


MARA MONTHLY

OCTOBER 2009



Full bellied lions snooze in front of a few thousand wildebeest.

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2009

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

October was one of the driest months for years with a few scattered showers at the beginning and end of the month.

There was a meeting between the Narok and Trans Mara County Councils on the 6th at Governor's Camp. The meeting was scheduled for 9.00 am but the Narok contingent did not arrive until 2.00 pm. The Trans Mara team was well represented by the Clerk and Chairman of the Council and also by technical officers and the Chairmen of the finance and Game committees. Narok did not have either the Clerk or the Chairman.

The issue of traversing rights was resolved but Narok took the opportunity to hit at the Mara Conservancy, blaming the Conservancy for coming between the two Councils. They were particularly irritated by a bypass road being constructed around Mara Rianta as an alternative to the

Sekenani route and by an email written to the Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO) in response to the blockade by Narok on traffic destined for Mara Serena. There was a very strong impression that the anti-Conservancy tirade was stage managed by political opponents to the Conservancy in both districts.

Major Syed Hamid Raza came on the on 13th to demonstrate a motorized para-glider for possible monitoring and anti-poaching patrols. Unfortunately the conditions are not suitable for such machine, being either too windy or turbulent. Major Hamid may try an alternative machine in November.

We hosted eight members of the Council, including the Chairman and Clerk and four Councillors, on the 13th for a site inspection of all special campsites and proposed lodge sites. The wildlife put on a special display for our visitors and they managed to see rhino, elephant, buffalo, lion, leopard

and cheetah, not to mention all the possible ungulate species, including klipspringer.

The Chief Executive met with Dr Anthony Hall-Martin of the Africa Parks Network. Africa Parks are considering investing in some of the conservancies on Koiyaki. This could potentially give these conservancies the financial boost that they require to transform them into well managed and model conservation areas.

The Clerk, Elijah Mung'aya has been transferred; we are yet to meet his replacement.

We hosted 17 Councillors on the 24th and 25th. They did a tour of the Triangle on the 24th and then met with the Chief Executive and Chairman of the Conservancy on the morning of the 25th.

Wildlife

One lioness was killed in a fight with other lions between Sankuria and Dirisha. She was found badly injured on the 11th but died two nights later. This is the second lioness that has been killed in the past six weeks – both appeared to be animals that moved into existing territories as they followed the main concentrations of wildebeest and met up with the existing prides.

Two lionesses gave birth near “Mugoro”, fairly close to the Mara River and upstream from Mara Serena and another had her cubs about 10 meters from the Serena conference room on the night of the 12th. One cub was reportedly killed by a coalition of four young lions on “Mike Tango” one of the inselbergs near the border.

Dr D Mijele treated an injured elephant on the 19th – the animal was badly injured and may not survive. A second injured elephant was treated on the 20th. It would appear that both elephants had spear wounds, probably inflicted by people on the escarpment.



Lioness with a wildebeest kill.

Photograph taken by Assistant Warden of Tourism, Joseph Kimojino.

More of Kimojino's photos can be found on Flickr:

www.flickr.com/maratriangle

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www.facebook.com/maratriangle

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The wildebeest continued to move between the Triangle and the northern Serengeti for most of the month. More and more animals came in to the

Triangle as it became drier and we ended the month with about 100,000 to 200,000 animals; a lot fewer than in August, but still a substantial number.

Community

There was a very large invasion of cattle into Trans Mara from Narok, Kajiado and even northern Tanzania as people went in desperate search of pasture. The people in Trans Mara had been able to cope with the situation until the influx but whatever spare pasture they had will be depleted by the end of October. Unless there sufficient rain, this will place them in an equally desperate situation and is bound to place additional pressure on the Triangle. The drought will decimate livestock populations and will lead to a significant increase in the number of destitute people – there are reports of three elders committing suicide because they had lost all their livestock and could no longer look after their families. Those people who have managed to lease their land for conservation in areas such as Koiyaki may lose many of their livestock but not their livelihoods; they will at least have a regular income from conservation that will sustain them and their families.

As the country increasingly heads towards individual land ownership the Masai will have to accept that the days of vast herds of livestock that can move anywhere are numbered. The emphasis will have to change towards fewer animals and alternative sources of income – revenue from conservation offers an important first step in changing people's lifestyles.

Research

The Hyena Research Project produced their latest quarterly report for the period ending 1st October. The programme has been testing a hypothesis that hyena serum may have anti-bacterial properties. It would appear that the serum inhibits some bacterial strains.

The Chief Executive met with veterinarians from the Kenya Wildlife Service and Dr M Tanner from the Friedrich-Loeffler-Institute in Germany. The team will be investigating bovine tuberculosis (*Mycobacterium bovis*) in livestock and wildlife and we agreed to assist with collection and storage of samples. This is an important zoonotic disease and it is estimated that 10-15% of human tuberculosis may in fact be the *M.bovis* form.

