

MARA MONTHLY

FEBRUARY 2009

Heavy rains at the beginning of February saw new shoots on the burn area.



M&C Denis-Huot

MARA CONSERVANCY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2009

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

We had heavy thunderstorms for the first week of February, we then had two weeks of beautiful weather before the rains returned for a few days towards the end of the month. The Mara Triangle looks absolutely stunning and the area burnt in January has attracted large numbers of animals, including two cheetah families, several lions and hundreds of plains game.

The Chief Executive met with Mr Hal Wackman, a founder Director of WildlifeDirect on the 17th to discuss the Conservancy's relationship with WildlifeDirect.

We had a visit by the President of Libya's son and his entourage at the beginning of the month. They stayed at Mara Serena for nearly a week.

A road was being constructed into the Mara Triangle from the top of the escarpment; the road follows a cattle route to the salt-lick. The Council wrote to the developers, M/s Mara Engai Wilderness Lodge, and instructed them to cease construction of a camp on the escarpment, and to

stop the road until the Council sees all the necessary approvals. The Council gave approval for the construction to continue on the 10th February. This will open up a new route into the Reserve and has significant cost implications for the Conservancy, in terms of personnel, construction and security in that part of the Reserve.

There was a meeting in the KATO Board room on the 20th to discuss progress on the ten-year management plan for the Mara. The meeting discussed ways of moving the plan forward and it is hoped that a meeting can be held with Narok County Council in early March. Another meeting will be held with the County Council of Trans Mara once it has been properly constituted.

It appears that there may be a way out of the impasse that has paralyzed the County Council of Trans Mara for over a year. We now hope that a Chairman to the Council will be elected in March and that this will allow the Council to begin operating again.

Community members discuss issue of livestock compensation due to increasing number of carnivore attacks.



Baby Eland Joins Bahati at Oolololo Gate Orphaned Elephant Rescued in Kilgoris

A delegation from the Ministry of Immigration visited the Mara in mid-February to consider opening the Sand River Gate as a border post between Kenya and Tanzania. This would greatly improve access into Tanzania from the Mara. At present visitors going between the Mara and Serengeti have to go through Isbanyia or Namanga, a full days drive, at the very least.

WILDLIFE

A four-day old eland calf was brought into Oolololo Gate on the 1st, it had been found abandoned in a rainstorm by one of the villages on the escarpment. This now joins “Bahati” the eland calf that we have reared since May 2008.

The very weak cheetah female that we had been watching was seen again on the 1st, she seemed much stronger and there is a good chance that she will now survive. We now have three groups of cheetah on the burn, this is very welcome, cheetah had been very hard to see in the Triangle since June 2008.

A 10 -12 month old elephant calf was brought to Oolololo on the 14th by rangers from the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). The calf had been found abandoned near Kilgoris. The calf was flown to Daphne Sheldrick’s orphanage the same evening, it died a few days later. Another elephant calf was brought in by KWS on the 26th and was again flown to Nairobi, we hope that this one will survive. One immature elephant with a broken leg was euthanized on the 27th, there was no chance of recovery for this animal.

COMMUNITY

We held a meeting with members of the community committee that acts as a liaison between the Conservancy and community on the 4th at the livestock guardian demonstration homestead – Iseiya the Anatolian sheep-dog puppy is thriving and beginning to take his responsibilities as

a protector of his flock seriously. A large part of the meeting revolved around compensation arrears for livestock killed in 2006/7 and not compensated for. We received a list of compensation claims and will review them. We also discussed our proposals for future compensation and they include registration to the scheme and conditions of minimum acceptable housing and herding that must be adhered to for compensation to be considered. We also discussed our proposals for checking and policing the scheme and our intention to use the committee and young men from the committee to evaluate claims – they would be given forms to fill in and cameras to use for documenting evidence.

RESEARCH

Mr Sean Dyer will be working on the Hyena Research team and will replace the two researchers who have been here since July 2008.

A large team of researchers spent a day on the Mara River, near Mara Bridge, looking at water flows, water quality, inveterate populations in the water and fish species. The team was made up of Kenyan and Tanzanian based scientists. Water flows are extremely low again but of more concern is the quality of water. Salinity has increased and oxygen levels in the water seem abnormally low; this may be the cause of a number of dead fish being seen in the river in recent weeks.

STAFF

We conducted our routine staff transfers on the 1st. We will keep our staff in a post for one year at a time, up from the traditional six months.

We have instituted a new appraisal system that makes each sector warden much more accountable for their respective areas.

Total of 1,128 Poachers Caught

Statics shows Poaching Trends in the Mara

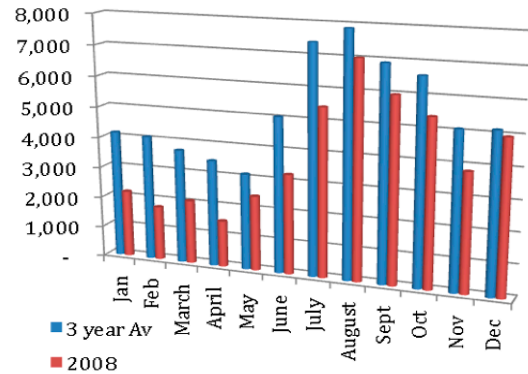
We held our passing-out parade for the eight Council rangers on the 5th, the event went well and was also attended by wardens from Narok and Trans Mara County Councils, and the Officer in Charge of Lolgorien Police Station.

