

MARA MONTHLY

JUNE 2010

One of the first wildebeest crossings of this year.

Taken by Asst. Warden Joseph Kimojino



MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR JUNE 2010

By Brian Heath

General

The rains continued through the first week of June, making it difficult to cut grass and grade the roads. The rains eased off by the middle of the month, with a few sporadic thunderstorms.

We met with Dr Keith Scholey of Disney's "African Cats" film on the 16th and discussed progress on the film, the anticipated release on 22nd April 2011 and linkages between the Mara Conservancy and the Disney website. We watched a draft cut of the first half of the film – it has absolutely stunning shots and a great deal of drama with all the makings of a major film. We are hoping that the "Mara Trust" will be registered in the United States in

good time and that the film will generate funds for the Trust. Our first project will be to build a visitor centre.

We held a meeting with Mr Dominic Grammaticas, Managing Director of Musiara Ltd, to discuss ballooning and Park entrance fees on the 25th. We both agreed that the issue of Park entrance fees should be resolved by Narok and Trans Mara County Councils and Mr Grammaticas suggested arbitration to resolve the issue of balloon cess. Although nothing was formally resolved, it was a good meeting and we are grateful to Musiara Ltd for making the effort. A demand letter written to the Conservancy by the Clerk, County Council of Trans Mara, on the 28th

June 2010 superseded the outcome of this meeting. This letter gives Musiara Ltd two weeks to pay all arrears in Park entrance fees and balloon cess.

Wildlife

The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) and Masai Mara National Reserve conducted an ear-notching exercise on the 10th June. The team saw a total of eight rhino in the Triangle and darted five of them – four were ear-notched and the fifth was found to be pregnant. Two rhino were fitted with radio transmitters in their horns. We understand that a further ten rhino were seen in Narok, two of

them outside the Reserve. I have to question the importance of these ear-notching exercises – they are extremely disruptive and traumatic for the rhino. We have no equipment to follow the rhino with transmitters and some of the rhino, which were extremely tame and visible, have since reverted to being shy and secretive.

The first, small, groups of zebra and wildebeest started crossing Sand River into the Game Reserve, near Roan Hill, on the 12th. Within two days there were large herds crossing into the Reserve and by the 18th we were seeing herds come into the Triangle. This is much earlier than anticipated – we had thought that the heavy and prolonged rains would have kept the animals in the Serengeti.

Community

We have had a request to station rangers on top of the escarpment from the farmers around Angata Barrikoi. Their maize crops are ripening and this is a time when elephant routinely go up the escarpment and raid their crops. Human/wildlife conflict is a perennial problem; when lions and leopard go up the escarpment after the migration and when elephant raid crops as they ripen. The predator problem is largely being addressed with the construction of predator-proof “bomas”. This is a project that was started by the Conservancy but has since been taken up on the escarpment by the Anne Kent-Taylor fund - it has now expanded into Koiyaki and the Mara North Conservancy.

Dogs

The dogs have undergone some extensive training in areas where they were seen as weak. The training focused on working in areas



Two handsome male lions near Purungat.

Taken by Sergeant Francis Penko

that had been contaminated by wildlife, livestock and people. They also worked on hard ground and with old scent. The training really improved the skills of both handlers and dogs.

We are expecting another dog in August – this will be a bitch and will enable us to breed. I would like to extend my thanks to Dr Asuka Takita and Linda Porter for their hard work in finding and training all our dogs.

Staff

Eleven of our rangers have started a three-month paramilitary training course at Londiani. It leaves us a little short staffed for the beginning of the poaching season but will be well worth it in the long term.

We held a celebration on the 19th to commemorate the arrest of 1,400 poachers – we are already at 1,439.

Tourism

We held the award ceremony for most responsible guide at Mara West Camp on the 3rd. Ms Charity Cheruiyot from Batleur Camp won the award – a two-week safari to top

camp and lodges in the South Luangwa Nation Park in Zambia. We gave certificates for second prize to Abdul Karim from Olonana, and runners-up Mark Liaram from Mara West and Timothy Kiok from Kichwa Tembo. We noticed an improvement in the quality of guiding from the first year but were still disappointed that some of the camps and lodges seem disinterested in both the competition and making their guides more responsible. We had a great deal of interest and support from *Beyond*, Mara Siria, Mara West and Olonana Camp, little support from Mpata and Kilima Camps and absolutely no interest from Mara Serena and Mara Timbo.

I would like to thank Dr Cheryl and Manny Mvula of Tribal Voice Communications for their initiative, for finding sponsors and for holding the initial workshops on responsible guiding. I would like to thank the assessors for their work, the participants for taking on the role of responsible guides and a very big thank you to the Born Free Foundation for sponsoring the competition and giving the award.

The camps and lodges are beginning to fill up and we can expect an excellent high season.

Security

We arrested 22 poachers and three stock-thieves during June. This brings the total arrests up to 1,439. We suddenly started recovering significant numbers of snares from the 15th – coinciding with the onset of the migration into the northern Serengeti and the Mara – 117 were recovered in two weeks.

