

MARA MONTHLY

APRIL 2009

Heavy showers
fell for most of
April.

M&C Denis-Huot

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR APRIL 2009

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

We had very heavy thunderstorms during the first week of April, these storms continued throughout most of the month, with a little respite in the last week.

The very tense and difficult political situation that we faced in March continued through the first half of April and only subsided when the Warden Operations and Chairman to the County Council of Trans Mara were arrested and charged with incitement on the 16th. We then suspended a number of staff members and had those who were Council staff transferred back to the Council.

We held the Annual General Meeting and a board meeting on the 17th.

We had a visit from the Council, SNV (a Dutch development NGO) and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) officers from the Mid-Rift Conservation Group. This group was looking at game reserve management options for Lake Bogoria, Baringo and Kamnarok Game Reserves. A delegation from the County Council of Trans Mara also joined them. This

included the Clerk, Vice-chairman and Councilors and technical officers from the Council.

The Chairman and Chief Executive met with the Director of the Kenya Wildlife Service on the 23rd to brief him on the current situation in the Mara Triangle.

We received a copy of a letter from the Clerk, Narok County Council (NCC) to the Clerk, County Council of Trans Mara (TMCC). This letter stated that NCC is "losing colossal amounts of revenue due to its failure to collect Park entry fee from Tourists entering our side of the Park across Mara River/Governors Camp crossing point." We did an analysis of the number of visitors who may be crossing the river from Little Governors and those that stayed on the Narok side but crossed the river at Mara Bridge to do their game drives in the Triangle. The table below summarizes the findings – the Triangle gets five times more visitors from Narok than go from Little Governors – a net loss to TMCC and Conservancy of US\$ 686,000 (Ksh 54 million) in the past year alone.

Ole Sampei stands next to his newly constructed predator proof sheep pen.

He is the first to be registered for the new compensation scheme.



Visitors to the Mara Triangle						
Month	Mara Triangle Bed nights	In Transit to Mara Triangle through Narok	Narok	Little	Value	Value of
			Clients on Day Walk \$20 US	Governors Bed nights	\$36.47	Narok Tickets accepted
March-08	2,090	1,162	2,097	61,344	268	10,490
April-08	1,810	962	717	39,872	291	10,596
May-08	2,441	803	1,896	49,371	218	7,937
June-08	3,249	1,358	2,108	61,364	256	9,327
July-08	6,452	1,490	2,959	96,736	560	20,691
August-08	7,218	2,238	4,398	141,424	690	25,123
September-08	5,986	1,497	3,779	108,227	711	26,072
October-08	5,405	1,392	4,159	121,068	507	18,490
November-08	3,641	1,980	1,729	50,331	465	14,673
December-08	4,968	1,498	1,216	35,269	377	13,727
January-09	3,678	1,825	1,802	62,498	327	11,966
February-09	3,718	2,255	752	21,891	439	15,984
TOTAL	58,136	14,827	36,369	947,562	5,115	\$184,949
Value in Ksh	111,543,282			88,041,367		14,776,345
TOTAL VISITORS	88,186					

we will compensate anyone for livestock killed if they have an acceptable enclosure.

The “community” held a stage-managed demonstration against the Conservancy in the middle of the month – ostensibly because the Mara Conservancy were stealing and selling animals from the Reserve. This followed a comment in the press by the Member of Parliament for Kilgoris that said “officials of Mara Conservancy have been illegally transferring wild animals from Masai Mara Game Reserve to private conservancies”.

RESEARCH

We received a copy of the hyena research project report for the quarter ending 31st March. The researchers are working with six different clans, totalling 237 animals. We are also beginning to get some information on wildlife distribution between burnt and un-burnt areas.

WILDLIFE

A young lioness was reported dead on the 19th – it is presumed that the lioness was one of the Serena pride. This pride had just returned from across the river after an absence of about a month.

A lioness had cubs somewhere near the burn, one of the cubs was found on the 23rd with one of Notch’s sons. The male was nuzzling and biting the cub and it died soon afterwards. We presume the mother moved the other cubs.

