

MARA MONTHLY

APRIL 2010



Naishuro's ulcer is starting to heal.

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR APRIL 2010

By Brian Heath

General

We had a week of good weather at the beginning of the month, followed by heavy rain for a week. The rains then subsided for two weeks before returning with a series of exceptionally heavy storms in the last week of April. We have now had six months of regular, and at times, very heavy rain.

Alison Jones visited the Mara for three days to discuss the setting up of a foundation in the United States that will tentatively be called "Friends of the Mara". This would enable Americans to give tax-free donations to conservation bodies in the Mara. We are being supported in the establishment of this foundation by Owen Newman and Amanda Barratt – both have been

working on the Disney Film "African Cats" that is now due for release in April 2011.

On the 14th April 2010, the High Court in Kisii ruled (Civil Suit No. 110 of 2009 - Mara Conservancy versus County Council of Trans Mara) on an attempt by the Council to remove the Mara Conservancy through their Council Resolution of 9th June 2009. The High Court ruled in favour of the Conservancy - we had advocated for mediation and arbitration in any disputes as per Cause 19.2 in the Management Agreement. The Judge directed that "the dispute be referred to a mediator forthwith in accordance with the provisions of clause 10 of the Agreement dated 1st April 2005 that relates to "Arbitration". The Judge also ruled that the Council

would bear the costs of the application and it would appear that the Council is still unable to discuss with matters relating to the Conservancy until we have completed the mediation and arbitration process.

Wildlife

The female rhino "Naishuro" had a large skin ulcer on her rear hindquarters. Dr Dominic Mijele came to look at the wound and it was decided that it would be too risky to treat her – rhino tend to abandon their calves after darting and she has a fifteen-month old calf. Naishuro had a similar ulcer about four years ago and she and her calf at the time separated for several weeks after her previous treatment.

A hippo died in the river, near the fig-tree picnic site; there were over 100 crocodiles feeding of the hippo at one stage.

A cheetah with three half-grown cubs took up residence near “Mugoro”, along the river.

Research

The Hyena Research Project submitted their report for the period ending 31st March. The project has confirmed that hyena cross the river, two known hyena from Talek have been seen in the Triangle. It is increasingly apparent that the Mara River is no barrier to the free movement of animals; lion and cheetah regularly cross the river and now we have proof that hyena also cross.

We are working on methods of measuring standing biomass. Dr Kay Holekamp, head of the Hyena Project, in conjunction with Dr Bilal Butt from the University of Wisconsin, have come up with a very interesting proposition – using remote sensing data from the MODIS sensor on the TERRA spacecraft. The MODIS data is available at no cost and is available at sixteen-day intervals at 250 metre cell sizes, very high resolution.

Dr Butt has agreed to help with this and we are proposing that the project is expanded to measure the effect of both fire (in the Triangle) and cattle (in the Mara North Conservancy) on vegetation - and their effect on wildlife distribution and densities. This could make an extremely interesting, and practical, research project for a Doctoral student.

There are a number of studies that indicate controlled grazing can be beneficial to wild ungulate populations. A definitive study that compares two different management strategies, one in a protected area



Road Team collect murrum to repair roads.

Photograph taken by Simon Mathara.

and one outside, could have far reaching practical implications.

Community

Anne Kent-Taylor has been supporting the construction of predator-proof livestock enclosures and over 50 have been constructed along the escarpment. This follows on from a demonstration enclosure that was started by Dr Asuka Takita and supported by the Mara Conservancy.

We have seen a dramatic drop in the number of livestock, especially sheep and goats, killed since the inception of this project and we are most encouraged that this is a way of reducing human/wildlife conflict in areas adjoining wildlife and tourist areas. The project is now being expanded to Mara Rianta and the Mara North Conservancy.

Dogs

Memusi was diagnosed with *babesia* and treated when the infection was in the very early stages; he recovered almost immediately and was given a follow-up treatment a week later. Morani was responsible for the arrest of one poacher on the 29th.

Staff

A refresher-training course that was scheduled for mid-April has now been rescheduled to the end of May. We expect to send 12 rangers on the first course and will be looking at refresher courses for our non-commissioned officers (NCOs).

Tourism

The volcanic eruption in Iceland had an impact on already low visitor numbers to Kenya and the Mara and this will certainly mean less revenue.

Security

A total of 22 poachers were arrested during April, six of them were in the Triangle, one on the escarpment and the remainder were in the Lemai Wedge. This brings the total arrests up to 1,409. 20 wire snares were also recovered.

There was an attempted robbery at Mara Serena on the night of the 1st. The thieves broke into the lodge accounts department and made off with a large cash box. It was initially thought that the box was taken to a vehicle but it was found on the 2nd,

Security cont.

near the football pitch. The thieves had been unable to break into the box. The police were alerted and took statements and fingerprints.

