Project Update: August 2001

First, we have been to both Meru and Ruma National Parks, sampling hartebeest (and giraffe for another, similar study). We found the hartebeest populations in both places greatly reduced (probably less than 50 in each), and very hard to approach. Thus, I obtained few biopsy samples, and some dung samples (which can also yield DNA), but enough to work with (I already had dozens in the freezer).

Second, the MSc student who will analyse the samples, Collins Ouma, arrived on schedule (August 1), and has begun to work in the lab. I am very impressed with his knowledge and skill with lab work, doing new things right first time (e.g. a new DNA extraction protocol yesterday), making good judgements, and achieving his goals - he's great. I knew he had had some experience, but his level seems like a huge bonus.

Third, in the wake of a few papers that have been published recently on hartebeest genetics, we have planned a slightly different analytical strategy to the one proposed originally, which was to first screen samples for genetic variation using restriction enzymes, then to sequence representative haplotypes. We will now sequence all samples, skipping the restriction analysis.

While in Ruma NP, I was also able to sample the small population of Roan antelope there, the ONLY population of Roan in Kenya (this was also unanticipated). There has been some speculation about introducing additional Roan from Tanzania, either to Ruma or elsewhere. I happen to have 20 Roan samples from Tanzania in the freezer, and have asked Collins if he would like to add this small project to his analysis - naturally he said yes! Thus, his masters will comprise two parts, both addressing conservation issues for endangered ungulate populations in Kenya.