A team of rangers went to Nanyuki on the 6th, to attend a training course and exercises with the British Army. There were with the army for two weeks and were trained in ambushes, observation posts, communication and gate security before going on exercises with them. The training was extremely useful and a good motivator for our staff, we hope that they will be able to put some of the things that they learnt into practice.

TOURISM

We had a total of 45,908 bed nights in the Mara Triangle during 2008. This was a drop of 27% on the three-year average of 62,683 bed nights. The most affected months were between January and April, when we witnessed a 50% decline in occupancy rates. Mara Serena managed to market to the resident community in Kenya and were able to maintain a relatively high occupancy rate; this was reflected on the average value of tickets sold to Serena clients at US\$ 29.11 per client for the year, compared to US\$ 35.98 per client for the other lodges.

All the projections are for a 40% decline in tourist numbers through 2009, this may well continue into 2010.



SECURITY

The table below gives a summary of poachers caught in 2008 and compares this with the average number of arrests made and snares recovered since 2001. Only two poachers were arrested during the month, bringing the total to 1,128.

2008		MONTH	TOTAL ARRESTS	TOTAL SNARES	AVERAGE ARRESTS	AVERAGE SNARES
ARRESTS	SNARES					
28	54	January	84	384	12	55
10	10	February	79	372	11	53
2	5	March	47	202	7	29
14	6	April	83	253	12	36
2	6	May	47	79	7	11
6	242	June	64	345	9	49
19	1,029	July	107	1,807	15	258
20	838	August	135	1,734	19	217
25	311	September	138	1,755	17	219
7	293	October	113	1,587	14	198
2	108	November	144	1,208	18	151
5	46	December	74	759	9	95
140	2,948		1,115	10,485	151	1,372



Rescued orphan baby elephant gets transported to Daphne Sheldrick's orphanage in Nairobi.



Congratulation for eight council rangers on completing their course and their excellent performance during the passing-out parade.

Washed Away Bridge Under Repair Still Waiting for News on Park Fee Increase

There has been a major reduction in poaching within our normal areas of operation, along the Tanzanian border and along the escarpment. However, there still seems to be extensive poaching on the southern side of the Mara River, downstream from Kokatende. Our Iseiya team joined forces with their counterparts from Kokatende on several occasions during the month.

On the 20th the patrol saw poachers beyond Saiyari Camp as they were setting up an ambush at 4.00 pm, unfortunately the poachers escaped but left behind six dead warthog. The team ambushed the general area that night, but no one returned.

We conducted a joint patrol with Kokatende again on the 24th near Machechwe. At least three groups of poachers were seen operating in the general area but they were moving very fast and the rangers were unable to catch up with them at night. The rangers then decided to set up an ambush on a route back to the villages and arrested two, of six, poachers as they returned home at 4.00 am. The poachers had killed two warthog, one impala and one Thompson's gazelle.

REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

We had expected that the proposed increase in Park fees would have been formalised in February, we now expect the increase to take effect in Mid-March. This will increase revenue by approximately 50% and enable the Conservancy to meet its financial obligations.

REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY 2009

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	111,883.00	1,789,840.00	-	-
Non-ticket sales	1,153.00	2,379,935.00		
Balance for Distribution	113,036.00	4,169,775.00	-	-
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	40,912.03	1,953,306.65	-	-
Group Ranches	21,257.77	340,069.60		
Sub-total	62,169.80	2,293,376.25	-	-
Mara Conservancy	50,866.20	1,876,398.75	-	-

DEVELOPMENT

The approach to the lower Mara Bridge has been repaired; the approaches were washed away two years ago, after exceptionally heavy rain flooded the Mara River. The bridge should be open to traffic within the first week of March.

We graded the road to Ooloolo Gate and repaired sections of the main road that had been damaged in recent rains. We continued to surface some of the wet sections along the river road to Ooloolo Gate.

We built a pit latrine at Ooloolo Gate. This will be used by large school groups and in instances when there is no water at Ooloolo.

We repaired broken windows and fittings at Ooloolo Gate.

We installed a notice board at Ooloolo Gate



Resident Eland, Bahati, welcomes four day old baby eland at Oloololo Gate.

REPORT ON FOCUS ON FEBRUARY

Send security team on training course in Nanyuki	Done
Hold meeting with community representatives on 4 th	Done
Transfer staff to new stations	Done
Hold passing-out parade for recruits	Done
Put up new information boards at the gates	Done
Complete toilet block at Oloololo Gate	Almost complete
Renovate buildings at Oloololo	Ongoing

FOCUS FOR MARCH

- Complete renovations at Oloololo Gate;
- Open the Bridge over the Mara River;
- Start work on dog kennels for the two bloodhounds due in late May;
- Continue with road-works on river road;
- Touch-up damaged sections of the roads to Ngiro-are; and
- Push for approval of ten-year management plan.



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

View our daily blog at: www.maratriangle.org