

MARA MONTHLY

OCTOBER 2011

Three cheetah cubs playing near the Purungat Bridge before the tragedy.



M&C Denis-Huot

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2011

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

The heavy rains continued into early October. The weather then cleared and we had three weeks of glorious, sunny weather, interspersed with one or two days of rain – that is, until the 26th, when we had some exceptionally heavy storms and sustained rain for three days. These storms were enough to send the wildebeest South and within days there was hardly a wildebeest left in the Triangle.

Prince Amin Aga Khan and Mr M Jan Mohamed visited Mara Serena Lodge on the 11th to review plans to renovate the public areas. It is anticipated that work will begin on the 1st November.

Senior officers of the Council visited the Triangle on the 13 – 14th. They included the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Chairmen Finance and Planning and other Councillors. We discussed the purchase of a grader on behalf of the Council and issues pertaining to Little Governors.

The District Security Committee met with managers from all the camps in Trans Mara at Mara Serena, on the 21st. The principle purpose was to discuss possible security threats, and procedures to minimise the risk to camps and tourists. The meeting was extremely important and well

received by the camp managers. It was agreed that a follow-up meeting should be held in two months.

The Chief Executive met with Renson Mbwagwa of the Centre for Urban and Regional Planning and J G Halake from Geomeasure Surveyors on the 27th. They will commence the survey and marking of the Mara Triangle boundaries on the 1st November. This survey has been necessitated by the possible incursion of camps and agriculture into the Triangle along the western boundary.

WILDLIFE

One of the three cheetah cubs reported in September was killed by a Tawny eagle on the 3rd. This happened when the mother went hunting, a second cub disappeared at the same time. We have not seen the mother and her remaining cub since.

Wildebeest poured into the Triangle at the end of September and early October – there were over 100,000 by the third – they remained until the last week of October. This is the first time this migration that the Triangle had significant numbers of wildebeest.

We had to euthanize three zebra with severe wounds caused by wire snares, one had lost a hoof, from the fetlock down, two others had very deep cuts on the neck.

One elephant was put down – she was paralysed in the back quarters and was unable to walk. Dr Mijele looked at the animal and was unable to treat her. Another large female was found dead on the 31st - there were no visible wounds and so we presume it was a natural death.

Masai morans (warriors) are gearing up to kill a lion, maybe more than one. There have been a number of half-hearted attempts but these will certainly become more determined as they approach graduation. The moran manyattas are being consolidated – just before and just after consolidation is a crucial time – time is running out before they can prove their manhood prior to graduating to junior elders. The next two months will be critical for us, to try and deter them and save our lions. It is extremely easy for the warriors to sit on the escarpment and watch for concentrations of vehicles – probably signalling a lion – they wait for the vehicles to leave before rushing down the escarpment and spearing the lion. Early morning, mid-day and late evening are the most likely times for an attack and will have to be extra vigilant.

RESEARCH

Dr Eberhard Zeyehle wrote a report on his trip to the Mara between 21st and 30th August, during which he conducted post mortem examinations on 121 wildebeest and one zebra – all had drowned when crossing the Mara River. He was working in the Mara with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) veterinary team as part of his larger research project on Cystic *Echinococcus* (Hydatid cysts) in Sub-Saharan Africa with AMREF. The team also looked at other internal parasites.

His preliminary findings are extremely interesting:

- They found fertile Hydatid cysts – probably the sheep strain - in the lungs of 2 animals;
- 30 other animals showed cystic like lesions – in last year's survey 3/10 such lesions were identified as *Echinococcus*;
- *Cystercercus bovis* cysts were found in 42 animals;
- *Cystercercus teniaecollis* cysts were found in 16 animals;
- *Paramphistomum* were found in 44 animals;
- *Haemonchus* nematodes were found in 84 animals;
- *Strongyloides* were found in 65 animals;
- *Moniezia* tapeworms were found in 23 animals; and
- *Fasciola* were found in 2 animals.

The above indicates the very high parasite burden carried by the wildebeest population – most of these parasites also occur in domestic livestock.

We had also assisted Dr Zeyehle in collecting fecal samples from lions; 38% of the samples so far examined had *Taeniid* eggs.

STAFF

Our rangers and officers completed their three-month paramilitary courses with the Kenya Forest Service. Our staff did exceptionally well and won six of the seven awards – including best Junior Commander and best Recruit. Congratulations to them – they did us proud. They have taken a well-deserved week off and will report back on duty on the 4th November.

TOURISM

Mr Iregi Mwenja completed the first round of evaluations for the Most Responsible Guide award. He had some very interesting insights. All the guides seemed knowledgeable about the animals but only one guide talked at length about the Reserve, environment, conservation issues and local community. One guide gave a lot of misinformation – two classics come to mind “the wildebeest move 30,000 kilometres during the migration and poachers are shot on sight”. It really highlights the need for us to develop a visitor centre – sadly we can't rely on our guides to talk about the bigger picture, the importance of some of the rules and conservation in general.

