

MARA MONTHLY

JUNE 2008



Rain has returned for a short period of time and water lily now blooms in the seasonal streams in the Mara Triangle.

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR JUNE 2008

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

We had five days of fairly heavy and widespread rain between the 6-10th, thereafter the month was mainly sunny and dry.

We held a Board meeting on the 4th to discuss and approve this year's work plan. The plan was for a six-month period, from June to December, as we would like to incorporate recommendations from the larger, Ten-year Management Plan being prepared for the whole Reserve as soon as it is ready. Mr Gideon Konchellah, the immediate former MP for Kilgoris attended the meeting for a while, to confirm his willingness to work with the Board and support the Conservancy if re-elected on the 11th June; he was re-elected with a large majority.

We held two, one-day, workshops for resident drivers on responsible guiding with support from the UK based Travel Foundation; they were facilitated by Dr C and Mr M Mvula. We had good representation from Olonana, Little Governor's, Mara Balloon Safaris, Mpata Club, Kichwa Tembo, Mara Siria and TransWorld. It was disappointing to see that Mara Serena drivers did not attend; as the largest operator in the Mara Triangle it is important for them to understand the direction we are taking and encompass the changes that we will be making to promote responsible guiding in the Mara.

The workshops highlighted the need for resident drivers to be

responsible, respect the environment and wildlife, take charge of their clients, adhere to the rules and set an example for all other drivers. We also discussed the proposed zoning scheme, limits on the number of vehicles at crossings, disciplinary action and the authority given to all resident drivers to act on infringements by any driver, including non-residents. We launched an annual award for the best and most responsible resident driver at this meeting. The award will entail an all expenses paid, two-week trip to the Luangwa National Park in Zambia. We are most grateful to The Born Free Foundation, Kenya Airways, the Travel Foundation and safari operators in the Luangwa for their amazing support.



“It is duty of all drivers, tour operators, lodges to protect and preserve the environment which we all depend on”

Camp/operator	Attendance	
	Day 1	Day2
Olonana	2	2
Mpata Club	1	3
Little Governors	6	0
Mara Balloon Safaris	2	0
Kichwa Tembo	0	14
Mara Siria	0	2
Mara Serena	0	0
TransWorld Balloons	0	2
Mara Conservancy	3	2
TOTAL	14	25

Conservation Corporation Africa (CCA) agreed to pay US\$ 10 per guest staying at their camps in Trans Mara, effective 1 January 2009. The Council sanctioned this contribution, and we look forward to this additional revenue. Without it, we will be very pressed to meet our financial obligations. However, we still have a serious financial problem between July and December and will almost certainly have to rely on donor support to see us through this period. We have applied for an advance, to help us through the current financial crisis and are awaiting a response.

Mr Simon Trevor, who has been working on a film series he calls “Inspiration”, came down on the 12th to continue working on a series of four films he is making on the Mara Conservancy.

We held a fourth tourism sector meeting in the KATO Boardroom on the 13th. This was well attended by leaders, representing most sectors, in the tourism industry. We had agreement on the zonation plan and the need to charge a

premium fee in the low-use zone. There was also agreement on most of the prescriptions, but more work needs to be done on prescriptions for lodges and camps. We were unable to reach a consensus on the allocation of proposed new eco-camps and eco-lodges, with some sectors objecting to any new development in the Reserve.

We held the first community meeting for the ten-year management plan between the 18-20th at Governor’s Camp. Participants were representatives from each of the “Group Ranches” surrounding the Reserve. The meeting focused on: revenue sharing, support to communities, human/wildlife conflict issues, management of areas outside the Reserve and the removal or improvement of villages neighbouring the Reserve. The meeting was nearly disrupted on the second day when it became known that Somak were beginning to develop a site along the Mara River. Somak have an approved site along the Mara River and have since communicated their commitment to the plan and have undertaken to abide by the recommended prescriptions for new camps and the zonation scheme.