Most of the zebra that had come across in March moved back towards the Loita Plains in the middle part of April. The zebra helped sustain the lion population and there were some very dramatic crossings with very hungry crocodiles feeding on the zebra as they went North.

One male lion was injured near Sankuria, probably by a buffalo. Dr Mijele treated the lion on the 25th and also checked on an injured giraffe on the escarpment. The giraffe was too weak to get up after treatment and was euthanized.

COMMUNITY

Ole Sampei, an elder from Partikilat on the escarpment, is the first member of the community to make an acceptable predator-proof enclosure for his livestock. In fact his enclosure is probably even better than the demonstration enclosure we had built near Kawai. Ole Sampei is the first member to be registered to our new compensation scheme –

A scientific paper published in the Journal of Zoology by J O Ogutu, H P Piepha, H T Dublin, N Bhola and R S Reid entitled “Dynamics of Mara-Serengeti ungulates in relation to land use changes” was picked up by the local and international press. Most of the newspaper articles focused on the dramatic declines in seven ungulate populations between 1989 and 2003, with such headlines as “Crisis in the Mara”. The authors of the scientific paper were undoubtedly accurate in their findings, although it was difficult to determine whether the declines were recorded in the Masai Mara National Reserve only, or whether they referred to the Mara ecosystem. It would be easier to believe that the figures related to the ecosystem – the paper accurately highlighted the issues, namely: illicit harvest, livestock incursions, settlements and human population growth. One of the most alarming figures presented in the paper related to human population growth, 92 times the number of homesteads and 62 times the number of houses since 1950. There can be few paces in the World, outside a few cities, that have experienced such a massive increase in the human population in less than 60 years. There is no doubt that human pressure, and land-use changes from pastoralism to agriculture have had a huge impact on the wildlife in the ecosystem. However, there are a number of positive developments in the Mara:



M&C Denis-Huot

KWS vet, Dr. Mijele treats the injured male lion near Olololo escarpment.



Looking ahead for the Mara Poaching virtually eliminated in Triangle

The Mara Conservancy – the first public/private sector management agreement for conservation in Kenya. The Mara Conservancy has virtually eliminated poaching in the Mara Triangle and the area has undoubtedly witnessed a resurgence of many species that were being affected by poaching. The paper quoted figures provided by the Conservancy of poachers arrested but did not make it clear that the majority of poachers are actually arrested in Tanzania, a result of the amazing collaboration we have with our Tanzanian counterparts.

Private Conservancies – the sub-division of land in the Mara dispersal area offered opportunities for the tourist industry to invest in conservation through the formation of private conservancies. The first of these, the Olare Orok Conservancy (OOC) enabled individual landowners to receive a fair price for setting aside their land for conservation, through leases. The leaseholders, a group of tour and camp operators, are now able to provide management and security. This is the way forward for protecting the land outside the National Reserve and is now being replicated on other, key, areas adjoining the Reserve.

These two initiatives, together with a ten-year management plan for the National Reserve, have set an excellent platform to stop the decline in wildlife numbers in the Mara ecosystem. Indeed, I believe that there is already an improvement and would welcome a series of new counts to verify this.

STAFF

The Chief Executive, Warden Operations and Warden Ngiro are met with officers from the African Field Training Services who are currently training all the field forces in the Serengeti. We discussed the possibility of them training our rangers. Martin Mthemba and Trevor Langerfeld, the two trainers, will come over at some stage to discuss our training needs.

The Police arrested the Warden Operations, Mr Edward Nkoitoi, on the 16th. A number of other staff were suspended for three months and others were transferred internally. Mr Samuel Kortom was sent by the Council to replace Mr Nkoitoi. Kortom is no stranger to the Triangle; he has been based here for many years in the past.

Tourism Drops Dramatically after Easter

New Park Fees Effective from 1st July

TOURISM

Tourist numbers dropped off dramatically after Easter, suddenly Mara Serena was operating at 20% occupancy, down from around 60% for the first half of the month.

