

AN UPDATE FROM KENYA

On the 16th August of this year we were in Mombasa and returned to the tortoise collection where we did training sessions earlier this year and in 2017 and which we visited briefly last week. We marked and counted all the adult animals (39 in all) and checked for shell lesions that might indicate metabolic bone disease. We advised on diet and hygiene. Our main focus on this day, however, was on the baby tortoises (hatchlings). We tested some new, shallow, plastic plates (from UK) as water containers, to see if hatchlings could 1) Get access to the water (otherwise they can die from dehydration), and 2) get out from the container if they climbed in (they can easily become stranded and may drown). These and other measures are aimed at improving the welfare and survival of tortoise hatchlings so that some may be released into the wild.

At the same location (it is a mission), there is a flock of free-ranging chickens, kept to produce eggs for consumption and chicks that can be sold. They are typical “*kuku wa kienyeji*” (local fowls) – tough, long-legged birds, some with bare necks. Unlike most of their western counterparts such fowls can run fast and fly up to safety on low buildings or bushes in order to escape predators such as monkeys, snakes and mongoose. They survive largely by foraging, including eating insects, waste and rubbish. They and the tortoises share the same land and sometimes feed together, so their health is linked - and relevant to humans as well.

Professor John and Mrs Margaret Cooper

(Photographs: Margaret Cooper)

1. Hatchlings in water tray
2. A kuku wa kienyeji joins for lunch