The Chief Executive was co-opted to attend an inter-ministerial meeting on the 24th. It was chaired by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Mines, was also attended by the Permanent Secretary for Tourism, and focused on developments in the Mara. There was a discussion on the ten-year management plan and it was felt that there had been insufficient consultation with key Ministries. It was resolved that further consultation and briefing be done before the plan was presented to stakeholders. The meeting was assured that a draft of the management plan would be ready by the end of September.

Hungry Predators Await the Migration Cycle of Life in the African Plains

WILDLIFE

There has been excellent game viewing along the Mara River and on the burnt area. There have been at least thirteen different cheetah on the burn and lions have been seen everywhere. One lioness had cubs at the beginning of the month and one leopard was seen with two young cubs on the 25th. One cheetah was seen with five very young cubs on the 27th.

One young lion was found with a badly injured hind leg – we have been monitoring the animal to see if there is any chance of recovery. Ms Natasha Breed, a journalist who has been working with the BBC and Big Cat Diary, reported that she had found a paralysed lioness in April, across the Mara River, right opposite the same place we had found the paralysed lions. This brings the number of known lions to have been affected to six, out of the seven lions in the pride.

The migration should appear in the Mara in the first two weeks of July, large concentrations of animals have already crossed the Mara River, in the northern Serengeti and there are also concentrations South of Sand River.

RESEARCH

The Mara Hyena Research Project has established a research camp in the Triangle. They will be comparing the resident hyena population with the one around Talek and will also collect data on lion, leopard and cheetah populations and movements. We have also asked them to study the effect of fire on wildlife movements and populations as part of our fire management programme.

STAFF

Mr E Nkoi toi took his annual leave from the beginning of June and is due to report back in mid July.

Mr P Siampei will take his leave in July.

We have completed staff appraisals for all non-security staff.

We held a staff welfare meeting on the 24th to elect new office bearers and discuss staff welfare issues.

