

CROWS NO MORE! PROJECT

Report for 2024 – Eric Kinoti, Colin Jackson

Introduction

The House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) is an invasive species in Kenya native to the Indian subcontinent. It was introduced to East Africa in the 1890's by the then British Governor as an attempt to control garbage in Zanzibar. Within just 15 years there was a bounty on the head of every crow. This species poses a significant threat to native wildlife, agriculture, human health and businesses and as a risk of bird strikes to airplanes. To address this issue, Kenya Wildlife Service responded to the call for action to be taken to control the crows and engaged with A Rocha Kenya to implement a targeted elimination programme on the Kenya north coast using an specialist avian poison, Starlicide. This selective avicide effectively reduces House Crow populations with minimal impact on non-target species.

At the end of 2023 several Watamu hotels pledged their support for the 'Crows No More!' project of A Rocha's which thus enabled the first steps of getting the project going including taking Eric Kinoti as the coordinator to carry out data collection, roost counts and do crow foraging site mapping in Vipingo, Kilifi, Watamu and Malindi.

Crows No More! – Build up to start of control

The project properly took off after KWS held a large stakeholders meeting at their coast HQ in Mombasa on 7th June 2024, chaired by Prof Charles Musyoki, representing the Director General KWS. At this meeting A Rocha Kenya was tasked to undertake crow control on north coast while Little Kenya Gardens to take the south coast with an aim "to eradicate an estimated 1 million House Crows within the next six months". *Crows No More!* is a project of A Rocha with the aim of eradicating the House Crow under the leadership of KWS.

Little Kenya Gardens is the organisation which successfully managed to obtain the import permit for the Starlicide poison from the Pest Control Products Board (PCBP) in c.2020. In 2022 LKG imported c.4kg of Starlicide to carry out efficacy testing as part of the overall process of getting the poison cleared for use. At the June meeting it was agreed that A Rocha should use the Starlicide that remained after the efficacy testing by LKG to start the poisoning on north coast. The poison was received in July 2024 and whilst it had passed its expiry date was tested and found to still be effective in killing crows albeit with a higher dosage than that recommended for fresh poison. This was then cleared by PCPB meaning the *Crows No More!* Project could plough on with the House Crow control on north coast.

While this was happening, A Rocha took on three other staff to work alongside Eric to begin pre-baiting at certain sites in Malindi, Kilifi and Watamu and to be mapping where the House Crows occur using the [Kenya Bird Map](#) protocol. Additional fundraising was taking place and we were very blessed to have Bruce, Crispin, Chris, John and several others volunteer their time to help coordinate and implement the pre-baiting and poisoning in Malindi and Vipingo. Without their incredible hard work, we would have been far less effective than we have been. Eric was also able to visit and train Lamu

field officers about site identification and pre-baiting. In Lamu, the challenge is thankfully less due to a significantly smaller number of crows on the Island than between Malindi and Vipingo.



House Crows feeding in Vipingo slaughter house at a location where they spread skins to dry

Poisoning

The first trial of poisoning was done on 30th July 2024 after getting the green light to use the expired poison in Watamu. An estimated 80 – 100 crows took the poisoned bait and the next day only five crows returned to the site next morning; 36 corpses were collected. Since then, poisoning has been done in Vipingo, Kilifi, Watamu, Matsongoni, Gede and Malindi. By the end of 2024, A Rocha had employed five fully employed staff and one intern through *Crows No More* but several other staff have been directly employed by individuals in Malindi and elsewhere to work under Eric's overall supervision. By the end of 2024 no less than 25 people were working either full time or voluntarily for the *Crows No More!* Project.