The Ministry of Local Government approved an increase in Park fees, in line with fees implemented by the Kenya Wildlife Service in January 2009. It has been decided that the new fees will be effective from 1st July 2009.

SECURITY

A total of nine poachers were arrested in April, bringing the total to 2,155. 20 wire snares were also recovered. Our security teams also arrested a number of people for illegal grazing along the escarpment. Illegal grazing has been a major problem in other areas of the Mara, especially near Keekorok and around Talek Gate on the Narok side of the Reserve.

A combined patrol by the Iseiya and Ngiro-are teams arrested four, of nine, poachers in an overnight patrol conducted on the 2nd. The poachers were arrested at 2.00 am, as they came into the Lemai Wedge to hunt gazelles, they had not killed anything.

The Ngiro-are team arrested three poachers on the 16th, during a daytime patrol near Kokamange in the Lemai Wedge. They had not yet hunted, 20 wire snares were recovered near the Kinyangaga outpost during the same patrol.

The Iseiya team found where poachers had killed a hippo along the BBC lugga on the 23rd, the poachers had left a few days earlier. The following day our rangers also found where poachers had killed a zebra near Nyumba Nane – both these places are in the Triangle. These poachers are the ones we have been trying to catch for the last few months, they have been lucky in avoiding arrest so far.

The Iseiya team arrested two, of five, poachers on the night of the 23rd, at 9.45. The poachers were on their way to hunt Thompson's Gazelle in the Lemai Wedge, near Nyanguki, when arrested.

REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

The table below shows our revenue and expenditure for the first nine months of the financial year.

	Actual	Budget	Variance	Comment
Revenue				
Entrance	51,247,173	54,776,482	-3,529,309	No increase in fees
Donations	17,666,842		17,666,842	
Balloon	4,062,798	3,286,589	776,209	
Promotion	1,086,808		1,086,808	Maps, caps etc
Vehicles	2,745,405	2,905,789	-160,384	
Assets	1,000,000		1,000,000	
& Beyond		13,722,940		
TOTAL	77,809,026	74,690,940	3,118,086	Supported by donations
Expenditure				
Operating	63,846,738	63,180,490	665,888	
Finance	-1,200,626	2,757,644	-3,958,270	Weaker shilling
Net income	678,390	-7,559,779	8,238,169	Funded by donations

REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2009

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSh
Ticket sales	103,295.00	1,360,003.00	-	354,283.50
Non-ticket sales	14,448.00	232,075.00		
Balance for Distribution	117,743.00	1,592,078.00	-	354,283.50
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	45,132.60	617,242.33	-	194,855.93
Group Branches	19,626.05	258,400.57		
Sub-total	64,758.65	875,642.90	-	194,855.93
Mara Conservancy	52,984.35	716,435.10	-	199,427.58



A young male lion nuzzled and bit a two week old cub. The cub died following the incident.



KWS vet was called in to treat a giraffe with an injured leg. The animal was too weak to stand after treatment and was euthanized.

DEVELOPMENT

We have virtually completed the kennels at Ngairo-are for two new bloodhounds.

We had problems with both our tractors, at one point they were both unserviceable. They are now both working again and we have continued to work on the river road to Oloololo Gate.

We repaired the gyro-mower in anticipation of cutting grass tracks in June/July.

REPORT ON FOCUS FOR APRIL

Hold Board meeting and AGM on 17 th April	Done
Repair both tractors	Done
Resolve political issues with Council	Ongoing
Construct kennels at Ngairo-are for tracker dogs	Ongoing

FOCUS FOR MAY

- Complete kennels;
- Tracker dogs due to arrive on 29th May from the US;
- Complete Annual Work Plan and budget;
- Recruit and train dog handlers for tracker dog unit; and
- Hold Board meeting and EGM on the 22nd



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

View our blog at: www.maratriangle.org