

MWCS under COVID-19 crisis

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Firstly, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all our members for your continued support.

Founded in 1994, Mahale Wildlife Conservation Society (MWCS) has provided a forum for researchers on the two *Pan* species involved in fieldwork across Africa to share information on research and conservation through the publication of Pan Africa News. Another mission of ours is to contribute to wildlife conservation in the chimpanzee habitats of western Tanzania, particularly in the Mahale Mountains National Park.

MWCS has been engaged in three projects in Mahale. Firstly, we have supported the park headquarters at Bilege to improve their facilities, for example, by donating a visitor center and creating tourist exhibits to be displayed there. Secondly, we have promoted community-based conservation at villages such as Katumbi outside the park. The proactive involvement of local communities is vital for successful wildlife conservation. For this purpose, we have prioritized the improvement of social infrastructure, such as primary education and a dispensary in Katumbi, with the aid of the Embassy of Japan in Tanzania. We have produced *Wanyama wa Mahale*, an animal guide written for local children with a grant from the Toyota Foundation. Since 2009, MWCS has awarded special scholarships to three outstanding youths who aspire to pursue higher education to contribute to their community. The third project is to enhance environmental conservation in and around Mahale. For example, a project to control *Senna spectabilis*, an invasive alien plant species, was successfully implemented in collaboration with the National Park management. Importantly, as the

risk of zoonotic infection from humans to chimpanzees has heightened with the increase in the number of tourists, we have instructed tourism operators to take effective measures to prevent viral transmission, such as the wearing of masks during observation and maintaining an appropriate distance from the wild apes.

These activities would not have been feasible without the assistance of research assistants belonging to the indigenous Tongwe community. Additionally, our activities are beneficial to them in that they earn cash income by assisting us with their traditional knowledge of nature in Mahale.

Since late March 2020, the researchers' fieldwork has been suspended due to the strict precautions against the spread of COVID-19. Our research assistants have been maintaining minimal activities inside the park, such as the maintenance of research trails and health monitoring of M-group chimpanzees. To help them stay in the park and continue their activities, MWCS-J contributed 300,000 yen in December 2021. Although the short-term outlook for our own activities is unpredictable, we are planning to return to the field as soon as possible, while keeping a close eye on the domestic and international developments related to overseas travels. By August, we hope to resume educational and medical support in Katumbi, which has been halted for the past two years.

We would be grateful if you would consider supporting our activities under the prolonged pandemic. If you are interested in joining MWCS or donating money, please contact us at info@mahale.main.jp. We will then inform you of the remittance methods and other details.