

MARA MONTHLY

MAY 2009

Playful group of bat-eared fox seen on the burnt plain after the rain.



MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR MAY 2009

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

The rains started in earnest on the 10th, with the heaviest and most sustained rain we have had in a year.

A team from the Kenya Wildlife Service intelligence unit visited us on the 2nd to discuss allegations in the press by the Member of Parliament that we were stealing and selling animals from the Mara. These allegations were totally unfounded and untrue and formed part of the campaign by the MP to remove the Conservancy. The Chief executive also met with Ms Anne Kahiha, Assistant Director KWS South Rift Region and the District Warden, Kilgoris to discuss the same issues.

The Chief Executive met with Dr Richard Leakey on the 15 – 16th and briefed him on developments in the Mara Triangle.

The Task Force set up by Government to review proposed developments in the Mara set up a committee to visit the Mara. The committee came down and spent three days between the 19-21st. The team visited the proposed Somak site on the junction of the Olkeju Ronkai and Mara Rivers and found that construction was ongoing, despite a stop order. They also visited a number

of opportunistic “seasonal” camps that have been considered illegal. Senior members of Narok County Council joined the team on the 20th and re-visited the sites. They were shocked by the Somak development and vowed to stop construction. They also agreed to close the seasonal camps and have the sites revert to special camp sites – with maximum occupancy of two weeks. The team visited proposed sites in Trans Mara and made recommendations that the Cobra Corner site be re-located. We now need a visit by the County Council of Trans Mara – to review all the sites and make their recommendations.

The Conservancy hosted a meeting of officers from KWS and Narok County Council on the 20th, to discuss local cross-border issues and agreed to set up a joint operation along the Kenya/Tanzania border later in the month. The Council and Conservancy have also agreed to support a larger cross-border meeting to be held in Naivasha in June.

The Chief Executive met with Mr John Lutenberg and his wife Linda Porter on the 29th. John and Linda have been training our new bloodhounds for the past six months and have very kindly donated their time to train

The veterinary team vaccinates 8,635 dogs against Canine Distemper Virus and Rabies.



our dog handlers in the Mara for the next month to six weeks. They are both extremely experienced dog handlers and run the Canine Training Academy in the United States.

WILDLIFE

A buffalo with a broken hind leg was destroyed on the 12th. Two lionesses found it that same night and fed on it for a full day before a pack of hyenas chased them off.

COMMUNITY

The Board has agreed to build a Chief's Office in Kawai, we will probably start work in July.

Dr Asuka Takita's team has vaccinated 8,635 dogs and 388 cats against canine distemper and rabies in this round of vaccinations. The work is continuation of 2008's vaccination done in collaboration with Trans Mara District Veterinary Office.

The Chief Executive met with the Councillor from Ongata Barrikoi and discussed a number of possible community projects on the 25th. The Councillor requested assistance with doors and windows for the Ondonyo Orok School laboratory, with tree planting and with school fees for 12 orphan and poor children. We undertook to assist the 12 children, in training for the tree planting and also said that we would solicit funds for the school.

The Chief Executive met with Cllrs John Korinko and ole Ngeto on the 28th to discuss the possibility of having a seminar with all the Councillors. This seminar would go through the Management Agreement, the Conservancy's role and achievements and the ten-year management plan for the Mara.

RESEARCH

Dr Kay Holekamp visited the Hyena Research Project this month.

STAFF

Martin Mthembu and Trevor Langerfeld, two trainers working with rangers in the Serengeti came over to review our training needs. They spent some time on patrol and ambush to see our rangers at work.

Mr Samson Lenjir was transferred to the Mara Triangle as Acting Chief Park Warden, he replaces Mr Edward Nkoitoi.

We received seven new rangers from the Council to replace security personnel who had been transferred back to the Council in April. The Board agreed that the Conservancy would pay salaries for the staff transferred to the Council until the end of May 2009. The Board also dismissed Conservancy staff who had been working against the organisation.

We started training eight potential dog handlers on the 16th. The dogs arrive on the 30th May.

TOURISM

Park fees are set to increase from the 1st July. The price for a non-resident adult will now be US\$ 60.

Narok County Council started charging park fees to all visitors to Little Governor's Camp on the 25th. Little Governor's is in the Triangle but most of their clients land at the Musiara airstrip, in Narok. They also do some of their game viewing in Narok. However, a review of the number of visitors who are based in the Triangle and game view in Narok compared with those that come into the Triangle from Narok shows that we accommodate five times the number of visitors. If we retaliate and start charging visitors from Narok to the Triangle it will cause problems and needs to be resolved between the Councils at the soonest possible opportunity.

Tourist numbers were well down for May; this is normal for this time of year. It looks like the high season will be similar to last year: very busy from mid-July through mid-September and will then drop off. This essentially means that we lose two weeks at either end of the high season.

SECURITY

26 poachers were arrested during May, the highest number of poachers that have been arrested in May since the Conservancy started working in the Mara – the previous average was seven. This brings the total number of poachers arrested to 1,181 – an average of 148 per year over the past eight years. It is interesting to note that twelve of the poachers were arrested in Kenya; one in the Triangle, one in Narok and ten on the escarpment – seven of them by a



M&C Denis-Huot

Warthog is the favorite prey for the hungry lions and poachers. Poachers were caught with warthog meat at their bush hideout.



26 Poachers Arrested in May 12 out of 26 were arrested in Kenya

combined team of Anne Kent-Taylor/Care for the Wild scouts and rangers from Oloololo Gate. 49 wire snares were recovered during the month. An additional two suspected armed robbers were arrested, as were a number of illegal grazers.

