

# MARA MONTHLY

SEPTEMBER 2009

During September, very playful lion cubs were seen near Oolololo and Salt Lick area.



M&C Denis-Huot

## MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER 2009

By Brian Heath

### GENERAL

The month started with several days of rain and overcast days. There was a heavy thunderstorm on the 8<sup>th</sup>, which was then followed by two weeks of heavy and widespread rain that first brought in the wildebeest and then sent them South again. For a few days at the beginning of the month and then again around the 20<sup>th</sup> there were half a million wildebeest in the Triangle.

The Chief Executive met with Peter Browne, Associate Editor of Condé Nast Traveller on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Condé Nast will be doing a feature on Abercrombie and Kent and the Masai Mara.

Ms Alison Jones, who is doing a documentary and articles on the Mara River for her organisation No Water No Life, spent a few days in the Mara Triangle towards the end of the Month. Alison is a major supporter of the Mara Conservancy and we are delighted to have her back after a four-year absence.

Conservation Development Centre (CDC) and the President of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF) gave a presentation on the second draft of the ten-year management plan to the full Council at Mara Serena on the 29<sup>th</sup>. The plan was well received and the Council has asked for one month to consider and deliberate on its contents.

The Parliamentary Select Committee on Local Government postponed their visit to Trans Mara at the last minute; it has now been rescheduled to October 16<sup>th</sup>.

### WILDLIFE

The wildebeest returned to the Triangle in very large numbers over the first few days of September and concentrated along the escarpment and between Oolololo and Ngiro-are. However, a few days of rain from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup>, and the majority moved South into the Lemai Wedge for a few days before returning in even greater numbers around the 17<sup>th</sup>. The majority left again around the 23<sup>rd</sup> but were beginning to trickle in again at the end of the month.

One lioness killed in a fight. She was first seen on the 9<sup>th</sup> with a very deep wound on her spine, the following day she hid in one of the culverts along the main Serena to Purungat road, she was found dead in the same place on the 11<sup>th</sup>. One other lioness, from the Oolololo pride, lost one of her two very young cubs on the 13<sup>th</sup>. This lioness allowed some half grown, and very boisterous, cubs to play with them and it is felt that they may have killed it.

An elephant calf was seen with a wire snare around its neck on the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup>. It was found again and darted by Dr D Mijeje on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The snare was removed and the calf revived. Dr Mijeje was assisted by Kamande, one of the Anne Kent-Taylor scouts, and our rangers from Oloololo Gate.

One female elephant was found dead near the proposed Mara Enkai Camp on the escarpment on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The tusks were recovered.

**COMMUNITY**

We hosted the Chairman and community liaison officer from Shompole Group Ranch for two nights. They are considering management of their conservation area, 10,000 acres area set up around the Shompole Lodge and visited the Triangle, Koiyaki and Ol Choro Oroua to see different models.

**RESEARCH**

Amanda Subalusky's July and August reports highlighted the deterioration in water quality for the Talek and Mara Rivers. We have their comparative figure for the Mara River in August 2008 and this is shown in the Table below.

Date	Site	Temp °C	pH	DO %	Conductivity mS/cm	Salinity ppt	TDS g/l
23 Aug 08	Mara Bridge	21.21	6.57	75.5	0.080	0.04	0.052
7 Aug 09	Mara Bridge	23.11	7.65	30.0	0.359	0.18	0.242
4 Jul 09	Talek Naibor	20.08	7.78	5.8	0.752	0.41	0.539

We look forward to them spending more time in the Mara Triangle and to seeing their continued work on the ecological processes within the river and what factors affect these processes.

**TRACKER DOGS**

John Lutenberg and Linda Porter spent 10 days conducting refresher training for the dogs and their handlers. We were able to show them a number of different real-life scenarios from night ambushes and arrests, de-snaring and the arrest of poachers who were camping in the Triangle. The dogs were exposed to camps with meat and also to wa Kuria poachers. Memusi was nervous of some of the strange and strong smells and we will work on him to accept them. We are most grateful to John and Linda for their wonderful support.

Both dogs contracted a tick-borne disease called *Babesia* and Morani also was diagnosed with Trypanosomiasis. This prompted us to purchase sufficient laboratory equipment to be able to quickly and efficiently test the dogs. The *Babesia* was easily cured but we are most concerned about the Trypanosomiasis; one form, *Trypanosoma brucei*, hides in the spinal cord and is very difficult to cure. Morani was treated with *Diminazene aceturate* at seven milligrams per kilogramme and responded immediately. He was then given *Quinapyramine sulfate*; a trypanocide that has a prophylactic

Tracker dog and its handler practise scent trail laying in the field



affect that should provide cover for four months. Lets hope that the disease has been cured.

**STAFF**

Mr Samson Lenjirr was invited to the United States and will be leaving in mid October, for three weeks.

