


MARA MONTHLY

JANUARY 2010



Storm clouds clearing after the heavy rains in early January

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR JANUARY 2010

By Brian Heath

General

There was exceptionally heavy rain in the last few days of December and first week of January, some of the seasonal watercourses flooded and the areas adjoining the river road became a foot-deep swamp. All the ox-bow lakes along the Mara River were filled, including Maji ya Ndege, which had not had any water in it for three years. These rains were very widespread and many areas that had been experiencing the drought suddenly had to cope with flooding. However, the rains stopped by mid-January and we had glorious, sunny weather for the remainder of the month.

The Chief Executive and Financial and Administration Manager met with Earthview Management on the 11th and then were given a presentation by Earthview and Paynet on a proposed new system for revenue collection on the 13th.

We held the Board meeting on the 22nd and there was another presentation on revenue collection, by Techno Group Consult. The Board resolved to go to Tender and we will be starting the process in early February.

Wildlife

The one surviving cheetah cub from a litter born in July was found dead on the 28th, there was no obvious

cause of death. Shakira returned to the Triangle after a short absence, we expect her to leave her cubs in February – they are now 18 months old.

The lions with cubs are beginning to lose condition – all the wildebeest and zebra have moved out and the lionesses are struggling to find enough food.

Dogs

Morani was instrumental in finding three poachers on the 27th. Both dogs are doing very well, although Memusi had an abscess from an injection site; the abscess was lanced and memusi was treated with antibiotics.

Community

Most of the people who moved their livestock into Koiyaki and Trans Mara returned home after a series of heavy rainstorms in eastern Narok. Many of the people lost 80% of their cattle in the last drought but if the rains don't return soon they will be in danger of losing even more. There was a flush of short, green grass for a while but in many places the grass never got a chance to recover before being grazed to the ground again. Although the cattle have stopped dying, they are still too thin and weak to survive another prolonged dry spell.



Rangers return across the Mara River after having arrested three poachers found by our tracker dog Morani.

Photograph taken by Assistant Warden Joshua Naiguran.

Research

The Hyena Research Project has been working on the effect of fire on wildlife densities and distribution; the first results were reported at the end of December. The report showed a significant difference for Thomson's gazelle (66/km on burned vs 19/km on unburned), zebra (68/km on burned vs 28/km on unburned) and impala (1.34/km on burned vs 4.66 on unburned).

Two other species indicated a preference for the burned areas: Grants gazelle and wildebeest but the differences were not statistically significant. Topi, buffalo and eland appeared to have a preference for the unburned areas. This highlights the need to have mosaic of burned and unburned areas.

The project has also been comparing wildlife densities between the Triangle and their main research site near Talek. The preliminary report indicates that there are 351 prey species per square kilometre in the Triangle, against 222 per square kilometre near Talek. However, the difference is not statistically significant and may have been skewed by the huge numbers of wildebeest and zebra in the Triangle during the migration.

It is generally accepted that other prey species are more abundant on the eastern side of the Mara – many grazing animals move out from the long-grass and flooded areas common in the Triangle and prefer the cattle induced short grass areas found on Koiyaki Group Ranch.

The increasing rate of decline in total ungulate numbers on the eastern side of the Mara – the rate of decline seems to have accelerated since 2003 – should be of great concern to the management and tourism industry on the Narok side.

The Hyena project has also been focusing on three hyena clans. One clan (the Serena North Clan) was reported to have declined from 68 in October to 41 in December. There seems to be no explanation for this apparent decline – there have been no significant deaths reported.

Staff

We conducted our staff transfers on the 16th – for the most part the transfers went well, though we had a slight problem with the Wardens. This is being addressed.

Tourism

We have just noticed another camp being constructed along the Mara River, on the Narok side, opposite Ol Keri camp-site. Visitors that were scheduled to stay in Ol Keri had to be re-located because of the disturbance on the Narok side. This is the second special camp-site that we have had to vacate because of construction on the other side of the river.

It would appear that virtually every single patch of riverine thicket along the Mara River downstream from Mara Serena – on the Narok side - now has a camp. It starts with a special camp-site about three kilometres downstream from Serena – there are now at least five sites that are either special camp-sites, or are being developed as permanent camps. The same has happened along the Talek River in Narok – the camps are now packed along the whole length of the Talek – both inside and outside the Reserve.

Nine years ago, before the Conservancy started managing the Triangle, poaching and insecurity were so bad along that stretch of the river that no one would dream of putting in a camp. Poaching is now

Tourism cont.

virtually non-existent along the river and security so improved – courtesy of the Mara Conservancy – that people are flocking in to build. Is this the downside of making the area safe?

It would appear that there is a sudden frenzy of building along the Mara River – we presume to beat any possible adoption of the ten-year management plan. The plan advocates no new camps along the Mara River. Why else are we suddenly seeing all these new camps being constructed?

Security

Twenty five poachers were arrested during January; three of them in the Triangle. This brings the total arrests to 1,357. Five wire snares were recovered. The mode of poaching has changed, as is normal at this time of year. The poachers concentrate on hunting hippo, warthog and Thompson’s gazelle. They hunt hippo with spears, warthog with spears and dogs and Thompson’s gazelle with dogs and torches on dark nights. We can usually expect incursions into the

Triangle at this time of year and are extra vigilant on bright nights – when the poachers are able to hunt warthogs and hippo by moonlight.