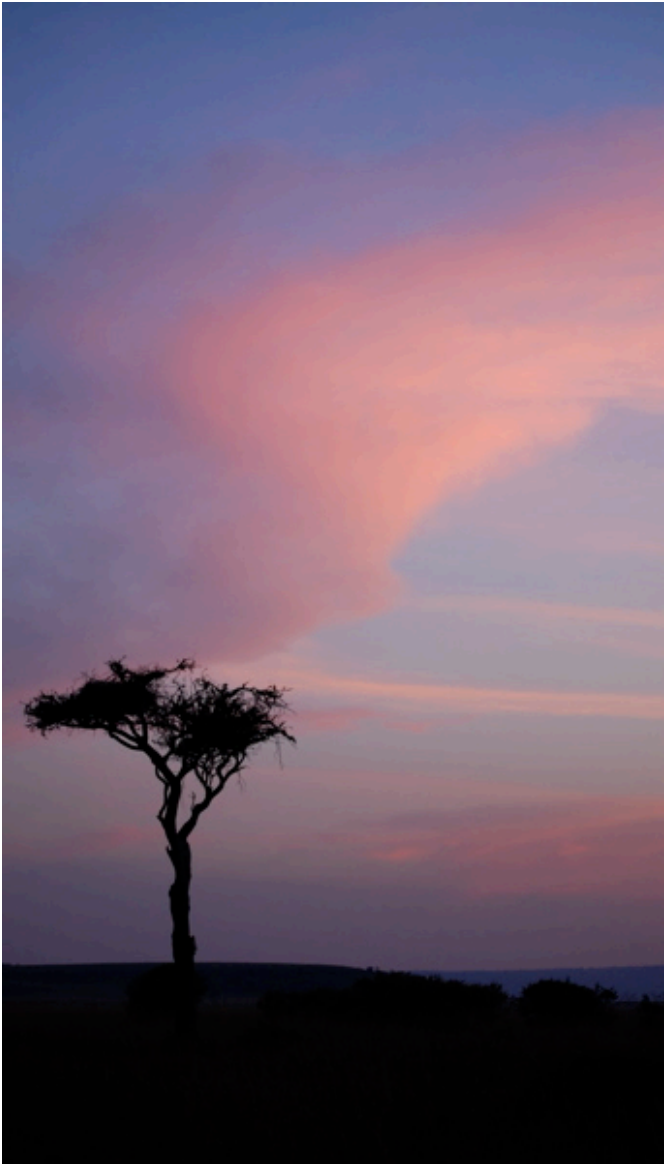
TOURISM

We have been working hard to ensure responsible guiding behaviour by all the drivers and guides from the very beginning of the new season. There have been eight incidents of unnecessary off-road driving and approaching animals too close and the offenders have been made to pay instant fines of Ksh 2,000 (US\$ 30). The responsible guiding workshop recommended that no more than 10 vehicles be allowed at the Serena crossing and no more than 20 vehicles be allowed at the crossing points near Mara Bridge. This will be implemented and we expect people to move off and make way after they have witnessed a crossing.

Drivers and trainee drivers from Kichwa Tembo spent several days with Assistant Warden J Kimojino, to learn about new areas and see issues from the Reserve management perspective. We hope to do this with drivers from other camps and lodges.

Thousands of zebra migrated to the Mara Triangle towards the end of May, marking the beginning of the great migration. Zebras are the forerunner of the migration and wildebeest, Thomson gazelle follow the herd.





Great number of wildebeests are now filling up the plains bordering Tanzania. The hungry predators ambushes the long-awaited prey .



Wildebeests Arrive Early this Year Rangers Prepare for Fight Against Poachers

SECURITY

Six poachers were arrested during the month. This brings the total number of arrests to 1,037. We also recovered 242 snares.

The Ngiro-are team collected 36 wire snares on the 4th, two zebra had been killed in the snares. This followed 107 snares collected by the Tanzanians in the same area, Limana, on the 31st May.

The Ngiro-are tem arrested three, of four, wa Kuria poachers on the night of the 5th, at 8.00 pm. These poachers were hunting with five dogs in the Limana area for Thompson's gazelle and had not yet killed anything. The following day the Ngiro-are team also found another five snares.

The General Service Unit (GSU) policemen based at Zakaria, on the Narok side of the river saw a suspected poacher on the 14th and reported to our rangers. The rangers combed the area but were unable to locate anyone. They did, however, find a poacher's camp with hippo meat stashed in trees. The

poachers had left the camp a few days previously and would probably return to collect the remaining meat. Three days later the rangers found a second camp along Sand River that had been vacated a week earlier; at least two hippo had been killed and butchered.

The Ngiro-are team found 30 wire snares, with one dead topi, near Kasarani in the Lemai Wedge on the 18th. That night they set an ambush and arrested one, of five poachers, at 2.00 am.

The Ngiro-are team collected 36 wire snares on the 19th in the Kasarani area of the Lemai Wedge. No animals had been caught.

A combined Mara Bridge, Serena and Ngiro-are team arrested two wa Kuria poachers near Zakaria, on the Narok side of the river, at 7.00 am on the 21st. They were checking out the poacher's camps seen earlier in the week when they found three poachers who had arrived the previous evening. They had spears and 11 wire snares and were going to move into an area near Roan Hill when apprehended.

Tourist Number Slowly Picks Up Occupancy 80% of Previous Year

On the 22nd a routine patrol along the border, near an area we call “Sierra Lima” found a freshly vacated camp, the poachers had killed a warthog and had left the previous night.

On the 25th the Ngiro-are team collected 17 wire snares, three zebra had been caught in the snares and butchered.

On the 26th an Earthview employee reported the theft of Ksh 28,000 from his house at Serena. A suspect was arrested and the money recovered after interrogation. The following day the suspect allegedly committed suicide by swallowing ground glass – the police are investigating the case.

REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

May revenue was the lowest since the Conservancy started operations, at Ksh 3 million (US\$ 50,000). This was down from Ksh 9 million in the same month last year, traditionally the lowest month for collection in the year. By the time this had been divided between the Council, Group Ranches and Revenue collector the Conservancy remained with Ksh 1.1 million – only 40% of the amount required to cover salaries, let alone other costs. Occupancy rates in the lodges increased but this was the result of aggressive local marketing and an increase in residents and citizens visiting the camps and lodges. The average value per ticket sold dropped to US\$ 24 as a result – the average value is usually well over US\$ 30.

Our draft accounts for the financial year ending May 31st showed a loss of Ksh 10 million in the year. This is summarised in the Table below. Two major items contributing to this loss included a provision for depreciation at Ksh 14,522,172 and exchange rate losses amounting to Ksh 5,131,876. We had anticipated that the Kenya Shilling would remain stable against the US\$ at approximately Ksh 67:1US\$; in fact the US\$ depreciated by a further 10%, to Ksh 61:1US\$ for much of the year.



Rangers at Ngiro-are post arrests poachers carrying out dried hippo meat from the Mara Triangle.

SUMMARY OF DRAFT PROFIT & LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR ENDING 31st MAY 2008

Income	
Disposal of assets	5900000
Balloon Revenue – gross	6301354
Donations	10732056
Park entrance fees – net	63866835
Gate sales - promotion	989660
Vehicle revenue	3404835
Total Income	91194742
LESS	
Direct Costs	
Promotion, tickets & compensation	3273230
Commissions to Earthview & KATO	15364006
Balance	72557506
Recurrent Expenses	83103658
Net income	-10548152

REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF MAY 2008

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	40,053.00	680,750.00	-	630,274.20
Non-ticket sales	-	120,750.00	-	-
Balance for Distribution	40,053.00	801,500.00	-	630,274.20
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	14,419.08	311,482.50	-	346,650.81
Group Ranches	7,610.07	129,342.50	-	-
Sub-total	22,029.15	440,825.00	-	346,650.81
Mara Conservancy	18,023.85	360,675.00	-	283,623.39

We are most grateful for the donor support we have received. Dr Asuka Takita has now raised US\$ 90,000 (Ksh 5.9 million), Mr J Kimojino and Mr W Deed have raised US\$ 50,000 (Ksh 3.2 million) through WildlifeDirect and Anne Kent-Taylor has pledged another US\$ 11,000, bringing her total to US\$ 26,000 (Ksh 1.7 million). Ms Leslie Roach has also sent US\$ 50,000 through WildlifeDirect and this is expected in July.

DEVELOPMENT

The water tank at Serena was repaired after two of the internal supports corroded away and the tank began to bulge and leak.

The mason strengthened two badly damaged buildings at Ngiro-are by inserting reinforced pillars on the corners. These buildings have been seriously cracked and weakened by periodic earth tremors that occur in that area. He also placed a water tank so that we can catch rainwater to provide drinking water.

We completed cutting all the grass tracks; over 500 kilometres of grass tracks have been cut for game viewing.

Work is continuing on the main road between Ooloolo Gate and Serena and we expect the Government contract to be completed in early July. It is disappointing that a number of poorly drained sections will not be re-surfaced and that we will still not have an all-weather road.

We graded the roads between Mara Serena and Mara Bridge and will now work on the roads to Ngiro-are, before moving towards Ooloolo.



Tourists can enjoy over 500 km of game viewing tracks in the Mara Triangle

REPORT ON FOCUS ON JUNE

Grade roads in reparation for the high season	On-going
Cut grass tracks	Done
Hold Board meeting on the 4 th	Done
Hold two one-day workshops for responsible guiding in the Mara	Done
Complete Government contract on road from Ooloolo	Almost complete
Hold community and tourism sector meetings for the 10 year plan	Done
Work on housing at Ngiro-are	Done

FOCUS FOR JULY

- Complete Government contract on Ooloolo road
- Complete grading roads
- Put up road signs for closed areas and tracks
- Hold final series of meetings for 10-year management plan
- Thatch uni-huts at Mara Bridge and Serena
- Continue to raise funds to meet expected shortfall between July and January 2009.



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