Poison being applied to chopped up meat bait

Method

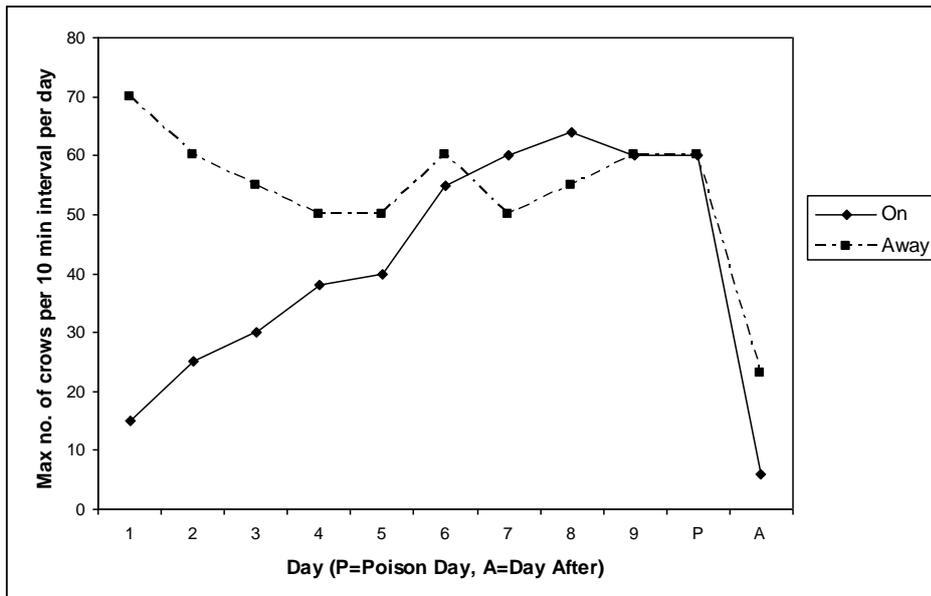


First foraging sites are identified and mapped with rough counts of birds using the site recorded. A site that is to be used for poisoning should be one ideally which is some distance from high centres of human population and where other birds, animals and humans including children will not be able to access the bait.

In advance of the poisoning, unpoisoned bait (the best is off-cuts of meat – and here a note of thanks to all the hotels and establishments which have provided us with food scraps from kitchens) is used to coerce many crows as possible to come and feed on the bait. The field officer, having chosen a site commonly visited by the crows (e.g. rubbish dump or hotel grounds), clears a small patch of ground of loose debris to allow the bait to be seen. He then places a large metal pan (c.1m x 1m) on the ground and scatters the of un-poisoned meat bait on it (1kg is normal but more if there are a lot of crows). This is done at 6 a.m. each morning for 6-7 consecutive days to accustom the crows to feeding there.

Once the bait is put out, every 10 minutes for a total of 2 hours, the number of crows are recorded that are both 'on' the bait (i.e. eating it) and those 'off' it (e.g. in the trees surrounding the area) to give an idea of overall numbers and to show the birds getting accustomed to the bait. See Fig.1 for an example of how the counts indicate changes in the numbers of crows on the bait compared to those in the trees around the site. As they become less wary, more crows come to the bait until finally there are many on the bait and it is the right time to apply the poison.

Over the 6-7 days, the number of crows taking the un-poisoned bait grows steadily until they flatten off with a maximum number. At this point on the 7-8th morning, the bait is soaked in Starlicide poison before being put out. The poisoned bait is closely watched to ensure that only House Crows take it – if any indigenous Pied Crows, Black Kites or stray dogs try to take the bait, they are chased off by simply throwing a stone at them. This has proved very effective in ensuring only the voracious



A graph showing how crows behave on a site from the start of baiting to the poisoning day.

Results

Since the start of the poisoning in late July, we have had a milestone. As of 31 December 2024, a cumulative total of 10,219 House crows were killed in all the locations.

Month	Gede		Kilifi	Malindi	Matsangoni	Vipingo	Watamu
July	-		-	99	-	-	74
August	-		179	233	-	50	592
Sept	-		150	771	-	180	213
Oct	20		612	778	-	395	644
November	20		509	1654	233	417	183
December	-		1479	900	28	469	181
Sub Total	40		2929	4491	261	1511	1887
Grand Total	10,219						

Challenges

Since the start of the program, we were able to convince stakeholders that the crow problem cuts across all the sectors of the economy. However, one major setback was that the poison was past the due date. Through the company's advice we increased the dosage that made the poison as strong as possible. There is also less funds to cover the whole are at once.

In Malindi and Watamu, the main dumpsite of Mayungu was closed this was a major poisoning site for Malindi. But after closure, another challenge emerged of small illegal dump sites that led to a split of crow copulations making it harder to capture huge numbers of Crows.

Funding

We have been fundraising from stakeholders and public. Initially, we started with the 6 hotels in Watamu. We also received large donations from Ocean Sports and Nature Kenya (750,000 and 1.3 million respectively). Giraffe centre have also pledged to support us in 2025. In total we received a total of **Ksh 5,497,656.00** ana the amount used **Ksh 5,634,285.75**. The expenditure is as follows.

Looking forward to 2025

Poisoning and Monitoring

2025 is looking promising for CNM. Priority is to cover more ground with Ngomeni and Mamburui being our focus to the north and Kaloleni to the south. We also look forward to obtaining our new poison that was purchased last year that we have not received yet. our target it is to kill 100,000 House Crows in the north coast by the end 2025. We also intend to increase monitoring through Kenya Bird Map to establish the distribution of house crows as well as show the resurgence of native bird populations and distribution by encouraging more birders to do atlassing, especially on the coastal pentads

Awareness

Crows mostly feed on rubbish dumps by scavenging for leftover foods. Fishmongers and roadside food vendors play a huge role in crow multiplication by throwing away food scraps to prepare fish or utensils. Educating them on proper disposal of their organic waste as well as guiding them on the supply of food will be cut reducing reproduction hence stop the spread.