We received a copy of a paper by Richard D Estes and Rod East (Wildlife Conservation Society – working paper No 37 July 2009) entitled: Status of the Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*) in the Wild 1967-2005. This paper reviews six different wildebeest populations and sub-species throughout Africa. It records the increase for the Serengeti population from 220,000 in 1960 to 1,300,000 in the mid 1970s; the population is now stable at around 1,245,000. Up to half the population now moves into the Mara during the

dry season, July to October, but this movement into the Mara was not observed until 1969. The paper noted that radio collared wildebeest spent 90% of their time (328 days) within the protected areas but also noted that the animals spent 33% (121 days) within 10 kilometres, or less, of unprotected areas. There is a word of caution, poaching takes a very heavy toll, approximately 7-9% of the population – roughly 100,000 animals a year. This number would be far higher if it were not for the efforts of the Serengeti (TANAPA) rangers, the Grumeti Reserve and the Mara Conservancy.

The above paper also looks at the Loita/Mara population. This population was estimated at 50,000 to 100,000 animals in 1947. This population was drastically reduced by commercial meat hunters, to around 16,000, but by the late 1970's was estimated at 50,000 animals. However, as pastoralism gave way to agriculture, Narok District as a whole showed “a greater decline in wildlife populations between the 1970s and 1980s than almost all other parts of the country.” It did note that the only exception to this decline in wildlife populations in Narok was the Masai Mara National Reserve, “where wildlife populations were generally stable.” The resident wildebeest population within the Reserve is estimated at around 600 animals; we hardly have any in the

Research cont.

Triangle. By the late 1990s the Loita/Mara population had declined by 75% and it is estimated that there has been a further decline of 50% in the past ten years, meaning that there are no more than a few thousand left.

Dogs

Morani recovered completely from his trypanosomiasis and looks very healthy.

Staff

We started training the rangers, sent from Kilgoris earlier in the year, on the 7th. We also started training four of the dog handlers and three drivers.

The Chef Executive will take some time off in November.

Tourism

Tourist numbers have dropped off this month – and yet October is often the best month of all in the Mara, and for the migration. This is probably why there are so many professional photographers in the Mara in October. Those visitors who did come this October were treated to glorious weather, excellent crossings and a lot of predator activity.

Security

We arrested 41 poachers in October, the highest number we have ever caught in one month. The total arrests now stand at 1,299. We also recovered 1,454 wire snares, rescued 51 animals and found at least 98 freshly killed wildebeest; there were probably many more that were not recorded.

The Iseiya team found 11 wire snares on the 1st, between Nyakita Pembe and Mlima Hotel in the Lemai Wedge. Three wildebeest had been caught, two of them dead. The rangers called in other rangers from Ngairo-are and set up an ambush. Two poachers walked into the ambush at 5.30 pm and were both arrested. Three other wire snares were collected during the patrol. The Ngairo-are team found poachers butchering a wildebeest near the Kinyangaga ranger post – they set up pursuit but were fired upon with arrows. The Ngairo-are team arrested one of three poachers on the night of the 2nd.

38 wire snares were recovered by the Ngairo-are team near Kokamange on the 4th; one wildebeest was saved and five were found dead. The Iseiya team recovered three snares and rescued three wildebeest on the same day.

One of our community scouts reported that a buffalo had been killed along the top of the escarpment on the 5th. Our teams arrested three local Kisii with the buffalo meat in their houses. The poachers were taken to the Kenya Wildlife Service in Lolgorien. That night, at 8.30, the Ngairo-are rangers arrested a further three wa Kuria poachers near Kasarani in the Lemai Wedge as they came in to hunt.

A combined patrol arrested three poachers along the Mara River, upstream from Lemai, on the 10th. The poachers were part of a larger group of six that had set 45 snares. The other three escaped across the river.

The Ngairo-are team arrested two poachers with eleven wire snares on the

11th near the salt-lick in the Lemai Wedge. The snares had not been set and no animals had been caught.

A combined team arrested two poachers along the Mara River near the Lemai Ranger post on the 12th. The poachers were heading towards Mlima Hotel in the northern Serengeti and had 50 wire snares and 40 arrows. They said that another group of people were ahead of them but the others were not located.

A combined team recovered 174 wire snares in the Lemai Wedge on the 15th. The patrol started at Konyoike and ended near the Lemai Salt-lick and swamp. Within five minutes there were signs of recent poaching activity and the intensity increased as we moved further towards the escarpment. Seventeen were found to have been killed in the previous night, all but one of them had been butchered and the meat taken. However, we did manage to rescue nine wildebeest. That night the Ngairo-are team arrested three, of ten, wa Kuria poachers as they came in to check their snares.

