

MARA MONTHLY

MARCH 2010



Thomson
Gazelles killed
by poachers.

MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR MARCH 2010

By Brian Heath

General

The heavy rains we had experienced in February continued into March, giving us the heaviest and most sustained rain we have experienced in years. The areas along the river became completely flooded and the river was exceptionally high for weeks, very different from the two previous years, when the river had been a trickle. The rains subsided for ten days and then returned on the 22nd, with heavy and prolonged storms.

The Chief Executive attended a meeting chaired by the District Commissioner, Trans Mara West and the whole security team on the 18th at Mara Serena. It was attended by camp and lodge managers and discussed security threats to the Mara including:

possible terrorist threats, local insecurity, robberies, petty theft, the proliferation of shanty villages around the Mara and the improvement of roads to enable a rapid response to any incident.

The Mara Conservancy helped support a workshop on developing a "working partnership to fight wildlife crime in the Mara/Serengeti ecosystem" in Narok on the 26th and 27th. The workshop was organized by BEAN (Bushmeat-Free Eastern Africa Network) and funded by US Fish & Wildlife, the Mara Conservancy, Care for the Wild, Mara Siria Camp and *Beyond*.

The aim of the workshop was to increase awareness on the value of wildlife, the effect of poaching on

wildlife populations and improve dialogue between wildlife managers, the authorities and the judicial system. The workshop was well attended, with representation from Tanzanian National Parks, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the Uganda Wildlife Authority, the Mara Conservancy, Mara North Conservancy, the Anne Kent-Taylor Fund/Care for the Wild, Police prosecutors and the Senior Resident Magistrate, Kilgoris.

Wildlife

The cheetah with three cubs on the border was seen quite frequently. "Sita" started to leave her cubs, they are 19 months old; there were times when she left them for a few days and then rejoined them and by the 9th, one of the cubs seemed to have

left her for good and a few days later they all disappeared – possibly across the river.

A lioness with two cubs near the Purungat picnic trees was seen frequently, sometimes the pride would take over the picnic site and lie on the tables. The lioness lost one of the cubs towards the end of the month.

Game viewing in the Triangle was excellent in March, lions were seen every day, the rhino were very visible and we had some excellent leopard sightings. Many people were able to see the “Big Five”: lion, leopard, elephant, buffalo and rhino in a single game drive.

The exceptional rains that we have experienced since November 2009 will almost certainly mean that the wildebeest have ample food this year. This is likely to translate into a late and possibly weak migration. Unless the rains stop early there is a chance that the migration will not arrive in the Mara before the end of July or early August.

Research

The Swedish students returned for two weeks to continue with their various research projects. We are particularly interested in regeneration of *Balanites* trees and have been monitoring the growth of some trees for over five years. Saplings that have been protected from wildlife and were also protected from insects for one or two years are doing much better than the controls and I look forward to seeing the results. Insects seem to have a major impact and most of the saplings had no leaves, as was the case with many mature trees. Some of the protected saplings are over a metre in height; the controls have shown no significant growth in five years.

Community

We have been having a problem with illegal grazing. There is no



Lions near Mogoro.

Photograph taken by Asst. Warden Joseph Kimojino.

reason why people should graze their cattle in the Triangle – there has been excellent rain – except for the fact that people living along the escarpment have given too much of their land over to agriculture. There is a considerable amount of cultivation all along the South Western third of the escarpment and there is no longer any space for livestock.

The competition for resources is a major issue, protected areas are seen as underutilized and as more land is turned over to agriculture so more pressure is put on conservation areas. This is a major issue in National Parks (KWS are discussing drastic measures to try and control illegal grazing – such measures may include confiscating 50% of a person’s herd). Parts of the Narok side of the Masai Mara National Reserve have been overrun with cattle and concessions made to the locals during the last drought have now been accepted as the norm.

Thousands of cattle along the Talek River continue to graze in the Reserve, despite the fact that there has been excellent rain in the region and there is no shortage of grass. The formation of conservancies, excellent as they are, is bound to exacerbate the problem in the short-term. The conservancies all have

limitations on livestock numbers and distribution – people are being forced to take their livestock elsewhere and the Reserve seems to be the obvious choice. In the long-term people will have to keep fewer, and hopefully better quality, cattle. This is happening in some areas in Trans Mara, some Maasai with small farms are only keeping a few “high grade” cattle. However, we have a long way to go in rangelands that form the best wildlife areas.

Dogs

Morani picked up a fairly heavy worm infestation; both dogs were treated on the 25th.

Staff

Mr Samson Lenjirr attended the International Travel Fair in Berlin. He was accompanied by senior Council officers including the Clerk, Chairman, Treasurer and Chairman of the Game Committee.

One of the Senior Rangers, Johnson Leiyen, was returned to the Council on the 5th for gross misconduct. Mr Leiyen had received two other written warnings in the space of five months for lesser offences.