William Deed took three weeks off and returns to the Mara at the beginning of October.

**TOURISM**

Visitor numbers dropped off slightly at the beginning of the month and then dropped even further from around the 15<sup>th</sup>. The dispute over park fees between the County Councils of Narok and Trans Mara has not been resolved. In fact, matters escalated in the last three days of the month, when Narok unilaterally started charging vehicles in transit to Mara Serena. A number of vehicles were held up at Sekenani Gate for hours, as the clients were forced to pay additional entrance fees.

It also meant that all visitors wishing to cross the river in either direction had to pay additional park fees. As a result we had far fewer visitors crossing over at Purungat from Narok and it made the southern corner of the Triangle much less congested. We will still advocate for a game-viewing fee to be charged albeit a lot less than the full park fee.

We have noticed a fairly rapid drop in tourists during September and can expect a slow low season. Although the high season was good at its peak, it was extremely short and we lost a month on either end. Long established tour operators and camps will probably be able to manage but we can expect that some of the newer camps will struggle financially.

**SECURITY**

We arrested 30 poachers during September, eight of them in the Triangle and the rest in Tanzania. We also recovered 773 wire snares. In the past two months over we recovered 2,200 snares, the majority of them along the escarpment, just across the border. Towards the end of the period wire snares were far more difficult to find and it appears that the poachers were unable to replenish their supplies. This was borne out by comments of some of the poachers we arrested, they complained that we had collected all their

# We have Now Caught 1,261 Poachers 2,200 Snares Collected in Last 2 Months

snares. Each wire snare costs the poacher in the region of Ksh 50 to purchase, so their collection represents a fairly significant financial loss to the poachers. 39 wildebeest and one zebra were rescued; 38 wildebeest and five zebra were known to have been killed.

The Iseiya team set an ambush on the 1<sup>st</sup> near Kokamange, in the Lemai Wedge, near some wire snares and watched as six wildebeest were caught. They waited for a while, in the hope that the poachers would come in – no one came in and so they released the wildebeest and collected 46 wire snares.

The Ngiro-are team arrested two poachers as they came in to check their snares at 9.00 pm on the 1<sup>st</sup>. The following day the team conducted a de-snaring patrol and recovered 227 wire snares. In the process they rescued nine wildebeest and one zebra; another nine wildebeest were found dead in snares. They recovered the snares from the previous night's ambush and found where one wildebeest calf had been butchered, ready to be carried home.

The Iseiya team recovered 30 wire snares near Maji ya Bett, just in the Lemai Wedge on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. They rescued five wildebeest and found another five dead in snares. That afternoon at 4.00 pm Mr Ninian Lewis, a Ker and Downey guide, reported seeing two people at the salt-lick. We immediately mobilised both anti-poaching teams, the Ngiro-are team were working in Tanzania and were re-directed. We arrested seven of nine poachers – all wa Kuria from Kangariani in Tanzania. They had been in the Triangle for four days and had killed eight wildebeest and one zebra. Seventeen wire snares were recovered, five of them three days later. One wildebeest was saved and one found dead in the five snares.

The Iseiya and Ngiro-are teams jointly collected 64 wire snares on the 6<sup>th</sup>. The Iseiya team recovered 24 snares and found 13 dead wildebeest in the snares. The Ngiro-are team recovered 40 snares and rescued three wildebeest. Both these patrols were operating in the Lemai Wedge, close to the escarpment.

The Ngiro-are team collected 112 wire snares on the 8<sup>th</sup> and rescued five wildebeest. The following night they were joined with a team from Koiyaki and Ol Choro and managed to arrest two people as they came in to set snares on the Masanga route at around 9.30. The combined team collected 101 snares on the morning of the 10<sup>th</sup>. They rescued eight wildebeest and one Rupell's vulture, the first time any of us have seen a vulture caught in a snare. Five wildebeest had been killed in the snares.

The Iseiya team found seventeen wire snares on the 12<sup>th</sup>, poachers probably saw the rangers coming and ran off, two freshly butchered wildebeest was found and one other had been carried off.

The Ngiro-are team arrested two poachers

near Mlima Hotel, along the Mara River in the Lemai Wedge late in the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup>. Our rangers saw the two come into the Park and start setting snares, they were arrested as they started to drive a herd of wildebeest into the snares; none were caught and eight snares were recovered. That night three armed robbers came into Entim Camp, on the Narok side of the river, and robbed the clients of three mobile phones. Our rangers and dogs went after them but no arrests were made.

The Ngiro-are team arrested two poachers on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> near Kokamange, in the Lemai Wedge. On that day the Iseiya team rescued three wildebeest and collected 14 wire snares in the same area.