The very intense level of poaching continued along the western border of the Lemai Wedge. On the 16th the Ngairo-are team conducted a patrol from where we had left off the previous day and arrested two poachers near the Lemai Swamp as they came in to set snares. A total of 200 snares were recovered that day; about 20 wildebeest had been killed and seven rescued, as was one topi. That night the team set an ambush near Kokamange and arrested four people, two of them women, who had come in to check their snares and butcher animals.

On the 17th the two teams recovered 162 snares, the Ngairo-are team operated in the area that had been patrolled the previous two days and the Iseiya team moved further towards the Lemai Post. The Ngairo-are team only recovered 14 snares but the Iseiya team found 148; 20 animals had been butchered and none were rescued.

On the 18th combined Conservancy and Tanzanian patrols recovered 222 wire snares; 71 by the Iseiya team and 151 by the Ngairo-are/Kinyangaga team. Five wildebeest were rescued. The rangers also arrested three people carrying meat near the Lemai Salt-lick – two of those arrested were women. Also on the 18th, Oloololo rangers, in conjunction with Anne Kent-Taylor scouts, arrested two Kipsigis near Mpata Club with two wire snares. 18th.



Ngairo-are Rangers free a wildebeest caught in a wire snare.

Our patrols recovered 71 wire snares on the 19th, eight animals were rescued and the rangers found where six had been butchered. The focus for all the poaching activity continues to be along the escarpment and around the Lemai salt-lick and swamp.

A joint patrol, combined with our Tanzanian counterparts, recovered 138 wire snares along the western side of the Lemai Wedge on the 20th. Eight wildebeest were rescued and three were found dead in the snares. Later the same day the Ngiro-are team joined up with the Oololo and Anne Kent-Taylor scouts and arrested one person near Mpata Club.

A joint patrol on the 21st recovered 108 snares, saved eight wildebeest and found where over a dozen animals had been butchered in the usual area of the Lemai Wedge. 2 poachers were arrested by the Ngiro-are team on the evening of the 22nd in the Lemai Swamp/

Kokamange area. This followed on an ambush on a total of 81 snares that had been found by both our teams. One wildebeest was rescued and three were found butchered.

The Iseiya team arrested 1 poacher at 6.00 on the morning of the 23rd, after an all-night ambush on 16 wire snares that had been found during the day. We have started seeing people setting snares with twine, rather than wire.

The Iseiya team arrested 1 poacher on the morning of the 26th, after an all-night ambush. He was setting snares near the Lemai Swamp. The previous day the rangers had recovered 18 snares and a further six were found in the morning. At least six animals had been caught and butchered.

The Ngiro-are team arrested three poachers at 7.00 pm on the 26th as they came into the Lemai Wedge to set snares; 56 snares were recovered.

One, of over 30, poachers was arrested on the morning of the 28th by a combined team from Tanzania and the Mara Conservancy after an all night patrol. The poachers were carrying two butchered wildebeest and one topi. The patrol was fired upon with arrows when they tried to apprehend this group. Many of the arrows are poisoned and even a nick could prove fatal. The two teams recovered 72 wire snares on the 28th.

Development

We continued with our work on the road past Mara Rianta and now have a reasonable alternative to Sekenani Gate. The grader was serviced and will probably stop work for the season. We continued to repair sections of the road in anticipation of the short rains.

We improved guttering at Purungat and did basic repair work to the buildings and signs. We started work on a toilet block at the Iseiya public camp-site.

Revenue & Accounts

Our revenue for the past three months has been excellent. Unfortunately we have a problem with collections from Little Governor's Camp. Funds have been held despite the resolution of a dispute between the County Councils of Narok and Trans Mara on the 6th. It was agreed that visitors pay where they stay and that all visitors to the Masai Mara National Reserve have traversing rights within the Reserve. We also have a problem with the implementation of new rates for ballooning. The fee was increased to US\$ 40 per passenger in July and none of the three balloon operators have implemented it.

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	355,547.00	3,675,880.00	-	-
Non-ticket sales	11,989.00	536,150.00		
Balance for Distribution	367,536.00	4,212,030.00	-	-
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	134,590.87	1,618,199.30	-	-
Group Ranches	67,553.93	698,417.20		
Sub-total	202,144.80	2,316,616.50	-	-
Mara Conservancy	165,391.20	1,895,413.50	-	-

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of October 2009.

Report on Focus for October

Install Vehicle Tracking Device	Test in Progress
Host Parliamentary Select Committee	Postponed
Host Council Site Inspection Visit	Done
Resolve Dispute with Narok County Council	Had Meeting on 6th
Improve Road to Mara Rianta as Alternative Access	Done
Work on Additional Culverts	Done

Focus for November

1. Service all radios and check frequencies.
2. Complete toilets at public campsite.
3. Hold Board Meeting on 21st.
4. Continue with Road Repairs
5. Repair and Service Tractors and Trailers.
6. Resolve issues over park fees.

Visit the [Mara Triangle Website](#) to find out more, book a campsite, ask about latest migration movements, or even [make a donation](#) towards our work. Thank you.



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