

MARA MONTHLY

OCTOBER 2008

Many vultures at Purungat, after the drowning of so many wildebeest in the last big crossing of the year.



M&C Denis-Huot

MARA CONSERVANCY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2008

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

There was some exceptionally heavy rain in the first few days of October. We then had a week of beautiful weather before the rains returned on the 16th. These rains continued for 10 days and were sufficiently heavy to send the migration back into Tanzania.

We held a fund-raising event at the Karen Blixen Coffee Shop on the 3rd and raised Ksh 1,022,000 (approximately US\$ 13,000). The event was a great success and we would like to thank Dr Bonnie Dunbar for her amazing support. We would also like to thank the sponsors, those that donated items and the organisers for their help and support. I would like to make special mention of Mr Charles Njonjo for being our chief guest, for his keynote speech and generous donation.

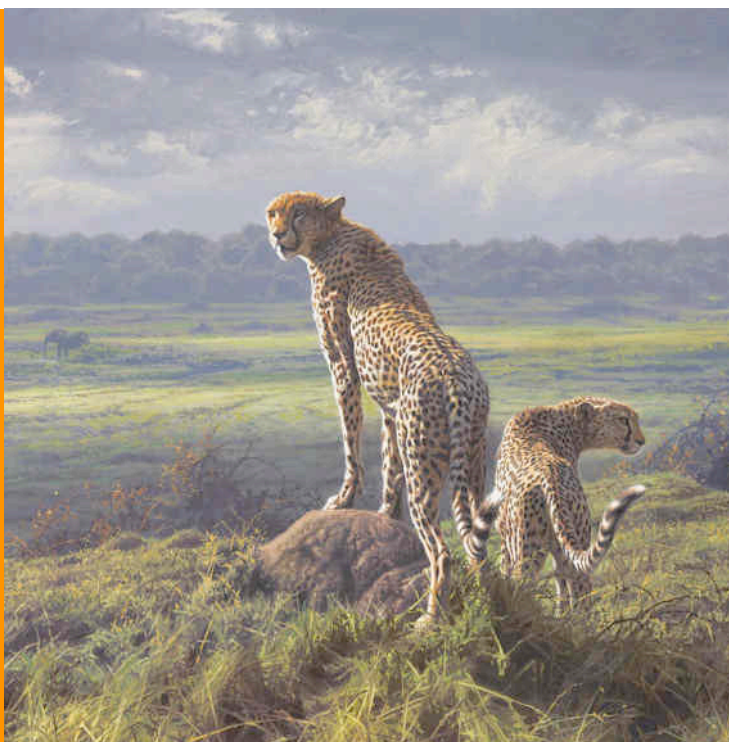
The Chief Executive and Dr Asuka Takita met with Dr Samuel Kasiki, head of the biodiversity division in the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), on the 7th to discuss collection of wildlife samples and the treatment of sick and injured animals in the Triangle. Dr Kasiki has recommended that Dr

Takita be allowed to treat injured animals under supervision of KWS.

We hosted two Tanzania National Park (TANAPA) trustees and senior staff including: the Chief Park Warden – Mr Martin Loibooki; Principle Ecologist and head of Tourism, from the Serengeti on the 17th. They were on a familiarisation tour of the Mara and we were able to exchange many ideas on Park and Reserve management.

The painting donated by Mr Paul Augustinus named "Hunters of the Mara Triangle", a very beautiful painting of two cheetah, was the first to sell in his exhibition in the Tryon Gallery in London. We are extremely grateful to Paul, and to the Tryon Gallery, for their support. We will receive £11,500 (approximately US \$20,000 or Ksh 1.5 million); 100% of the sale price, as the Tryon Gallery waived their 40% commission. We are also grateful to Dr Richard Leakey who wrote an introduction to the Conservancy in the exhibition catalogue.

Hunters of the Mara Triangle by Paul Augustinus.



The Chief Executive met with Ms Leslie Roach and Dr Helen Gichohi on the 21st to discuss the ten-year management plan for the Mara and funding requirements for the plan's completion. The plan has turned out to be much more expensive than originally anticipated, largely because of the complexity of tourism issues and the requirement that Government become involved and approve the plan. It has now stalled as a result of inadequate funds. This has already provided a loophole that could jeopardize the whole plan; The National Environment Monitoring Authority (NEMA) have possibly issued licenses for the construction of one or two camps in the Triangle since the expiry of a notice that stated no more licenses would be issued in the Mara.