We received a letter from the Clerk, County Council of Trans Mara on the 6th, instructing us to collect revenue from all clients staying Little Governors. This elicited an immediate and angry response from Governors, addressed to the Chief Executive; with accusations of trying to disrupt tourism in the Mara and that the contents of the Clerk's letter were illegal. Subsequently, the County Council of Trans Mara reiterated that all clients staying at Little Governors must have valid Trans Mara tickets; basically disowning a letter purported to have been written in 1999 by the Clerk at the time, the late John Naiguran. Governors' Camps had been using this letter as the basis for insisting that Park fees for Little Governors' clients be paid to Narok County Council. A meeting has been scheduled in Nairobi for the 2nd November. This dispute has been going on for over three years and we hope that it will finally be resolved.

SECURITY

We smashed our record for the number of arrests in one month, 51 arrests in October alone. The previous best month's total was 39. This was despite the fact that 11 of our key staff were on a training course. This brings our total arrests to 1,729 – time for another, very well deserved celebration. I am extremely proud of our staff – they show incredible skill and commitment – WELL DONE. You can not imagine how difficult it is to catch these poachers – they are excellent bushmen, have become very wily, have immense stamina, and are extremely fleet footed. Even the poachers have a huge respect for our rangers; for the way in which they are well treated, but also for the skill, discipline and professionalism shown by our rangers. It should be noted that no poacher was arrested in the Triangle – they were all arrested in the Lemai Wedge and northern Serengeti – a testament to the amazing relationship we have with our TANAPA counterparts. We collected 564 wire snares and found 22 wildebeest, 1 zebra, three buffalo and an impala dead in snares or recently butchered.

One poacher was arrested near Nyakita-Pembe on the 1st. He had butchered a wildebeest, which he said he found in a snare belonging to someone. He was middle aged and limped badly and only hunted on his own.

Two people were arrested on the 2nd by the Ngiro-are rangers near Kichwa ya Tembo in the Lemai Wedge mid-morning. Seven wire snares were recovered.

Three more poachers were arrested on the 3rd by the Iseiya team. The patrol started near Nyakita Pembe, where they found one dead impala in a snare and recovered 18 snares. The patrol continued along the Mara River and came across

five more poachers at around 1.00 pm. They managed to arrest three of the five and recover 33 snares.

The Iseiya and Ngiro-are rangers arrested five, of eight, people on the 7th at Nyakita Pembe. The Iseiya patrol left at 2.00 pm and found where belongings had been abandoned – obviously the patrol had been seen. They were joined by the Ngiro-are team and set up ambushes – they succeeded at 8.00 pm when the poachers walked into the ambushes. They had killed a wildebeest and were carrying 28 wire snares. The following day the patrols found where six wildebeest had been killed and butchered – the meat of a zebra and a wildebeest was hidden. An ambush was set up but no one returned – 25 snares were recovered.

Kilima Camp reported a theft on the 9th. One or two people had cut the gauze and entered the tent while the occupants, three women, were asleep. Two cameras, US\$ 750 and £ Sterling 30 were stolen. The thief seemed to have a good knowledge of the tent and its belongings; he moved around with three people asleep in the tent and managed to select his items – leaving all the clothing intact.

Our rangers joined forces with TANAPA rangers on the 10th and managed to arrest two people who were setting a bush fire on the far side of the river. These fires are used to attract wildlife to the short green grass that then grows. The two were armed with spears and machetes. On the same day our staff found a cache of petrol hidden between Little Governors and Oloololo Gate – we believe that the fuel was stolen from Little Governors and gave them the fuel for their action.

Our patrol teams recovered 78 wire snares in the Lemai Wedge on the 11th – spread throughout most of the area. The following day they found an additional 38 snares near Maji ya Bett on the Kenya/Tanzania border. At least 10 wildebeest had been butchered and another four were found dead in the snares.

Our ranger teams joined forces with our Tanzanian counterparts from Lemai and Machweche between the 15th and 19th. During this period they managed to arrest 21 people and recover 174 wire snares.

On the 15th the teams arrested six people in two different groups along the Ngira watercourse that flows into the southern bank of the Mara River. All three in the first group were arrested and three, of four, were arrested in the second group. The first group had 48 snares and the second group were camped on the far side of the river but had set their snares at Sampura in the Lemai Wedge – a further 18 snares were recovered; 2 wildebeest were rescued and three were found dead in the snares. That same night the Ngiro-are team arrested set an ambush near Miungu in the Lemai Wedge and arrested three people as they came to check their snares – two wildebeest were rescued and one was found dead.

A further seven poachers were arrested at Ngira on the 17th. In the first incident four poachers were arrested with 34 snares – they had killed and slaughtered 4 wildebeest. That evening eight poachers were spotted in very broken country, they were followed and the rangers managed to arrest three of them just after dark.