The Ngiro-are team arrested three people who had entered the Lemai Wedge near Limana on the 27th December. They were about to hunt with dogs at night and had not yet caught anything.

On the night of the 4th the Ngiro-are rangers received a call for assistance from their counterparts in Lemai and managed to arrest five, of seven, people who said that they were on their way to fish along the river, they had nets, spears and dogs and would probably have been hunting warthog and fishing.

A combined Iseiya and Ngiro-are team arrested all three poachers who were camped in the Triangle, downstream from the Ol Are springs. The poacher had camped one full night and had killed four warthog; they probably would have left the following night. The poachers were arrested at 10.00 am in their camp. They had one dog with them.

The Iseiya team arrested four people in a thicket we know as “watu kumi”, a place in the Lemai

Wedge where we arrested ten people in 2002. The four had arrived the previous night and had not succeeded in killing anything; they had four dogs with them and would have been targeting warthog or Thompson’s gazelle.

The Ngiro-are team arrested two wa Kuria poachers as they entered the Lemai Wedge to hunt warthog at 5.00 pm on the 19th. The two had spears, hoes and dogs and had not started hunting.

A combined patrol arrested three, of five, people who had killed a hippo along the Mara River, near Mlima Hotel in the Lemai Wedge on the 21st. The three were from Kibaso and had spent two nights long the river. That night the Iseiya team arrested the two remaining people, as they tried to return home. They had snuck back to collect the meat when arrested. Five wire snares were recovered.

A combined team arrested three people near Mlima Hotel in the northern Serengeti on the 27th. The three were fishing with nets when seen by the rangers; they immediately crossed the river. Our rangers, with Morani, one of the dogs, followed them across the river. Morani then proceeded to locate all three – they had gone about three kilometres from the river when found, hidden in tall grass.

Revenue & Accounts

The table below summarises our income and expenditure for the first six months of the financial year. Note: our actual income was considerably higher than budget.

We had been very conservative in our income projections, not sure what impact the increase in Park entrance fees would have on visitor numbers. We are fortunate that the Mara Triangle now has such a good reputation: for excellent game viewing, good roads, well



A flash flood on the main road to Oloololo. Taken by Wilson Naitoi.

disciplined and respectful staff; that it has become the destination of choice in the Mara.

We were also helped by the fact that cattle did not invade the Triangle – as was the case on the Narok side of the Reserve. However, income would have been even higher if it were not for the ongoing dispute with Narok County Council and Governors Camp over the payment of Park fees for clients staying at Little Governors.

The amount of revenue collected by Narok County Council for clients staying in Trans Mara (Little Governors) now stands at US\$ 147,790 (Ksh 11,232,040). Two balloon operators (Mara Balloon Safaris - Governors Camp - and Skyship) have not been paying their fees in full. Skyship owe US\$ 51,000 in balloon revenue and we believe Mara Balloon Safaris to have underpaid by US\$ 83,000 (Ksh 6,314,376).

Expenses were higher than budget, most of the additional expenses were staff related. We took on a Chief Park Warden and additional

rangers and paid out more on bonuses and allowances than we had allowed for. This was understandable – poaching was at an all-time high between July and December and we had to work very hard to keep it under control. It was worth it – we arrested 149 poachers and recovered 4,058 wire snares during that period.

Our target was to set aside a reserve of US\$ 100,000 (Ksh 7.5 million) by the end of the financial year; this should be met. Our long-term target is US\$ 200,000. This should see us through most unforeseen crises and possible drops in tourism.

	Budget	Actual
Income	55,522,333	84,020,090
Direct Costs	6,272,308	15,857,516
Gross Margin	49,250,025	68,162,573
Expenses	45,201,814	52,917,093
Operating Surplus	4,048,211	15,248,481
Finance charges	2,022,273	1,874,049
Net Income	2,025,938	13,371,432

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	229,420.00	2,625,705.00	-	1,352,738.90
Non-ticket sales	5,400.00	569,550.00		
Balance for Distribution	234,820.00	3,195,255.00	-	1,352,738.90
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	85,561.20	1,258,506.30	-	744,006.40
Group Ranches	43,589.80	498,883.95		
Sub-total	129,151.00	1,757,390.25	-	744,006.40
Mara Conservancy	105,669.00	1,437,864.75	-	608,732.51

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of December 2009.

Report on Focus for January

Collect new Land Rover	Ready
Hold Board Meeting on 15th January	Held on 22nd.
Start on Chief's Office, Kawai	Work started
Conduct Staff Transfers	Done
Repair sections of roads damaged in December rains	Done
Review Tender process for revenue collection	Ongoing

Focus for February

1. Install new culverts.
2. Continue repair work on roads.
3. Cut game viewing tracks.
4. Tender for revenue collection.
5. Start on Chief's Office Kawai.
6. Collect new Land Rover.
7. Burn one block, weather permitting.
8. Oversee construction of chief's office.
9. Construct Hardware Store.
10. Start work on annual work plan.

Please visit our regularly update website to find out more about our work. Thank you.

www.maratriangle.org



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