Three, of five, wa Kuria poachers were arrested at 4.00 am on the 6th as they came in to check their wire snares along the escarpment between Kinyangaga and Lemai. A combined team from Iseiya and Ngiro-are had set up an ambush at 2.30 am. Nine wire snares were recovered.

One poacher was arrested in Nyumba Nane in the Triangle on the 9th. Unfortunately the poachers had two dogs, which gave the alarm as the rangers approached, five of the poachers escaped. This is a group that have been poaching in the Triangle for some time and we have been looking for them for the past several months. They were hunting warthog and had killed three in the three days they had been camped in the Triangle.

A combined Iseiya and Ngiro-are patrol arrested four poachers along the escarpment on the night of the 12th at

7.30 pm. The Rangers had been on a day-long patrol before setting up ambush on one of the trails leading down from the escarpment. The poachers were on their way to hunt Thompson's gazelle near Nyanguki in the Lemai Wedge when apprehended, one escaped.

We received a report at 4.00 pm on the 15th to say that some poachers had been seen near the Talek junction, on the Narok side of the river. Our rangers immediately went to a position opposite the site, on the Triangle side of the river and three rangers crossed the river. They joined up with two Narok rangers and found a poachers camp with hippo meat. As they were inspecting the camp one of the poachers approached and was apprehended by our rangers – the other four escaped when the Narok rangers opened fire. The poachers had been in the camp, very close to the Talek junction, for three days and had killed the hippo the previous day.

The Anne Kent-Taylor/Care for the Wild scouts, in conjunction with our rangers arrested one person for snaring near Olopikidongoe on the 16th. The person was setting snares when arrested, 14 wire snares had been set and

Snares dyed to blend with surroundings

Joint Patrols with KWS & TZ Rangers

another 10 were hidden. Not all the snares were made of wire, some were made of platted twine and had been dyed either green or yellow, to blend in.

One poacher was arrested by the Iseiya team on the night of the 20th. He was part of a group of three poachers who were operating opposite Saiyari Camp in the Lemai Wedge. The poachers had arrived the previous night and were hunting warthog, they had not killed anything. The following night the remaining two poachers were arrested by the Ngiro-are team at 7.30, near “Daraja ya Mzee”, as they were returning home.

Six poachers were arrested by the Anne Kent-Taylor scouts in conjunction with rangers from Oolololo Gate in an ambush near Ngos Nanyuki on the escarpment. A daytime patrol had found some wire snares and the team set up an ambush, six snares were recovered.

One poacher, from a group of eight, was arrested by a combined Ngiro-are, Lemai and Kinyangaga operation on the morning of the 23rd. The poachers had killed a hippo along the Mara River, between Lemai and Mlima Hotel. The other poachers escaped across the river but all the meat was collected by the Tanzanian rangers. That same night, at 7.45 pm, the Ngiro-are team arrested three poachers, from a large group of over ten, as the poachers were entering the Lemai Wedge, near Kokamange. The poachers were on their way to hunt in the Serengeti and had six wire snares.

A team of our rangers joined forces with KWS rangers from Kilgoris to conduct a joint operation for three days from the 25th. This was part of a larger operation that also involved Narok and KWS from Uaso Ngiro that patrolled all along the Tanzanian border and then the eastern and western boundaries of the Reserve. The Conservancy/KWS operation arrested three poachers, with four wire snares near Ngos Nyanyuki. The team also followed up on

two zebra that had been poached but did not apprehend anyone.

We conducted a night operation on the 27th, to apprehend people suspected of involvement in a series of armed robberies in the Mara region, the last one being at Ololemutia, on the eastern boundary of the Mara. Two suspects were arrested, one of them suspected to own an AK47 that he leases out. Unfortunately, one suspect escaped – probably warned off by the local Chief, his brother. The escaped suspect was also wanted in connection with a robbery in the Mara Triangle last November, where camera equipment worth US\$ 200,000 was stolen and two people slightly injured.

REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

Revenue dropped considerably in April and we can expect the same, or slightly less, in May. This is normal for this time of year but means that we only collect about one quarter of our requirement in these two months.

REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL 2009

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	57,843.00	1,367,460.00	-	-
Non-ticket sales	250.00	197,300.00	-	-
Balance for Distribution	58,093.00	1,564,760.00	-	-
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	20,960.98	600,800.60	-	-
Group Ranches	10,990.17	259,817.40	-	-
Sub-total	31,951.15	860,618.00	-	-
Mara Conservancy	26,141.85	704,142.00	-	-

Tracker dogs and their trainers arrive to Mara Triangle.





Heavy Rain in May causes the Savannah to change colour.

DEVELOPMENT

We completed the dog kennels at Ngiro-are.

We renovated all the staff houses at Ngiro-are.

We took on a number of casuals, paid by the Government’s Youth Development Fund, to clean out culverts on the main road between Purungat (Mara) Bridge and Oloololo Gate. The team have completed all the culverts between Serena and Purungat and will now start on the section to Oloololo Gate.

We started cutting grass tracks around Nyumba Nane. This work will continue when the rains stop.

REPORT ON FOCUS ON MAY

Hold Board meeting and EGM on 22 nd May	Done
Complete kennels	Done
Dogs due to arrive on 29 th May from the US	Done
Complete Annual Work Plan and budget	Done
Recruit and train dog handlers	Ongoing

FOCUS FOR JUNE

- Train dog handlers;
- Complete work on culverts along road to Oloololo Gate;
- Start grading roads;
- Repair damaged sections of river road; and
- Cut grass game viewing tracks.



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