

MARA MONTHLY

AUGUST 2010



Passing Out Parade at Londiani.

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR AUGUST 2010

By Brian Heath

General

Kenya held a Referendum on the 4th August to decide on whether to accept a new Constitution. There had been a strong group opposing the Constitution – a few clauses relation to abortion, Kadhi's Courts and Land were strongly contested. However, in the end Kenyans overwhelmingly voted for the new Constitution and all the concerns that there could be violence were happily unfounded. The new Constitution was officially launched on the 27th August at a colourful ceremony in Nairobi.

The weather was on the whole dry, with the exception of a few days of scattered rain in the last week of August. The past two months have been the driest since the Conservancy started in 2001.

The County Council of Trans Mara has approved the ten-year management plan for the Mara Triangle portion of the Masai Mara National Reserve. It should be officially adopted in the next month or two. The plan endorses the construction of one or two new eco-lodges and an eco-camp and will allow for different zones within the Reserve. We have already instituted some of the recommendations for the river zone and the major change for visitors will probably be the formal adoption of high and low-use zones – with a premium charged on low use areas. Only recognized 4WD vehicles will be allowed in the low-use areas and mini-busses will be restricted to the high-use areas. More details will be given when the plan is formally adopted.

Wildlife

The migration ebbed and flowed, as animals came and went from the Triangle. There were times when the Triangle was full of wildebeest and zebra, a few days later there were virtually none. However, we expect the animals to be based in the northern Serengeti/Mara until November.

One large lion was found dead on the 23rd near the salt-lick. It had apparently been killed in a fight. This was the second lion found dead this month; the first was killed in a wire snare.

There are two new sets of lion cubs – one near Sankuria and the other in "Izabella's Ditch". The first are extremely young and the second are about a month old.

Cheetah were seen on a regular basis throughout the month. Some will probably stay around on the extensive burnt areas as they green up and attract Thompson's gazelle.

Community

Fires posed a real problem throughout August – we had to contend with three major fires that were started by suspected arsonists along the escarpment. About 20% of the Triangle was burnt in these fires – that included the whole section along the escarpment and along half of the Tanzanian border.

Research

Dr Kay Holekamp has been working with Dr Bilal Butt on remote sensing of vegetation biomass and gave a preliminary report in Dr Holekamp's latest report. This information is available from the MODIS sensor on the TERRA spacecraft and has been analyzed using Normalized Differential Vegetation Index (NDVI). The study compared six different areas in the Masai Mara and compares extensive cattle grazing with areas with fire and areas with no livestock and combinations of the three. The study is designed to answer two different questions:

- What is the effect of burning and grazing on above ground biomass?
- How do these effects affect ungulate abundance?

This is exciting and practical research that will assist us in establishing management strategies both in the Reserve and in the Conservancies outside the Reserve.

Dogs

John Lutenberg joined his wife, Linda Porter, and another professional dog-handler, Ms Coby Webb, on the 18th. They trained the dogs on a daily basis and had the opportunity to also use them in real deployments.

Morani and Anna were used to follow up on a robbery at Saruni Camp. The thieves broke into a room over the lunch hour and then escaped on a bicycle – Morani followed the tracks

to the bicycle and then followed it for several more kilometres before the bicycle was recovered – the suspect escaped.

John Lutenberg accompanied Morani on another deployment to Tipilikwani Camp, along the Talek River on the 28th. One of the tents had been broken into during dinner and cash and cameras stolen. They arrived at the site at 1.00 am and were able to follow the track to a large traditional village – the Police and Narok Rangers followed up in the village.

We had one other night exercise on the 30th and just missed arresting a group of poachers at 10.00 pm on a very dark and wet night.

Staff

We attended the passing out parade for our 11 rangers on the 26th. They had undergone a three-month paramilitary training course with the Kenya Forestry Service (KFS). Our rangers did us proud; they were awarded three of the four top awards. Jeremiah Maratim Cheruiyot was awarded best recruit overall, John Kintai was best in class and John Ntoika was best marksman. Well done to them all, and to the others who all upheld the good name of the Mara Conservancy.

Our Community Scouts are not working as well as expected and we will have to make a decision on whether to retain them – this decision will be made in September.

