

# Seed bombing project in Kenya takes root

Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) staff in Kenya have been working to increase the plant life on the MOD's Kenyan training areas.

Staff from the Overseas and Training (OS & TRG) team in Kenya are introducing seed bombing to the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK). Seed bombing, also known as aerial reforestation, is a technique of introducing plants through scattering what are called 'seedballs'.

Charcoal dust is combined with nutritious bindings and formed into a ball around seeds, which protects them from damage and animals. Charcoal, which is made from felled trees, is a very common form of fuel in Kenya. The dust is a waste product from the production process and is often left in piles in urban areas, polluting the environment. Using charcoal dust to make seedballs removes some of these piles and uses the waste product to grow new trees, helping to replace those used to make the charcoal in the first place.

The seedballs are scattered and when conditions are suitable with sufficient water and sunlight, the seeds will start to germinate and break through their protective housing. It can take as little as a month for new plants to be established in previously barren areas.

As part of a project looking at the impact military training has on the land we lease, the OS & Trg team worked with colleagues in DIO's environmental team. They were able to obtain funding to purchase 16 bags of native grasses and acacia trees, each weighing 25kg, to replant areas which have been impacted by training. This allowed the team to study the impacts of the seedballs, trying different methods of distribution, placing the balls in full sun or shade, and experimenting with burying and scattering the balls for the best effect.

Sam Seaton, DIO's OS & Trg Business Manager in Kenya, led the project. She said:

I've loved working on this and seeing how much everyone wants to get involved. I'm optimistic that we'll start to see much more greenery on the training estate as this project continues.

Understanding how our training affects the local wildlife and growth is key to ensure we understand the long-term impact of training in Kenya. By doing these studies we form a picture of the ecosystems on our leased land to protect it for future generations. Healthy ecosystems clean our water, purify our air, maintain our soil and regulate the climate.

BATUK staff also took the opportunity to engage with the local community.

Following a fire at Lolldaiga, the DIO team had purchased further seedballs for a mass drop from a helicopter to restore the area. Equity Bank, one of the many local companies that BATUK works with on the high street in Nanyuki, purchased a bag of seedballs and donated them to DIO to scatter, as did other local businesses. Lt Col Finlay Bibby, Deputy Commander of BATUK, was instrumental in helping Equity Bank to plant some seedballs and saplings to enable re-growth in the area.

DIO Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Longwell taking receipt of seedballs from Teddy Kinyanjui of Seedballs Kenya.

The DIO team worked with Seedballs Kenya, an organisation which chooses suitable native plants. DIO Commander Lt Col Paul Longwell took receipt of sacks of seedballs from Teddy Kinyanjui of Seedballs Kenya. He said:

I'm really pleased to have been able to support this project. It's fantastic to see growth already starting from the seedballs we've scattered so far and I'm really looking forward to seeing the difference in a few months' time.

The intention is to offer visitors to BATUK the opportunity to scatter seeds to offset their carbon footprint from the flight.