The Chief Executive met with Dr Paula Kahumbu on the 23rd to discuss our relationship with WildlifeDirect. It was a positive meeting and we will work out an agreement that suits both parties. In the meantime, we are grateful to Wildlife Direct for re-instating our blog and donate button on their site.

WILDLIFE

The wildebeest came back at the beginning of October and there were major crossings near Iseiya Station and Mara Bridge. We continued to see wildebeest calves die from apparent severe mange infestations. We believe that the wildebeest are transmitting it to cheetah and that is the reason why we have seen so many affected cheetah.

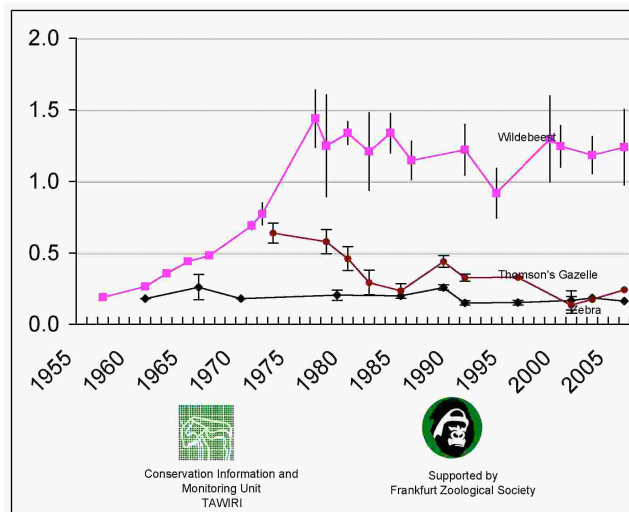
Researchers believe that mange is a stress related disease and that cheetah under stress are most susceptible, they also believe that the skin condition in wildebeest could be caused by a fungal infection – samples have been taken to the Kenya Wildlife Service for analysis. This is probably the case for some cheetah in the Mara, where the worst affected are young animals that left their mothers earlier in the year. However, there are a number of older animals, some of them that specialise in hunting wildebeest calves, that have also shown signs of very severe infestation.

Heavy rains in the last half of October triggered the migration back into Tanzania – there was a mass movement of animals on the 25th, an estimated 2,000 - 3,000 animals drowned when crossing in unsuitable areas near Purungat (Mara Bridge).

The Topi started giving birth at the beginning of the month and by the 15th there were young calves everywhere. Topi are seasonal breeders that give birth at this time of year, as are warthog and Thompson's gazelle.

RESEARCH

We have been in contact with scientists in the Serengeti about wildebeest population numbers and the possible effect of mange on the young wildebeest and cheetah populations. We received the following information from them on population trends. There was no count done in 2008 because the wildebeest has started moving early and the population was too dispersed. However, the population seems to have been relatively stable since 1980 and is estimated to be at around 1.2 million. It is interesting to note that the zebra population has remained fairly constant for the past 40 years and that the Thompson's gazelle numbers have halved in the same period.



Tourism down 20% for September

Full recovery not expected till 2010

STAFF

Mr William Deed was invited to attend a conference sponsored by Google on Internet and Technology in Africa. They paid all his travel and expenses to San Francisco for the all-day conference.

We are arranging a study tour for our staff in November. This tour was promised to the staff as a reward for arresting 1,000 poachers. This tour was put on hold as part of the cost-cutting measures instituted in January.

TOURISM

Tourist numbers for September were 20% down on last year and will probably be even lower in October. Mara Serena continues to do much better than most camps and lodges in the Mara – their occupancy rate in September was 98%, compared to 25-50% for many of the camps.

SECURITY

We arrested 8 poachers and recovered 304 wire snares during October. This brings the total arrests to 1,109.

The Iseiya team arrested one poacher on the 2nd, during an overnight patrol along the Bologonja stream. The poacher was one of three people who had killed three wildebeest, one zebra and one topi. They were in the process of packing up and leaving when apprehended. Unfortunately the poachers saw the patrol team from some distance away and the others managed to escape with some of their belongings and 12 wire snares.

We received information about some people with some ivory, leopard skins and a python skin and arranged an ambush by rangers from Oloololo on the night of the 2nd. Unfortunately elephant disrupted the ambush at a critical time and the people escaped, dropping the python skin. The Ngiro-are

team recovered 10 wire snares on the same day near Konyoike, in the Lemai Wedge.