Tourism

High Season – what a nightmare. We only have three anti-harassment vehicles and they can't be everywhere at once. It is such a shame that the moment our rangers turn their backs – usually to try and protect an animal like a cheetah from dozens of vehicles – the drivers elsewhere rush in to break the rules. We had situations when the rangers were protecting a cheetah with cubs and 12 vehicles were harassing lions a few miles away – many of the drivers were from supposedly reputable companies like Nature Expeditions, Twiga Tours, Southern Cross and some from our resident camps and lodges.

Many visitors don't appreciate the need for some controls. In August alone we had to deal with dozens of visitors who tried to break some of our basic rules and then some who became abusive, or tried to bribe our rangers when confronted with offenses. A cheetah cub was run over and killed on the Narok side of the river on the 20th, as vehicles jostled for a close up of the cheetah – was it worth it?

We were dealing with difficult and irate visitors on a daily basis – many of them resented the fact that they had to have security in our camps. Sadly, random attacks – such as the one at the end of July – are beyond our control and the risk to visitors can only be minimised if we have armed security in the camps. The decision to have security in camps is not ours, but comes from Government and has to be implemented until we can find an alternative solution. We have decided that next year we will reduce the number of available camps from eight to five – closing those that are seen to be too remote. We will close Campi ya Mungu, Nolmiman and River Camps.

Security

On the 18th we had a stroke of luck in our hunt for the armed robbers who attacked River Camp in late July. We were able to apprehend one of the armed robbers – the person we believe to have been the leader of the gang. This arrest was the culmination of three weeks of very patient intelligence work and excellent collaboration between the police in Kenya and Tanzania and the Mara Conservancy. The arrested admitted that he was part of the gang and corroborated the statement already given by the local guide who we arrested in July. He was charged with Murder and Robbery with Violence on the 31st. We are still working on apprehending other members of the gang and narrowly missed arresting another on the night of the 30th.

A total of 22 people were arrested for poaching during August; one additional person was arrested for murder. We recovered 532 wire snares and rescued several animals, including

seven wildebeest and an eland. We found a lion, giraffe, eland, Thompson's gazelle, zebra and several wildebeest that had been snared and butchered.

10 wire snares were recovered close to Kinyangaga on the 3rd, one wildebeest had been butchered.

One person arrested on the 4th as he came into the Lemai Wedge to hunt. One other person was arrested on the 7th along the escarpment near Kinyangaga. 15 wire snares were recovered near the Ngiro-are windmill.

On the eighth 89 wire snares were recovered in a sweep that started on the Kenyan side of the border, near Ol Donyo Olpaek and ended near the Lemai Swamp. One lion was found killed in a snare on our side of the border – the poachers had skinned the carcass and taken the claws. Two zebra and several wildebeest had also been butchered and one wildebeest was rescued. Two people were arrested near Kokamange as they came into the Serengeti.

One person, of eleven, was arrested near the Lemai Swamp as they came in to set snares on the 9th, he had six wire snares. A further five snares were recovered in the same area – they had caught and killed two wildebeest.

On the 13th an aircraft flying into the Kokatende airstrip saw a poachers camp. Our Tanzanian counterparts called our rangers for assistance and the combined team managed to arrest 13 poachers in an area known as

Nzozzo, across the Mara River, in the northern Serengeti. The poachers had killed and butchered seven zebra, six wildebeest, two eland and five Thompson's gazelle. 30 wire snares were recovered.

The rangers continue to collect large numbers of snares. Twelve were collected on the 17th, and 176 collected on the 18th. Six wildebeest and one eland were rescued. It is virtually impossible to apprehend these poachers – they have the advantage of height afforded by the escarpment and are able to closely monitor the movement of our vehicles and rangers. The snares are all set within easy walking distance of the escarpment and the poachers are able to come down at night, set their snares, or butcher any animals caught in them, and leave before being discovered.

A combined patrol with the Anne Kent-Taylor/Care for the Wild scouts and our rangers from Oloololo Gate arrested five people on the 18th. They were burning charcoal and had killed one bushbuck.

110 wire snares were recovered on the 26th, one animal was found dead and another five had been butchered. The following day another 79 snares were recovered near Kasarani, in the Lemai Wedge. One giraffe was found dead in a snare and eight wildebeest had been killed and butchered.

The Ngiro-are rangers arrested on poacher on the night of the 30th as he and his companion entered the Lemai Wedge.

