

Boost to biodiversity as thousands of trees are planted on the British Army training estate in Kenya

DIO's Safe Place to Train team and Kenyan Support Staff organised an Environmental Week to tackle a decline in the number of trees on BATUK training areas in Laikipia County and the Archer's Post region. With the help of volunteers from the local communities BATUK shares its land with, a total of 3900 tree saplings were planted and over 10,000 'seedballs' were scattered.

The seedballs were created by coating seeds within a protective ball made primarily of charcoal dust, which protects them from damage and animals when germinating. By scattering seeds using this method, it can take as little as a month for new plants to be established in previously barren areas.

DIO personnel worked with landowners to develop an understanding of which species of trees would be the best for the local region, as well as the ideal locations to plant them within each training area.

The DIO team also attended a number of schools and colleges to encourage staff and children to take part in the "Adopt a Tree" programme. It is hoped that these visits will help ensure the survivability of the trees once planted, by inspiring the younger generation to build on the Environmental Week's success.

The project was jointly developed by W02 Phillip Kent, a DIO Training Safety Marshall and reservist serving in 8 RIFLES, and Melita Loigisa, Senior Range Warden in the DIO team's Kenyan Support Staff.

W02 Kent said:

"Restoring trees to the Kenyan landscape is vital in counteracting the devastating decline in the number and diversity of trees due to land degradation and biological invasion by non-native plants. By working closely with local communities, we can help to ensure the long-term sustainable development of our training estate in Kenya."

Melita Loigisa said:

"I've seen a dramatic decline in the wooded areas of Laikipia County and the Archers Post region over the last 20 years. The DIO team has given me the platform as the Senior Range Warden to assist in restoring these important natural habitats.

"The 'Adopt a tree' initiative is something I am particularly passionate about, as it's vital for the younger generation to understand the importance of our environment and the impact we have on it. Although this project is a small step, if its success is sustained it will improve the environment for

all communities in the region.”

A variety of trees were planted, including some species which could only be planted in certain areas. The sapling species used throughout the project were: Yellow Fever Tree, Umbrella Thorn, Juniperous Africana, Wait a Bit Tree, Balanites Aegyptiaca, Olea Africana and Neem.

Land degradation in Kenya is a serious problem caused by overgrazing, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and the adverse effects of climate change.

DIO’s Kenya team has continued to increase its environmental and sustainability performance in recent years. In addition to planting native trees and aloes across the BATUK training areas, enhancements have been targeted in recycling and waste management.

W02 Kent pictured with members of the local community and personnel from the DIO team’s Kenyan Support Staff. Crown Copyright / MOD 2022.

DIO and BATUK continue to work with and support the local community with initiatives such as rainwater harvesting and borehole solar conversions. While BATUK already uses solar thermal energy across its estate, an assessment study to see how renewable energy technology such as solar photovoltaic panels can be used to reduce BATUK’s carbon footprint will take place in 2023.

Brigadier Jonathan Bartholomew OBE, DIO Head Overseas and Training Region said:

“Ensuring that military training takes full account of the environmental sensitivity of each training area is vital in order for training to be sustainable across the Laikipia and Samburu counties.

“My team continues to build a strong working relationship with the community, and has benefited from the technical support of environmental specialists from organisations such as the National Museum of Kenya, the University of Nairobi and Mpala Research Centre over the past decade. We are proud to be able to support these initiatives and contribute to the sustainable management of these internationally important areas.”