

FUNDRAISING

# VETAID scales the heights for Maasai future

**In February 2006, a group of 24 vets, veterinary nurses and supporters climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to raise funds for VETAID. Here they report their experiences and the work of the VETAID Maasai Pastoralist Development programme in the Simanjiro district, Tanzania**

VETAID is a small Scottish charity (a member of Vétérinaires Sans Frontières Europa) that works to enhance the lives and environment of communities and their animals in underprivileged countries by promoting animal health, welfare and improved husbandry. Tanzania is one such country; East Africa's largest, and one of the world's poorest, countries, ranked 164 out of 177 in the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme.

VETAID has been working with the Maasai communities in Tanzania for nine years.

### Maasai life

The Maasai are a semi-nomadic tribe who depend on livestock for their livelihood, and face serious challenges to their way of life due to outside pressures. They have lost over 20,000 km<sup>2</sup> of their best watered grazing land to national parks and commercial farm



Caption

land, exacerbating the difficulties during the recent drought, the worst in the region for over 20 years. Official figures show a total cattle mortality within the district between January and February

2006 of approximately 21,000 animals. The high livestock mortality has meant that many families are unable to afford school fees and have become totally reliant on the community to survive. With the onset of the rains, diseases such as anthrax and East Coast fever have emerged and are causing further livestock deaths, reducing the ability of the families to recover.

VETAID has designed a programme that aims to target the root causes of livelihood insecurity ([www.vetaid.org/annual-review.asp](http://www.vetaid.org/annual-review.asp); R. Allport, personal communication):

### Animal health

VETAID is training community-based animal health workers (CAHWS) to act as paravets. This gives the community access to basic, affordable veterinary assistance, including preparation for seasonal events (for example, vaccination) and identification and adequate treatment of the most relevant livestock diseases in the area. The CAHWS also report disease occurrence to the district veterinary authorities. So far over 65 CAHWS have been trained by VETAID within Simanjiro. The achievements to

## From Kilimanjaro to the soul of Simanjiro

MOUNT Kilimanjaro, at 5895 m (19,340 feet), is one of the world's largest volcanoes, Africa's highest point and the highest mountain in the world conquerable without specialised climbing equipment.

After landing in Nairobi and travelling to Tanzania by road, we arrived at the Kilimanjaro National Park. We followed the Marangu route, with the climb lasting six days. The first day we climbed from the park gates at 1800 m through semi-tropical rain forest to

Mandara, reaching the first huts of the trek at 2700 m. During the second day, the landscape began changing to moorland and at 3700 m we reached the huts at Horombo. The effects of the increasing altitude were already noticeable. The following day was an acclimatisation day with a day-trek to Zebra rock. After a second night at Horombo, we walked across 'The Saddle' between Mount Mawenzi and Kibo Peak, and the alpine desert to arrive at Kibo, where the last huts were located at 4700 m. By then, we were all

exhausted with some people suffering from digestive problems!

The summit climb started at midnight. It was a very long and cold climb, with temperatures of -10°C that felt rather cooler due to the chill factor and also because we were walking extremely slowly. Altitude, sickness and tiredness took their toll (with some of our group returning to base) and after six hours, 13 of us reached Gillmans Point (5680 m), just in time to see the sun rising over Mawenzi in great shades of colour. After a further two, seemingly very long, hours of walking along the crater rim, eight of us made it to Uhuru Peak (Freedom Peak) at 5895 m – the summit. The crater and the glaciers of the top of Africa were magnificent, and the feeling of achievement generated enough energy for the walk back to Kibo, just in time for a quick lunch before continuing the descent to Horombo, making it a long day of 16 hours trekking! After a well-deserved rest and a night's sleep in Horombo, we continued our descent accompanied by some very heavy rain to the Marangu gate.

The trek was hard work, but a great team effort; not just by us, but also from



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date can be reflected in the reported decrease in calf mortality (before the current drought) from 52 to 10 per cent. Simanjiro is also now the second most efficient district in reporting disease within Tanzania.

**Access to adequate grazing and water**

VETAID is assisting villages in developing land-use plans, as communities need to plan where they are to house immigrants and which areas are to be kept for livestock. VETAID also builds community awareness on claiming customary rights of occupancy for their land, so that the people have legal protection.

**Alternative sources of income**

The Massai's complete reliance on livestock increases their vulnerability. With the men away grazing the cattle in remote areas, women and children are more at risk. VETAID has started 14 village community bank groups for women in the area. These groups receive training on the management of finances and the running of small businesses. VETAID has also started a small village tannery and 11 bead-working groups to generate an alternative income. The impact of this project has been evident during the recent drought, where families have been able to afford both food and to send their children to school.

**Livestock and rangeland policy**

VETAID is a founder member of the Livestock Task Force, a group of non-governmental organisations that have come together to advocate for a fair and beneficial policy for people living in the rangelands.

**Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank all the people who have so generously sponsored us; so far over £97,000 has been raised for VETAID. We also thank VETAID for giving us this fantastic once in a lifetime experience. More information about VETAID and its work can be found at [www.vetaid.org](http://www.vetaid.org).

There will be another Kilimanjaro trek taking place July 5 to 19, 2007. Details are available from Christine Arnesen, e-mail: [fundraising@vetaid.org](mailto:fundraising@vetaid.org)



Caption



the porters and guides (over 75) who accompanied us. As the tour guide said, each one of us reached our own personal summit, and we could all be very proud of our achievement. That said, the most fascinating experience of our trek was still to come.

**Simanjiro**

After spending the night in a hotel (with very much needed showers!), we visited one of the VETAID projects in the Simanjiro region, south of Kilimanjaro. We spent several days camping close to a Maasai village, working with VETAID paravets and the local community. We were able to visit several bomas (villages) and experienced first-hand the enormous impact that the projects are having. We visited several of the bead-working groups and the small tannery.

Although there was not enough time to visit other VETAID projects in the area, we spent some time with one of the local vets responsible for a project in Aruwsha, outside the Simanjiro district. This project supports children orphaned by HIV/AIDS through the donation and training in the care of goats and chickens.



Caption

We were welcomed into the Maasai's lives, and were given a brief insight into what life is like trying to survive in these difficult conditions. The challenges experienced by the Massai are serious, but they face the future with great dignity. It was a fantastic experience and a privilege for us to have shared time with them – we went to Tanzania to climb a mountain, and were shown life in a new light; memories that will stay with us for a very long time.