A combined Conservancy and Serengeti operation arrested seven poachers on the 18<sup>th</sup>. The operation started near Kokatende and ended up near Machwechwe in Tanzania. The patrol first arrested one person near Kichwa Tembo, in the northern Serengeti. He was one of six poachers who had come in to hunt; one snare was recovered. That evening the operation succeeded in arresting six, of eight, people who had come in to hunt wildebeest. It is surprising that the poachers were just hunting with dogs, torches and spears. No snares were found.

The Ngiro-are team conducted a routine patrol along the escarpment, in the Triangle, on the 19<sup>th</sup> and came across an area where two zebra had been butchered. The patrol followed tracks to a house but the owner escaped. They also found six wire snares during the patrol. That evening they set an ambush and arrested one of four Kipsigis poachers who had come in to check their snares. Reports indicated that at least four other zebra had been killed by the same groups of poachers over the past weeks.

A combined Iseiya and Ngiro-are patrol recovered 16 snares and released one wildebeest on the on 21<sup>st</sup> when they patrolled the Kokamange area of the Lemai Wedge. The following day the Ngiro-are team found ten snares and that arrested two poachers in the same area as they came in to set more snares. No animals had been caught.

We arranged a joint anti-poaching patrol with our Tanzanian counterparts on the 24<sup>th</sup>. This was cancelled at the last minute as a result of an incident that again highlights the

**Rangers from Ngiro-are station release a zebra mare from a wire snare**



dangerous nature of our work; a village headman was murdered near Machweche in Tanzania by a poacher for reporting him to the police. The villagers then retaliated by killing and dismembering the poacher and his accomplice. The Iseiya team recovered 17 wire snares on that day.

The Ngiro-are team arrested two poachers near Kasarani on the 26<sup>th</sup>, as they came in to set snares; six snares were recovered. That night an ambush was set and another person arrested with three snares.

A combined patrol by both our teams resulted in the arrest of three, of six, poachers near Lemai at 10.30 pm on the 27<sup>th</sup>. During the day the same patrol had recovered 10 wire snares and rescued three wildebeest. The three said that another group of poachers had passed and so we set up another ambush at first light on the 28<sup>th</sup> – they did not get the targeted poachers but managed to arrest one, of two, people who were on their way into the Lemai Wedge to set snares; five snares were recovered.

### REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2009

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	384,295.00	5,307,600.00	-	410,988.50
Non-ticket sales	21,746.00	1,012,900.00		
<b>Balance for Distribution</b>	<b>406,041.00</b>	<b>6,320,500.00</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>410,988.50</b>
<b>Distributed</b>				
Trans Mara County Council	150,306.50	2,467,831.00	-	226,043.68
Group Ranches	73,016.05	1,008,444.00		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>223,322.55</b>	<b>3,476,275.00</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>226,043.68</b>
<b>Mara Conservancy</b>	<b>182,718.45</b>	<b>2,844,225.00</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>184,944.83</b>

### REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

We collected Ksh 36,954,386 as our share of revenue in the first three months of this financial year; up by 67% on budget. The majority of this increase came in Park entrance fees, showing that an increase in fees did not actually lead to a reduction in the number of visitors. We had direct costs of Ksh 8,329,916 – largely made up of commissions on revenue collection – leaving us with a gross margin of Ksh 36,954,836. Our direct costs went up by 30% On budget – largely as a result of having to provide costly security to campers and we spent Ksh 26,809,693.

### DEVELOPMENT

A radio technician came down and checked all our VHF and HF radios, several of the older hand-sets are no longer operational and we ordered four new ones. The HF radio is now working, after not being operational for about two years. This gives us good communication with Nairobi and will cut down on phone bills.

In view of the on-going dispute with Narok County Council over park entrance fees we used the grader to make a road from the North Mara Bridge onto the Mara Rianta to Lemek road. This new road completely bypasses Mara Rianta and gives visitors to the Mara Triangle an alternative route of access. Access to this road will be overseen by the Mara North Conservancy.

We graded a road to Mara Timbo camp; all the camps that use the Triangle now have good access to the Reserve.

We completed the shade for the tractors and grader.

We installed four culverts and gravelled the approaches.

### REPORT ON FOCUS ON SEPTEMBER

Complete tractor/grader shed	Done
Grade road along the escarpment	Done
Install vehicle tracking devices	Deferred
Host Parliamentary Select Committee	Postponed until mid October
Resolve park fee issues with Narok	Ongoing
Construct two new culverts	Done – Four constructed
Present ten-year work plan to Council	Done

### FOCUS FOR OCTOBER

- Install vehicle tracking device;
- Host Parliamentary Select Committee;
- Host Council site inspection visit;
- Resolve dispute with Narok County Council;
- Improve road to Mara Rianta as an alternative access route; and
- Work on additional culverts.

Visit the [Mara Triangle Website](#) to read more about our work, book a campsite or find out the latest about migration movements.

[Click here to make a donation](#) towards our work. Thank you.



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