

MARA MONTHLY

FEBRUARY 2010



Lion cub from Oloololo Pride.

Photograph taken by Wilson Naitoi.

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2010

By Brian Heath

General

We had a few days of rain, starting the 3rd and later on some very heavy storms followed by all-night drizzle. This type of rain is excellent for the vegetation but terrible for the roads and tracks. Huge volumes of traffic, by Governors Balloons and game viewing vehicles, to see lion and cheetah around Olpunyata and Topi Plains destroyed most of the tracks when it was wet.

The Communications Commission of Kenya (CCK) allocated a new frequency for our security channel; the old frequency did not work well and was subject to interference. All radios were reprogrammed on the 2nd and 3rd and the system checked. This should now iron out all the small glitches that we were experiencing with communications.

We installed vehicle-tracking devices in six vehicles this month. We can track our vehicles in real time and we also get an alert whenever the vehicles go over the speed limit or leave a designated area.

The National Environment Tribunal (NET) ruled in a dispute between Tourism Promotion Services (TPS) and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), the County Council of Trans Mara and Cobra's Corner Limited (3rd Respondent) on the 10th February. The ruling went in favour of TPS as follows:

"Accordingly and for the reasons explained in the foregoing paragraphs, the Tribunal, unanimously:

i. cancels EIA licence, registration number 0002276 issued by NEMA

to the 3rd Respondent on 24th October 2008;

ii. in accordance with section 129(2) and (3) of EMCA and Regulation 9(3) of the EIA Regulations (Legal Notice No. 101 of 2003) directs the 3rd Respondent to stop any activity that may be proceeding on the site in question;

iii. directs the 3rd Respondent to conduct a full EIA study for the project in question in accordance with EIA and Audit Regulations; and

iv. directs NEMA to ensure that no activity takes place in the location in question pending the conduct of a full EIA study and its proper determination in accordance with the law."

Cobra's Corner Limited were going to build a lodge in the Triangle – towards Ngiro-are.

The Chief Park Warden, Samson Lenjirr, and William Deed visited the Chief Park Warden in the Serengeti on the 13 – 14th. They went to introduce the Mara Conservancy to the new Warden at Seronera and discuss issues of common interest, including our cross-border collaboration.

After a series of meetings on tendering for revenue collection, we appointed Deloitte to conduct the process. We expect to award a contract by the end of April and start a new system of revenue collection by 1st June, in time for the high season.

Wildlife

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) trapped a leopard on the 5th at Kirindon for killing livestock. It was released in the Triangle, near the Tanzanian border.

Dr Kariuki, a veterinarian with KWS, removed a wire snare from a zebra on the 9th and treated an elephant with an injured leg the same evening. A second elephant with a wire snare around its front right leg went missing the day it was to be treated.

Seven cheetah have regularly been seen – these were “Sita” and her three cubs, the cubs separated from their mother for a few days and then rejoined. Another female with her two full-grown cubs was also in the same area – along the Mara River. At one stage it looked as if the cheetah wanted to cross the river, they would go to the bank and watch the river very intently before moving on to another section and doing the same again. Another three cheetah were occasionally seen: a single male and a single female were seen close to Serena; the third, a female, was reported to have new cubs on the Tanzanian border.

There has been a great deal of attention drawn to the Mara rhino population in recent weeks; brought about by the furor over construction of camps along the Mara River. There are at least seven rhino in the Mara Triangle - these are seen regularly. There is an eighth rhino that moves between the Lemai Wedge and the Triangle near Ngiro-are. A



Rangers burn bush meat found at a poachers camp near Little Governors.

Photograph taken by Corporal Langat.

report by Mr James Sindiyo, Chief Game Warden, the Narok side of the Game Reserve (Status of Black Rhinoceros in Masai Mara National Reserve: A review covering 2007-2009) indicates that 38 different rhino were positively identified between 2007-2009, of which 26 were seen in 2009. He only reports three rhino for the Mara Triangle and it is not known whether the additional four fall within his population estimates. It would be realistic to estimate the Mara rhino population at between 26-30, with possibly 6-8 rhino having moved into northern Serengeti.

