

# MARA MONTHLY

NOVEMBER 2011

Heavy rainstorms continued throughout the month of November, flooding the rivers around the Mara Triangle.



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## MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR NOVEMBER 2011

By Brian Heath

### GENERAL

A series of exceptionally heavy rainstorms at the beginning of November flooded large sections of the Triangle and raised the river levels to the highest since December 2006 – the highest on record. The heavy rains continued through the rest of the month – the most rain we have had in November for many years. These rains caused considerable damage to the roads. On one occasion a vehicle with four tourists was washed over the Sabaringo Lugga near Kichwa Tembo – it took us two hours to rescue the tourists. The heavy rains covered most of Kenya and floods caused numerous deaths – ten people were drowned when trying to cross a flooded stream near Kilgoris, in Trans Mara, on the 27<sup>th</sup>.

The survey of the Reserve boundary started at the beginning of November. The exercise was immediately embroiled in politics, with an opposition group organising demonstrations against the survey – no doubt some of these people have encroached into the Reserve along the top of the escarpment and are afraid that the survey will expose them. The survey has been stopped for the time being.

A group of senior policemen visited the Mara on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> to review security arrangements within the Reserve. They were complimentary about the security in the Triangle

and there is a possibility that they advocate for modern weapons for our rangers.

The Chief Executive met with key members of the County Council of Trans Mara, and the Council's lawyer, on the 30<sup>th</sup>, to discuss the drafting of an agreement on the purchase of a grader for the Council.

### WILDLIFE

All the wildebeest had moved off within the first few days of November, a few zebra have remained.

A cheetah had just started moving around with her four cubs at the beginning of November – a leopard killed two of the cubs on the 8<sup>th</sup>. The cheetah and her cubs have not been seen since.

There are two new groups of lion cubs near the Mugoro crossing, we hope that they will survive this time.

### RESEARCH

Ms Cheryl Lyn Dybas wrote an article on the Mara River in the American Institute of Biological Sciences. (BioScience: Saving the Serengeti – Masai Mara – Can ecohydrology rescue a key East African ecosystem? Vol 61. No 11 pp 850-855).



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Dr Craig Packer has written a draft paper entitled: Conserving dangerous animals: The lion, the fence and the way forward. In it, he advocates fencing and estimates that “Annual management budgets of about US\$ 1,000/km<sup>2</sup> are required to maintain lion populations that are at least 50% of their estimated carrying capacity, and about half of the unfenced populations are likely to decline to near extinction over the next 20 – 100 yrs.” (In the Triangle we spend over three times that amount in managing the area. The private conservancies North of the Reserve spend around US\$ 760 in the actual management of the areas – well below the US\$ 1,000 threshold. However, if one factors in lease payments to landholders at US\$ 3,000/km<sup>2</sup> then the figures compare with those in the Mara Triangle.) Dr Packer goes on to state that: “This analysis suggests that lion populations can only be maintained at ecologically relevant densities in ecosystems that can be separated from surrounding human communities by effective physical barriers.”

Dr Packer raises very interesting issues. Every year we see at least two or three leopard killed by livestock owners in retaliation for killing livestock – two have been killed in the local conservancies within the past two months alone. Anne Kent-Taylor has been supporting a project to predator-proof enclosures and this has undoubtedly helped – the figure could well have been much higher. Lions are under constant threat within the private conservancies for the same reason and in November we had a case of a lioness killing and eating a 12 year-old child – the first proper man-eating case in years. A case of man-eating will probably lead to the destruction of that whole pride (two have already been shot). It happened just outside the conservancies – in an area where the locals do not benefit from conservation in any way. Unless we can find a way to involve these marginal areas in conservation we will see the complete decimation of wildlife in these places. Elephant are constantly killed in these marginal areas and we have had to destroy two buffalo for injuring people. These areas of greatest human/wildlife conflict tend to be on the periphery of the Mara ecosystem; too far and marginal to attract much tourism development.

We are looking at an innovative way of involving these communities in conservation.

The Chief Executive met with Dr Elena V Chelysheva on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Dr Chelysheva spent a year in the Mara nearly 10 years ago and is proposing to undertake a three-year cheetah study in the Mara and Meru ecosystems: Cheetah Population Status in Regions with Different Types of Anthropogenic Influence (Masai-Mara National Reserve versus Meru Conservation Area). She proposes to start in March 2012 and will probably be based near Keekorok. It will be an interesting study and we have agreed to provide logistical support.

**STAFF**

Mr Charles Gitau completed his MBA (Masters in Business Administration) at Nairobi University and will graduate in early December. Congratulations to Charles, he was the first person in his year to complete the course and dissertation.

The Chief Executive took ten days off in mid-November.

**TOURISM**

Tourist numbers dropped dramatically at the beginning of November. This is normal for this time of year, but many operators are concerned about the next year. The recent kidnappings along the Coast, coupled with concerns about the coming elections have resulted in a number of cancellations and very slow bookings. We believe that there is minimal risk in the Triangle – we have tightened up on our controls and monitoring of visitors.