Revenue & Accounts

I have attached a copy of income and expenditure from the audited accounts for the period ending May 31st 2010; the accounts were audited by Deloitte. There was a considerable increase in Park entrance fees – the result of a 50% increase in Park entrance fees, from US\$ 40 to US\$ 60 that took effect in July 2009.

Development

We received our new Case Backhoe/loader on the 20th. This machine will greatly improve our ability to work on the roads, resurface sections and install ditches and culverts. This machine has already been used to speed up our road works on the main Serena to Oloololo Road.

The grader worked on opening up mitre drains on all the main roads and then graded a section of the main road to Purungat that had become corrugated.

We completed the new kennel at Ngiro-are and the mason went on to repair a section of the outside wall surrounding the station. A 20 metre section of the stone facing on the wall peeled off in one of the many earth tremors that affect that area.

We sent our Land Cruiser for valuation in Nairobi and will try and find buyers. The vehicle was valued at Ksh 1.7 million. The new land Cruiser was delivered to Nairobi and will be deployed in the Mara in early September, once we have fitted radios and a vehicle tracking device.

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of July 2010

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	195,645.00	2,511,305.00	-	1,681,738.00
Non-ticket sales	14,395.00	235,600.00		
Balance for Distribution	210,040.00	2,746,905.00	-	1,681,738.00
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	78,349.45	1,033,649.80	-	924,955.90
Group Ranches	37,172.55	477,147.95		
Sub-total	115,522.00	1,510,797.75	-	924,955.90
Mara Conservancy	94,518.00	1,236,107.25	-	756,782.10

STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MAY 2010

	2010 (KSh)	2009 (KSh)
INCOME		
Park fees	103,043,077	62,790,481
Grants, gifts and donations	15,602,520	22,592,785
Ballooning royalties	8,005,836	5,234,818
Vehicle revenue	5,168,385	3,304,215
Gain on disposal of equipment	1,015,793	1,000,000
Other income	516,319	51,800
Promotional items	1,289,569	1,577,340
Finance income	448,617	859,133
TOTAL	135,090,116	97,410,572
EXPENSES		
Staff costs	45,016,778	36,091,533
Advertising and conservancy promotion	24,739,218	17,247,964
Depreciation	10,414,934	12,879,428
Directors' emoluments – fees and other emoluments	6,094,956	5,943,102
Security	6,551,320	3,958,228
Motor vehicle running costs	7,370,845	4,862,812
Professional fees	3,556,828	1,605,945
Machine repairs	5,915,803	4,623,085
Repairs and maintenance	3,469,083	3,123,422
Administration costs	2,666,698	5,154,384
Insurance	1,693,909	1,382,328
Aircraft running costs	1,074,064	1,797,307
Travel and entertainment	1,173,960	698,507
Audit fees - current year	1,015,346	820,000
- prior year	-	3,619
Rent	858,405	621,760
Bank charges	626,786	570,700
Telephone	756,866	883,641
Licences and permits	415,000	210,200
Office expenses	2,468,962	972,145
Board meeting expenses	525,000	78,278
Postage and delivery	69,688	19,929
Leave pay provision	118,055	216,531
Veterinary costs	150,460	76,998
Bad debts write-off	950,059	1,095,629
Finance costs	482,159	530,401
TOTAL	128,175,182	105,467,876
SURPLUS / (DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	6,914,934	(8,057,304)
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME/(LOSS) FOR THE YEAR	6,914,934	(8,057,304)

Report on Focus for August

Order new Suzuki Maruti to replace Cheetah II	Done.
Complete dog kennel at Ngiro-are	Done.
Resurface sections of the road to Ngiro-are	Done.
Complete resurfacing bad sections of Serena - Oloololo road.	Ongoing.
Complete audit and receive audited accounts.	Done.
Receive new Land Cruiser and JCB.	Done.
Continue with operation to apprehend armed robbers.	Ongoing.

Focus for September

1. Collect new Suzuki and fit with radio and tracking device, as well as new Land Cruiser.
2. Work on main road to Oloololo and install culverts
3. Start work on new road from Sankuria to Little Governors.
4. Start on kitchen and mess at Oloololo.
5. EIAs on toilets and viewing platform at hippo pools.
6. Continue with follow-up on armed robbers.

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