On the 18th three more poachers were arrested near Kokatende, seven wire snares were recovered and 1 zebra had been killed. One of the poachers was deaf and dumb.

On the 19th, near Machweche, six people were spotted at a distance. They were followed for three hours (12-15 kilometres) before they were lost. The rangers then used Morani, one of our dogs, who tracked one of the poachers to an anthill, with a tree growing out of it. To begin with, the rangers were unable to see the poacher hidden in the top of the tree, but when Morani kept returning, he was seen. A second poacher was arrested close by. 19 wire snares were recovered.

The Iseiya team joined forces with the rangers from TANAPA and arrested seven poachers on the 22nd and 23rd. On the 22nd they arrested one, of three, people near Machweche and recovered six snares. Later, just after dark, they arrested another two people, from a large group, as they came into the Northern Serengeti to hunt – another 13 snares were recovered. The following day the patrol moved to near the & Beyond camp in the Northern Serengeti – they followed a water course downstream and managed to arrest four people. They found where three buffalo had been snared and butchered and then three wildebeest carcasses in the poachers' camp. They collected 68 wire snares in this one patrol.

On the 24th our rangers from Ngiro-are arrested five, of seven, poachers near Miungu in the Lemai Wedge. The rangers had found some meat hidden in a trees and set an ambush – the poachers walked into the ambush at 8.00 pm. 16 wire snares were recovered.

A further 41 snares were recovered between the 25th and 30th – all near Nyakita Pembe in the Lemai Wedge. One zebra and two wildebeest were found dead in the snares and one wildebeest was rescued. The Ngiro-are rangers head eight shots that were fired along the escarpment on the 25th night – a thorough search yielded nothing.

The Ngiro-are rangers left at 4.00 am to set up an ambush at Lempise on the morning of the 31st. Two people walked into the ambush at around 4.45 am and were both arrested. They were heading for Nyakita Pembe and were carrying 18 snares.

REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

We are a little concerned about the effect on our revenue, of the ongoing battle between Kenya and Somalia's Al Shabaab. Kenya has entered Somalia in retaliation against Al Shabaab, and in response to the kidnappings of tourists near Lamu. One or two hand grenades have exploded in Nairobi by an Al Shabaab sympathiser – he was very quickly arrested by the police and admitted to the attacks. He was also found in possession of 13 hand grenades and assorted firearms. We are already noticing cancellations but hope that the firm action taken by the Government will minimise the effect on tourism.

REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 2011

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	Ksh	US\$
Ticket sales	446,080.00	4,138,800.00	8,388,600.00	-
Non-ticket sales	56,195.00	853,300.00		
Balance for Distribution	502,275.00	4,992,100.00	8,388,600.00	-
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	191,496.05	1,959,283.00	4,613,730.00	-
Group Ranches	84,755.20	786,372.00		
Sub-total	276,251.25	2,745,655.00	4,613,730.00	-
Mara Conservancy	226,023.75	2,246,445.00	3,774,870.00	-

DEVELOPMENT

We installed a revenue booth and barriers at the junction of the roads that lead from Sankuria and Oloololo Gate to Little Governors. The new booth was manned by KAPS, with support from two of our security staff. We believe that this new base will assist us in closing off a “back-door” entry into the Triangle and enhance security.

We installed wing-walls on the culverts between Sankuria and Little Governors.

We cleaned the culverts between Iseiya and Oloololo Gate.

We constructed a small sentry house at the hippo pools, to give the attendant a shelter when it rains;

We graded the road from Oloololo Gate to Little Governors and touched-up other sections that required repair.

We had to purchase new tyres for the grader and also for the back-hoe tractor.

CMC Engineering fabricated a stronger hitch for the new trailer. Unfortunately they have been extremely slow, and somewhat untruthful, when it comes to completing the trailer. We have had excuse after excuse as to why the trailer has not been delivered – first it was: it is ready but there are no tyres; then the wheel studs are too weak; finally, we are awaiting new axles. This has been going on for two months.

REPORT ON FOCUS ON OCTOBER

Receive new trailer	Still not delivered
Work on cleaning culverts	Done
Start on culverts near River Camp	Done
Resurface section on road to Ngiro-are	Not done, awaiting trailer
Facilitate purchase of Cat 140 Grader for the Council	CFC Stanbic has approved loan facility
Build barrier on road near Little Governors	Done.

FOCUS FOR NOVEMBER

- Purchase uni-hut for gate at Little Governors’;
- Build new camp at gate;
- Take possession of new trailer;
- Extend parking area at Kichwa airstrip;
- Finalise purchase of grader for Council;
- Collect new Toyota Land Cruiser for anti-poaching work;
- Repair damaged sections of road; and
- Paint roof on staff housing at Iseiya.



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