A combined Tanzanian, Iseiya and Ngiro-are team re-visited the Bologonja area on the 3rd and came across a number of recently vacated camps and one dead wildebeest in a snare.

A combined Iseiya and Ngiro-are patrol found 23 wire snares near Maji ya Bett on the 8th. They set up an ambush that night and for two consecutive nights but saw no poaching activity.

We had an interesting day on the 9th. It started with a cattle rustling incident in the morning – a group of Kipsigis and wa Kuria stole 14 cattle from the wa Kuria and tried to drive them along the escarpment. Anti-stock theft police from both Kenya and Tanzania followed up the incident and recovered the cattle just above Ngiro-are after an exchange of fire. Our rangers from Ngiro-are tried to intercept three of the thieves as they escaped but unfortunately were unable to arrest any. The same morning the Warden from Lemai called to say that there was information of a large poaching party entering the Serengeti and heading for the Mara River. We hurriedly formed a joint patrol from Iseiya and Ngiro-are; together with Tanzanian rangers. They came across at least 42 poachers – on the wrong side of the river - and by the time a vehicle was sent to intercept them, the poachers had dispersed; only one was arrested. Later on the same day our rangers saw one poacher hide himself near Mlima Hotel, also across the river, and were able to direct a Tanzanian team into arrest him. A total of 15 wire snares were recovered.

A routine patrol on the 14th recovered 15 wire snares near Maji ya Bett – 12 of the snares had probably been set before the patrol on the 8th found the 23 previously reported. One wildebeest was rescued and two zebra found dead in the

Self-drive tourists break park rules, and are dangerously close to a herd of elephant.





Anne Kent Taylor Scouts and Mara Conservancy Rangers arrest a poacher with a leopard skin.



1,109 Poachers Arrested Many pit-traps found in Serengeti

snares. We also found where poachers had dug up and killed a warthog.

The Ngiro-are team recovered 30 wire snares in the area around Maji ya Bett on the 17th; two zebra had been killed in the snares. It is very frustrating working in this area, as the poachers are able to monitor all movement in and out of the area from the escarpment and know when to set snares and when not to come down again.

The Iseiya team joined their Tanzanian counterparts Kokatende and Tabora Bi and went on a two-day patrol from the 17th, returning on the morning of the 19th. They were operating in a very remote and inaccessible area along the Grumetti River and in an area known as Itaro. On the 17th they saw some poachers but were unable to make an arrest. They also found 20 wire snares and a poacher's camp where 20 wildebeest had been butchered. That night they arrested one poacher on a bicycle at around mid-night. He was a buyer on his way to collect meat from a camp. On the 18th the team moved from the Grumetti to Itaro and found another poacher's camp with at least 50 wildebeest carcasses,

they also recovered 63 wire snares. That night at 8.00 pm eight poachers walked into an ambush and the rangers were able to apprehend one person. They set up another ambush at 4.00 am on the same night and apprehended one more poacher at 6.00 am, as he was coming into check on his snares. He was alone. In all three poachers were arrested and 83 wire snares collected. The rangers commented on the number of pit-traps in the area; these are deep holes with spikes set in the pit and pointing upwards, the pits are then covered with a thin layer of brush or grass to conceal them. These traps are not seen in the Mara and in our normal areas of operation.

The Ngiro-are team collected 84 wire snares on the 20th in the Maji ya Bett area and then the Iseiya team found an additional 15 snares the following day in the same general area. Two wildebeest were found dead in the snares and four were saved. The Iseiya team set up an ambush near Kokamange on the evening of the 21st and arrested one, of seven, poachers as they went to investigate their snares. Five snares were recovered.

Credit crunch expected to hit tourism

Cost-cutting measures will continue

On the 22nd another ambush was set up; poachers came into the general area but no one was arrested.

On the 27th the Iseiya team found one dead wildebeest in a snare downstream from Kokatende. On the same day the Anne Kent-Taylor scouts, together with our rangers, recovered 10 wire snares and found one impala dead in one of the snares near Olopikidongoe.

Our rangers from Oolololo Gate, together with the Anne Kent-Taylor scouts and vehicle, set an ambush at 3.00 am on the 29th to follow-up on a person suspected to have a leopard skin near Olopikidongoe. The ambush was successful and one person was arrested in possession of one leopard skin.

REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

The global financial crisis is bound to affect tourist numbers, and hence revenue, for the foreseeable future. We had expected the high season, and the remainder of this year, to be down by approximately 20 – 25% and this was indeed the case through the high season. We had hoped that things would return to normal in January 2009 but this is now extremely unlikely. Some analysts are anticipating that 2009 will be as bad, if not worse, than 2008.

This is cause for great concern, as people will not have disposable income to travel or make donations. However, we hope to go into 2009 in better financial shape than we were in at the start of 2008; thanks to revenue from Kichwa Tembo, the donations mentioned elsewhere in this report and US\$ 50,000 expected from the US Fish & Wildlife Service. There is no room for complacency and we will have to continue with the cost-cutting measures instituted at the beginning of the year.

REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 2008

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	199533	2548360	-	598020.20
Non-ticket sales	21656	272480		
Balance for Distribution	221189	2820840	-598020.20	
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	83742.7	1067274	-	328911.11
Group Ranches	37911.3	484188.4		
Sub-total	121654	1551462	-328911.11	
Mara Conservancy	99535	1269378	-269109.09	

DEVELOPMENT

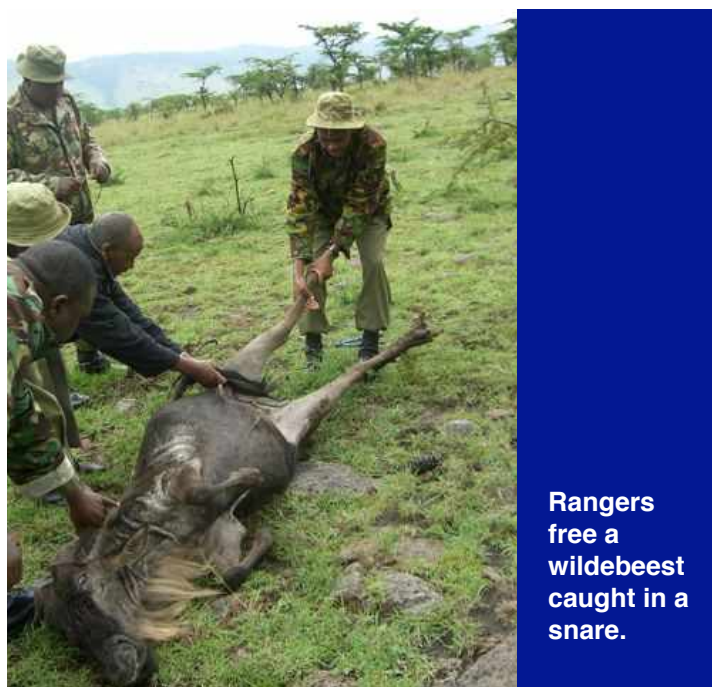
We ordered a new Land Rover to replace the Chief Executive's vehicle which is now over seven years old. The new vehicle will be delivered in early November.

We graded the road between Iseiya and Oolololo Gate and the Government contractor constructed two culverts. It would appear that this contract is now complete, although there are still areas that have not been re-surfaced and no compaction was done.

We have dug pits for two pit latrines, one at Oolololo Gate – for when there is no water – and one in the public camp-site near Iseiya.

We concentrated our efforts on improving the river road. We have built up most of the flood-prone sections and this will greatly improve access along the river in all seasons.

We have started work on improving housing at Mara Bridge.



Rangers free a wildebeest caught in a snare.



Road Team are quick to return all roads to normal after the heavy rains.

REPORT ON FOCUS ON OCTOBER

Collect uniforms	Ready for collection
Order and collect new Land Rover to replace CE's vehicle	Ordered, awaiting collection.
Hold fund-raising at Karen Blixen Coffee Shop	Done
Continue work on river road	Ongoing
Complete toilet in Chief Executive's camp	Done
Improve housing at Mara Bridge	Ongoing

FOCUS FOR NOVEMBER

- Study tour for staff as a reward for arresting 1,000 poachers;
- Sell old Land Rover and collect new vehicle;
- Collect uniforms;
- Clean out culverts and drains in anticipation of the rains;
- CE to take two weeks off from 2nd; and
- Continue with 10 year management plan.



Mara Conservancy
 P O Box 63457-000619
 NAIROBI
 Tel: (02) 3749 632
 Fax: (02) 3749 636

View our blog daily at: www.maratriangle.org