants, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, local communities, and other conservation partners.

Together, they ensure orphaned elephants are rescued, rehabilitated, rewilded, and eventually returned to the wild.

The activity was made possible through funding and support of the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, whose contribution helped strengthen efforts to rescue, rehabilitate and rewild the orphaned elephant.

In addition to protecting wildlife, the team will continue working with communities to promote peaceful coexistence between people and wildlife and help reduce the growing cases of climate-induced human-wildlife conflict.



CONSERVANCY GOVERNANCE

Sera continued to invest in leadership, institutional systems, accountability and management capacity.

Leadership and Management Programme

- The Conservancy Manager, Reuben Lendira completed 15 sessions of the Leadership and Management Programme training supported by The Nature Conservancy.
- The training brought together conservancies from Laikipia, Isiolo and Samburu and covered adaptive management, strategic planning, financial oversight, conflict management and Board–management relations.



Key Biodiversity Area Workshop

- Sera participated in a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) workshop facilitated by Nature Kenya from 13–14 January where the Rhino Research Officer Headman Lenayasa represented the conservancy.
- The workshop strengthened understanding of KBA criteria, monitoring and the KBA process. It also initiated discussions around Sera potentially pursuing KBA certification, which could strengthen the conservancy's profile for global biodiversity funding and research partnerships.

Knowledge and Learning



- In February, Sera participated in a sustainability assessment of Samburu conservancies facilitated by The Nature Conservancy. The process reviewed institutional systems and departmental performance and identified areas for continued strengthening and sustainability planning.
- The Conservancy Manager also participated in the 5th Tusk Conservation Symposium held in Zimbabwe in March under the theme "Leading Change: The Next Chapter in African Conservation." The symposium provided exposure to conservation finance, global biodiversity priorities and landscape-level approaches shaping conservation in Africa.
- Sera also participated in a women's rangeland management exposure tour to the Amboseli ecosystem in April and the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance strategic workshop held in Nanyuki in May.

Governance and Accountability

- Quarterly Board and staff meetings were held in April to review financial performance, conservation progress, staffing and project implementation.
- The 2025 external audit was also completed during the reporting period, strengthening accountability and providing an opportunity to identify areas for improvement in the conservancy's systems and financial management.

LIVELIHOODS AND ENTERPRISE

Conservation at Sera is built on the understanding that wildlife protection must deliver benefits to the communities that steward the landscape.

Education

- KES 5.1 million in bursaries disbursed to 580 students attending secondary schools, colleges and universities through the carbon finance programme.
- The bursaries continue to expand access to education and also helping cushion households against climate-related economic pressures.







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Water Security

- Phase 1 of the Sanctuary Long-Term Water Project was completed with support from Saruni Basecamp Foundation and Great Plains Foundation, with a combined investment of USD 285,906.
- The completed phase includes:
  - 3 shallow wells along Ntumot Lagga
  - A 150 m^3 water tank
  - A 10 km pipeline to 9-1 Camp
  - Ranger and security infrastructure
- The project is intended to improve access to clean, reliable water for wildlife, rangers and tourism partners within the sanctuary.

Infrastructure

- 3 ECDE toilet facilities were constructed in Kinya, Lentasim and Leitemu zones through carbon project funding. The facilities are intended to improve sanitation and learning conditions and support pupil health, safety and dignity.
- A 1.6 km perimeter fence was constructed at Sere Olipi Primary School to improve safety for over 700 students, reduce the risk of wildlife and livestock entering the school compound as well as address safety concerns at an institution serving as the only primary school for a large catchment area.
- Solar systems were also installed at Sererongai and Ntabasi preschools to improve lighting and learning conditions.

PEACEBUILDING

- In February, Sera conducted peace and conflict intervention meetings in Kulu, Kom and Losesia with moran and herders following the prolonged dry season. The dry conditions had increased pressure on pasture and water resources, raising the potential for conflict. Discussions focused on grazing management, pasture and water access and anti-poaching challenges.
- Joint patrol arrangements were established through the involvement of chiefs, conservancy management and county officials.
- These interventions improved coordination and helped reduce tensions during a period of resource scarcity.

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT





Sera continued to support community-led restoration and climate resilience.

- A 10-hectare women-managed grass plot was fenced and established in Sere Olipi through the TWENDE project, supported by the Green Climate Fund in partnership with Justdiggit and NRT. The fencing protects the plot from livestock and wildlife intrusion.
- Ahead of the March–May rains:
  - 7 grass plots were reseeded by women rangeland champions.
  - 200 semi-circular bunds were constructed to improve water retention and soil restoration.
- Approximately 150 bags of grass seed, each weighing 50 kg, were harvested in June from the reseeded plots.

The grass seed will support future restoration activities and dry-season fodder availability. It will also provide an additional income opportunity for the women involved in the programme.

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CARBON CREDITS



- In May, the Carbon Project Implementation Agreement was signed and ratified across the 22 NRT participating conservancies and Sera's 23 zones under the Northern Rangelands Carbon Project.
- The agreement formalises governance, benefit-sharing and safeguard mechanisms under the 40-year carbon finance framework.

PARTNERSHIPS



- In February, The Nature Conservancy Country Director visited Sera to better understand the conservancy's context and prepare for a subsequent visit by TNC Africa leadership later in the year.
- In March, Sera partnered with African Agency for Arid Resources Limited on a tree-planting initiative to mark International Day of Forests. As part of the initiative, 5,000 aloe and indigenous tree seedlings, including Boswellia neglecta and Acacia senegal, were planted in the women-owned grass plots.
- Sera also signed a new Memorandum of Understanding with Save the Rhino International to strengthen support for rhino conservation. Save the Rhino is a long-standing partner of the conservancy.
- The conservancy continued to receive support from Saruni Basecamp Foundation, Great Plains Foundation, Rhino Recovery Fund, Tusk Trust and NRT.

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CHALLENGES FACING SERA AT MID-YEAR

Despite the progress recorded between January and June, several areas remain fragile and require continued attention.

- operational funding gaps
- ranger welfare (uniforms, training)
- field equipment.
- rising operating costs
- infrastructure (ranger accommodation, fence maintenance)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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