The Chief Warden’s report ignored the importance of riverine woodland areas for food and refuge and although the overall population may not have changed much – many animals have been forced out of their traditional habitat and into more insecure areas in the Lemai Wedge and northern Serengeti - these are amongst the most heavily poached areas in East Africa. If it were not for the excellent work done by the Tanzanian National Parks (TANAPA) rangers and Mara Conservancy these rhino would surely be at great risk.

We found the elephant with a wire snare on the 21st and Dr Dominic Mijele came to treat it on the 22nd. The snare had not cut very deeply into the leg and the animal should recover quickly.

A speeding driver in a Toyota minibus (a smashed side-light at the scene was enough to identify the type of vehicle) killed a Grant’s gazelle on the 22nd near “Egyptian Goose”, on the main Serena to Mara Bridge road. Unfortunately, we were unable to apprehend the driver.

Research

The January report from the Mara River Flows study by Chris Dutton and Amanda Subalusky highlighted the very high levels of turbidity in the Mara River – turbidity indicates the sediment load in the water and is a measure of soil erosion in the catchment area. In December 2009 the turbidity levels were 149 NTU, they rose to 781 on 19th January 2010. However, at one point, 12th January, the levels reached 2,026 NTU. To put this in perspective, the turbidity levels on the lower Mara catchment area should not exceed 50 NTU (Kenya National Water Resources Management Strategy, 2006 and Lake Victoria South Catchment Management Authority of Kenya). It should be noted that the turbidity levels have only once been within the acceptable range in 18 months of monitoring – 43.2 on 11th January 2009.

Dr Jens Jung returned to do a preliminary reconnaissance before he comes back in March with 25 students. They will continue with their long-term study of *balanites* trees.

Community

We arrested eight people on two different occasions for illegal grazing in the Triangle; they were each fined Ksh 10,000. It caused a slight political issue, but there is absolutely no reason why people should graze their cattle in the Reserve at present. February has been the wettest is years, and it has followed three months of excellent rainfall.

Staff

We have been looking at possible refresher courses for our rangers and have been in contact with the Kenya Forestry College for quotations.

Mr J Saitoti started a three-month course on electrics; Saitoti works with our mechanics.

Tourism

The ongoing controversy over the Somak camp being built along the Mara River brought to light a number of divergent views. One: in defence of the construction, written by the Chief Warden, Narok (The Proposed Olkeju Ronkai Camp Development in the Masai Mara – An assessment report to inform the Kenya National Environment Tribunal, October 2008) stated that that development in that area would have no impact on the rhino population, as they did not historically occur there. This statement was challenged by the Acting Chief Park Warden, Trans Mara, Mr Samson Lenjirr. Mr Lenjirr had been head of the rhino surveillance team for several years and his report clearly indicated that rhino

had disappeared from the Olkeju Ronkai area since Somak started construction of their camp.

I would also like to challenge the figures given by the Chief Warden, Narok, on tourism in the Masai Mara, and have used the figures for tourist camps compiled by the consultants for the ten-year management plan (Mara Ecosystem Tourism Facilities Database, Conservation Development Centre, August 2008), a summary is provided below. The Warden underreported the number of beds on the Narok side of the Reserve, stating that there were only six facilities with 570 beds; the database records 50 (lodges, camps, seasonal camps, special campsites and public campsites) with 1,151 beds. Whilst the Chief Warden's report was reasonably accurate on the number of beds elsewhere in the Mara ecosystem, it overestimated the number of beds in the Triangle and completely overlooked the huge volume of facilities on the periphery – most relying on the Reserve for their game drives.

In order not to misrepresent the facts, we did a reality check on the figures in the Table. Our estimated annual revenue in the Mara Triangle, from Park fees alone, until the end of the May 2010, will be Ksh 246 million (US\$ 3.3 million) – almost exactly the same as the estimate in the Table. The Conservancy retains 45% for management - the remainder is paid to the Council and Group Ranches. Given the above, we believe the revenue estimate is very realistic and

well above any official collection by Narok.

Not satisfied with collecting US\$ 20,000,000 (Twenty million) annually from entrance fees alone, Narok County Council has approved the construction of three new camps, two of which are in an area considered too ecologically important to handle more tourist developments; and they have grabbed the revenue due to Trans Mara County Council for Little Governors Camp. This is surely a case where greed will suffocate the “goose that lays the golden egg”. When coupled with the fact that cattle now invade large tracts of the Reserve we are beginning to notice a major impact on wildlife populations (reported last month in the areas being studied by the Hyena Research Project).