The Ngiro-are rangers, together with their Tanzanian counterparts, arrested five poachers on the morning of the 5th. The poachers were part of a larger group of eight, who were hunting along the boundary of the Lemai Wedge with dogs – they had not killed anything.

Our rangers arrested four people who were fishing along the Mara River, inside the Lemai Wedge on the 9th. These people are often hunting as well and a few days later we found a hippo that had been killed and butchered in the same area. We used the dogs to follow the tracks but we stopped when the tracks left the Serengeti.

Our Oloololo rangers, together with the Anne Kent-Taylor/Care for the Wild scouts, arrested one person who had set snares on the escarpment on the 16th. The snares had killed a cow and the poacher was lucky not to be lynched by the community.

A combined operation by the Iseiya and Ngiro-are teams arrested four poachers on the night of the 16th near Nyanguki, in the Lemai Wedge. The poachers were part of a group of more than 35 people who came in to hunt on the plains between Nyanguki and the Triangle at 10.30 on a very dark and wet night.

The poachers like such nights – animals are easier to hunt and they feel that the rangers will not be operating. This group were arrested at 11.30 pm, before they could start hunting. The plains are teeming with animals, including thousands of Thompson's gazelle and the patrol managed to stop the killing of dozens of animals.

The Iseiya and Ngiro-are teams joined up to comb the “Nyumbanane” area on the 28th and came across two poachers camps. They managed to arrest all five poachers in the first camp and one person in the second camp; thanks to Morani, one of our dogs.

One group of poachers had arrived two nights previously and were set to camp for a week – they would

probably have hunted hippo. The second group had arrived the previous night and were targeting warthog. Neither group had killed anything.

Our rangers saw a group of 13 poachers on the other side of the river, near “Mlima Hotel” on the 29th. They joined up with the rangers from Kokatende and spent the whole day in pursuit but did not manage to arrest anyone.

A combined group from Iseiya and Ngiro-are arrested two poachers on the night of the 30th at Kasarani, in the Lemai Wedge. The poachers had set 20 wire snares, which were found by the Ngiro-are rangers in the evening. An ambush was set and both people arrested as they came in to check their snares at 7.30 pm. No animals had been killed.

Revenue & Accounts

Revenue dropped by 31% from February; this is normal for this time of year. However, the loss of revenue incurred by Musiara Ltd for Balloons – Ksh 6,179,710 (US\$ 81,312) and Skyship – Ksh 4,065,240 (US\$ 53,490), is of great concern and needs to be dealt with urgently by the Council. This loss of revenue has been compounded by the fact the all clients staying at Little Governor's pay Narok County Council, instead of Trans Mara. The loss in revenue to Narok since May 2009 now stands at Ksh 23,311,000 (US\$ 306,724).

Delloitte received four Tender documents for the new revenue collection contract. They have reviewed, evaluated and ranked the Tenders and will make their recommendations by the end of April. Thereafter, the Mara Conservancy Board will make a final selection at their Board meeting on the 14th May.



Cheetah and three cubs. Taken by Alfred Bett.

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of March 2010

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	132,409.00	1,772,200.00	-	298,589.25
Non-ticket sales	2,572.00	315,200.00		
Balance for Distribution	134,981.00	2,087,400.00	-	298,589.25
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	49,081.84	811,352.00	-	164,224.09
Group Ranches	25,157.71	336,718.00		
Sub-total	74,239.55	1,148,070.00	-	164,224.09
Mara Conservancy	60,741.45	939,330.00	-	134,365.16

Development

We purchased a bench vice and a pipe vice for the workshop.

We overhauled the engine on Ranger I, our three-year old Land Rover. The overhaul was expensive

and we will now retain this vehicle for another year.

We touched-up several sections of the river road and re-surfaced some bad sections with murram. We also graded a new track in an area this is extensively used when looking for lions.

We rolled the airstrip and cut grass on the surrounds.

The Chief's Office, Kawai has been completed and there should be an official opening at the beginning of May.

Report on Focus for April

Complete revenue and tender and award a contract.	Done.
Start refresher training for all Ranger IIs	Deferred.
Complete annual work plan.	Done.
Complete Chief's Office in Kawai.	Done.
Install one new culvert on road to Serena Airstrip.	Delayed.

Focus for May

1. Hold Lodge Managers meeting on 4th.
2. Hold Board meeting on 14th May.
3. Review and approve Annual Work Plan.
4. Award contract for revenue collection.
5. Open Chief's Office.
6. Conduct driver training.
7. Complete Responsible Guide Competition.