**SECURITY**

Twenty-one poachers were arrested November, bringing the total to 1,750. 87 wire snares were recovered. The poachers changed their tactics as soon as the migration moved South. Many of the people arrested were hunting warthog with dogs – this is the time of year when warthog take a major hit from poaching and we can expect incursions into the

Triangle as the poachers go after hippo and warthog. We have at least one group of poachers hunting buffalo along the escarpment and will have to be extra vigilant. If poachers can kill buffalo then the Masai Morans will have little difficulty in killing a lion.

Routine patrols on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> recovered 40 snares between Miungu and Nyakita Pembe, in the Lemai Wedge. One young lioness was found dead in a snare on the 6<sup>th</sup> – she was part of a pride that had found a zebra dead in a snare, they had fed on the zebra and then the lioness was caught in the next snare. The rangers found a hippo that had been killed and butchered near Mlima Hotel on the 5<sup>th</sup> and then another patrol found a buffalo that had been killed and butchered in the Triangle on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

A combined ranger team arrested three, of five, poachers along the stream downstream from the Ngiro-are swamp. The poachers were arrested at 11.00 after our rangers saw some dogs – they then searched the area and came across the poachers who were on their way to hunt warthog.

The Ngiro-are team arrested three people on the 13<sup>th</sup>. They arrested one person on the Masanga route with three snares during the day and then returned that night - they arrested a further two people with three dogs and thirteen wire snares at around 9.00 pm. On the same day the Iseiya team found a buffalo that had been killed in the Triangle, near Kilo Two. They investigated and found that the buffalo was probably killed by a group we had arrested in the same area a few months earlier. The court released them, for “lack of evidence” on the last occasion. The rangers investigated but did not make any arrests.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> the rangers arrested a further two people between Nyakita Pembe and Daraja la Mzee, in the Lemai Wedge. The poachers had ten dogs and were hunting warthog. On the 17<sup>th</sup> the Iseiya rangers arrested three, of

five, people also hunting warthog near Kokamange. They also had a large pack (11) of dogs.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> the Ngiro-are rangers arrested one person with seven wire snares at night. The following day the same rangers arrested three more people at Lempise in the Lemai Wedge. They were also hunting with dogs and had killed a warthog.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> the Iseiya rangers crossed the river and joined their counterparts from Kokatende. The Kokatende rangers had information of a gang operating near the & Beyond camp in the Northern Serengeti and asked for assistance. The rangers managed to arrest four of the seven poachers and recover 16 wire snares. The poachers had killed and butchered a buffalo.

The Ngiro-are rangers arrested two, of three, people near Watu Kumi in the Lemai Wedge on the 24<sup>th</sup>. They had just set up camp when arrested and had seven snares. One adult giraffe was found dead in a snare at Ol Donyo Olpack – just in the Triangle on the 24<sup>th</sup>

### REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

We can expect November revenue to drop considerably in November. Fortunately, we have built up a reserve of approximately US\$ 400,000 and hope that this will tide us over the low season ahead. We will be boosted further by revenue from Little Governors’ Camp – the resolution of a two-year dispute following a good meeting between the Council and Governors’ Camps at the beginning of November.



**REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER 2011**

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	Ksh	US\$
Ticket sales	331,585.00	3,483,700.00	1,260,000.00	-
Non-ticket sales	104,740.00	506,275.00		
<b>Balance for Distribution</b>	<b>436,325.00</b>	<b>3,989,975.00</b>	<b>1,260,000.00</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Distributed</b>				
Trans Mara County Council	176,977.60	1,532,583.25	693,000.00	-
Group Ranches	63,001.15	661,903.00		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>239,978.75</b>	<b>2,194,486.25</b>	<b>693,000.00</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Mara Conservancy</b>	<b>196,346.25</b>	<b>1,795,488.75</b>	<b>567,000.00</b>	<b>-</b>

**DEVELOPMENT**

- The exceptionally heavy rainstorms throughout the month did a huge amount of damage to the roads – we spent time trying to repair this damage, but have only managed to undertake emergency repairs – it has been too wet.
- A new trailer was delivered but found to be unserviceable. We returned the trailer and CMC manufactured a new one for us. This was delivered on the 24<sup>th</sup>.
- A new Toyota Land Cruiser was delivered in early November – we have equipped it with a very powerful light, for anti-poaching work, and have also installed it with a winch. This vehicle replaces a Land Rover that will now be used by the dog section.
- We managed to extend the Kichwa airstrip apron, so that there is more parking space for aircraft.
- We repainted the roof on all the staff housing at Iseiya – this had been on our programme for the past two years. We also repainted the staff houses.
- We painted the gate at Oloololo.
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**REPORT ON FOCUS ON NOVEMBER**

Purchase uni-hut for gate at Little Governors’	Done, yet to be delivered
Build new camp at gate	Ongoing
Take possession of new trailer	Received, unserviceable. A second one delivered
Extend parking area at Kichwa airstrip	Done
Finalise purchase of grader for Council	Ongoing
Collect new Toyota Land Cruiser for anti-poaching work	Collected and modified.
Repair damaged sections of road	Ongoing

**FOCUS FOR DECEMBER**

- Collect new uni-hut;
- Finalise purchase of grader for Council;
- Work on repairing damaged sections of road; and
- Start on new kennels at Iseiya;



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