The tracks of three suspected cattle rustlers were seen on the 1st, we mounted an operation to track them down but were unable to locate them. The thieves then stole six goats and two sheep and hid somewhere on the escarpment for the night. They then tried to return home on the second night. They ran into a herd of elephant on their way back, the sheep and goats were scattered; an elephant supposedly killed one. Our rangers followed their tracks and arrested all three people and recovered two goats and a sheep – the thieves had butchered, and were carrying, the remains of one goat. The thieves were taken to court in Kilgoris, they admitted being in the country illegally, but denied the theft.

A freshly speared, and wounded, hippo was found near Sankuria on the 9th. Our rangers combed the whole area for a day but never found the poachers. That night the poachers just evaded an ambush as they returned to Tanzania.

A combined force of rangers arrested one person at Daraja Mbili in the Lemai Wedge on the 12th. He was alone and had caught some fish – no snares were recovered.

On the 15th the Ngiro-are team recovered 17 wire snares near Kasarani, in the Lemai Wedge.

The Iseiya team arrested six, of nine, poachers on the 16th along the river, downstream from Purungat. The poachers had come in to meet the first herds of wildebeest and had set a number of snares. 35 wire snares were recovered. The following day the patrol went into the same area and recovered another 16 wire snares.

The Oloololo Rangers, in conjunction with the Care for the Wild/Anne Kent-Taylor scouts, arrested two people near Olopikidongoe on the 20th. The two had killed three zebra with wire

snares. The following night, at 7.00 pm, the same team arrested the third person in the group and recovered 23 wire snares. The three were handed over to the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). One of those arrested is known as a notorious poacher and was on the KWS most wanted list for the area. We understand that these poachers were quickly released by the Court; we are following it up.

A combined Iseiya/Ngiro-are team arrested three people in the Lemai Wedge at 7.30 pm on the 22nd, near an area known as Kichwa Tembo. The three were on their way to set snares when arrested; four wire snares were recovered.

The following day, the 23rd, the Iseiya team arrested one of two people near Nyakita Pembe. The two were carrying sufficient food and supplies for several days when apprehended. 12 wire snares were recovered.

The Ngiro-are team, with their counterparts from Kinyangaga, in Tanzania, arrested five poachers on the night of the 24th as they entered the Lemai Wedge on a major route from Masanga. 12 wire snares were recovered.

On the 25th the Ngiro-are team recovered thirty-six wire snares in the Lemai Wedge and that evening set up an ambush in the area. Three people were arrested at 8.45 pm – they were different from the ones who had set the snares and were carrying sufficient supplies to camp out for several days.

The Iseiya team found one dead impala in a snare near Kasarani, in the Lemai Wedge on the 26th. A total of three snares were recovered. A further ten wire snares were recovered on the 29th and 30th in the Miungu and Kasarani areas of the Lemai Wedge; one dead wildebeest was found in the snares.



Road Team patching up the main road. Taken by Simon Matara.

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of May 2010

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	141,110.00	1,406,400.00	-	176,981.60
Non-ticket sales	3,038.00	136,700.00		
Balance for Distribution	144,148.00	1,543,100.00	-	176,981.60
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	52,470.50	581,489.00	-	97,339.88
Group Ranches	26,810.90	267,216.00		
Sub-total	79,281.40	848,705.00	-	97,339.88
Mara Conservancy	64,866.60	694,395.00	-	79,641.72

Revenue & Accounts

Kenya Airports Parking Services (KAPS) took over the role of revenue collection on the 15th June. The take-over was not without drama, local politicians threatened to get a court order to stop KAPS from operating on the 14th – they felt that KAPS were not employing enough Maasai. The issue was resolved when it was explained that KAPS were indeed employing locals, although KAPS had not understood all the clan issues in Trans Mara.

We are happy to report that the new system is working remarkably well and we have received several

favourable reviews. Once the system is fully operational it will mark a radical change in the way we collect and account for revenue in protected areas. Within a couple of weeks we hope to provide credit card facilities, an e-ticketing option and sale points in Nairobi. Transactions can also be made through the Kenya Association of Tour Operators (KATO) and the KAPS office in Nairobi. Once a transaction has been made, people will only have to carry a print-out with their unique code number – this will enable the revenue clerks to access all the details on their computers at the three main entry points and issue a “ticket”. Tickets are valid for 24 hours – any

extension will be charged at a full day’s rate. KAPS have also installed a number of additional security features, including CCTV cameras at entry/exit points.

We are excited, and proud, to be at the forefront of a radical new ticketing system with KAPS and wish them the very best in refining the system further. We should not overlook the excellent work that has been done by Earthview Ltd in collecting revenue over the past nine years. Earthview have maintained the highest level of professionalism and accountability right to the end. Indeed KAPS have employed many of their key staff in the Mara – a testament to their skills and integrity.

Report on Focus for June

Announce Winner of Most Responsible Guide Award.	Done.
Burn one block.	Done.
Grade roads and cut game-viewing tracks	Ongoing.
Start on toilet block for Purungat Staff	Started.
Work with KWS on rhino identification.	Done.
Install new pipes at Ngiro-are	Done.
Complete Expansion of Ndovu Camp	Done.

Focus for July

1. Complete toilet block at Purungat.
2. Complete grading roads in Triangle and work on access roads outside.
3. Start on new dog kennel at Ngiro-are.
4. Re-surface sections of Olololo Road.
5. Open tracks to/around Kampi ya Mungu.
6. Install two new culverts on lower road to Purungat.
7. Work with KAPS on new revenue collection.

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