The “Somak” issue has raised considerable national and international interest, with articles in the Daily Nation, Daily Star in Kenya and the Daily Telegraph, Sunday Times and Independent in Britain. A petition has been set up on the internet: “I will not safari with Somak” and has over 3,600 signatures – the comments have been overwhelmingly against the development and yet the camp continues to be built at a frenetic pace.

Another new camp, on the junction of the Talek and Mara Rivers, has quietly been constructed in January and February. It is smaller but no less of a slap in the face to conservationists trying to protect the Mara and its valuable riverine vegetation.

Summary				NAROK	TRIANGLE	OUTSIDE
Number of beds in Reserve				1,151	160	
Number of beds outside but do game drives in, and pay, Reserve				1,018	182	
Number of beds outside Reserve and do game drives in Conservancies						962
TOTAL				2,169	342	962
Estimated number of people in each area on any given day (from average occupancy rates)				1,336	214	538
Estimated value of ticket sales in each area on any given day		\$42		56,097	8,975	22,604
Estimated value of ticket sales in each area in one year				20,475,515	3,276,021	8,250,606
Convert to Kenya Shillings		K Sh75		1,535,663,588	245,701,575	618,795,450

Summary of beds and revenue for the Mara ecosystem

Security

Fifteen poachers were arrested during February, four of them in the Triangle, one on the escarpment and the other ten in the Lemai Wedge. This brings the total poachers arrested to 1,372. As is normal at this time of year, the poachers were concentrating on hippo, Thompson's gazelle and warthog.

A routine patrol along the river came across a poacher's camp in "Kisumu Ndogo", near Little Governors on the 5th. The poachers had killed a hippo and had left the night before. A combined patrol arrested two poachers on the 6th.

On the 11th patrolling the Mara River, downstream from Kokatende. Rangers saw fresh signs of poaching but no poachers. The team stayed out that night and set an ambush near

"Watu Kumi." They saw torch activity soon after dark but the poachers were operating a long distance away. After hours of careful manoeuvring on foot, the rangers arrested four people between 2-3 am. They had killed at least ten Thompson's gazelle.

A combined team from Oloololo Gate and the Anne Kent-Taylor scouts arrested one person on the escarpment as he was setting snares on the 14th. A further five people were arrested for burning and selling charcoal. The Ngiro-are rangers arrested four people at 7.00 pm on the 19th. The four were part of a group of eight people who had entered the Lemai Wedge to hunt reedbuck and Thompson's gazelle with dogs and they were caught before they could start hunting.

We sent the rangers back into the riverine forest at "Kisumu Ndogo", on the 21st and came across nine poachers. They had arrived three days previously and had killed one hippo and two warthog. Three of the poachers were immediately located and arrested; one other escaped but was tracked down by Morani and arrested.

Revenue & Accounts

Our revenue for January was very much as expected, the peak that normally occurs in February will probably be smaller than normal. Most of the camps had reasonable occupancy, but the prognosis for the low season is not looking good – we can expect our income to be considerably less than expenditure for March to June. Fortunately we have set aside reserves and should have no problem in meeting our core costs.

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of January 2010.	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue		
	Collected	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales		165,160.00	1,695,522.00	-	275,201.50
Non-ticket sales		26,491.00	2,998,250.00		
Balance for Distribution		191,651.00	4,693,772.00	-	275,201.50
Distributed					
Trans Mara County Council		74,027.65	2,259,425.42	-	151,360.83
Group Ranches		31,380.40	322,149.18		
Sub-total		105,408.05	2,581,574.60	-	151,360.83
Mara Conservancy		86,242.95	2,112,197.40	-	123,840.68

Report on Focus for February

Install new culverts	Installed one.
Continue repair work on roads	Done.
Complete hardware store	Done.
Tender for revenue collection.	Signed agreement with Deloitte.
Collect new Land Rover	Done
Burn one block, weather permitting.	Too wet.
Oversee construction of Chief's office.	Supplies delivered.
Star work on annual work plan.	Started.

Focus for March

1. Start Tender for Revenue Collection.
2. Draft Annual Work Plan.
3. Continue with Chief's Office Kawai.
4. Install more culverts; and
5. Attend Law Enforcement workshop.