The law enforcement workshop in Narok highlighted the need for us to

Staff cont.

do some in-house training on the Wildlife Act, the procedures to be followed and the statements that need to be written in order to maximise sentencing for poachers. In the past we have tended to pass the responsibility onto the Police to ensure a conviction. We will conduct this training in the next few months.

Tourism

The number of visitors dropped dramatically in March; this is normal for this time of year and we will see no significant increase until June or July.

The Ministry of Tourism conducted an audit of all camps and lodges in the Mara ecosystem. This was in response to a lot of negative press, both locally and internationally, that the Mara was overrun with camps, many of them considered illegal. The Ministry said that they will close all camps deemed to be illegal and we are awaiting the results of the audit. We believe that almost all the camps in Trans Mara have the required licences but the ruling may have a major impact on the Narok side of the Reserve.

We have started our evaluation for the most responsible guide in the Triangle and the assessors – two different couples - should be through by the end of April. We were disappointed to see that the nominated driver from Serena was deployed elsewhere on the day the assessors were due to go with him.

Security

A total of 14 poachers and one cattle thief were arrested in March. 21 wire snares were recovered. Total arrests for poaching or stock-theft are now 1,387.

Seven cattle were stolen on night of 1st from Kawai. The theft was not discovered until 6.00 am, when the owner went to check on his cattle. We immediately received a report

and the rangers were mobilised. Six cattle were recovered and one of the thieves arrested in an area known as “Korongo ya Ndege”, a place we had recovered cattle in the past, with aircraft assistance. The thieves had hidden the cattle in a valley on the escarpment and the others had gone to get cattle to mix them with – by mixing them, they would not attract attention in the villages. The seventh cow had been slaughtered and butchered on route, as it had been unable to keep up. Cattle theft is treated as a serious crime; the cattle rustler was prosecuted and jailed for six years.

Our rangers arrested two, of three, poachers on the 5th. The poachers were on their way to camp in the Triangle when arrested near “Maji ya Bett” on the Kenya/Tanzanian border. They had three dogs with them and would have been targeting warthog.

Our Tanzanian counterparts from Lemai saw a large group of poachers near the Lemai swamp on the 8th but unfortunately they escaped. The Tanzanians did find one dead topi and one dead impala in snares. Our rangers from Ngairo set up an ambush in the same area that night and managed to arrest two people as they came in to set snares at 9.00. Six snares were recovered before the poachers were able to set them.

The Iseiya rangers arrested three people on the 11th near Kasarani in the Lemai Wedge, the three were on their way to hunt in the Park and had five wire snares.

The Ooloolo Rangers, with their counterparts from the Anne-Kent Taylor/Care for the Wild scouts, arrested two people near Kichwa Tembo on the 15th. The two were reported by a Kichwa driver and were found to be carrying food, hoes and machetes – it would appear that they were on their way to camp in the Triangle and hunt warthogs near the Mara River.

A routine patrol on the 17th came across some wire snares near Kasarani, in the Lemai Wedge. An ambush was set up that night but no one returned to check the snares; ten were recovered.

The Iseiya and Ngairo-are rangers set out on a twenty-four hour patrol on the 19th. They met up in an area known as “Sampura”, in the Lemai Wedge before lunch and then set up an observation point until dark. After dark the patrol moved into an ambush position and on the third watch (midnight to three am) the rangers observed poacher activity. They closed in on the poachers and managed to arrest three people. The three were part of a much larger group of fourteen who had already killed 37 Thompson’s gazelle, three impala and two dik dik. The rangers then set up another ambush along a route that they suspected the remaining poachers would use and managed to arrest two more people at seven am.

A large group of poachers, estimated at around fifty, entered the Lemai Wedge on the night of the 24th. Unfortunately, our rangers had set up an ambush in a different area that night and the poachers managed to kill a large number of animals and escape.

Revenue & Accounts

Deloitte advertised for the role of revenue collector for the Mara Triangle and received for expressions of interest. A presentation was made on the 25th to all four contenders on the Mara Triangle and our expectations from a revenue collector. They now have until the 14th April to submit a comprehensive Tender document, these will be short-listed and we expect to review the two best bids before the end of April and award a contract by the end of the Month. The successful candidate will be given one month to mobilise.

Our accounts for the first three quarters of the financial year place

Revenue & Accounts

us in a reasonably healthy financial situation – certainly strong enough for us to manage the next three “Low season” months where expenditure always exceeds income. A short summary of income and expenditure shown below gives an indication of the cash flow situation as at the end of February.

The major variances in the accounts relate to Kichwa Tembo Income and an increase in Park entrance fees. For Kichwa Tembo: this was money advanced to the Conservancy by *£ Beyond* and is being offset at US\$ 10 per client visiting the Triangle. The advance will be cleared at the end of this financial year. Thereafter, we will charge on a monthly basis. Park

entrance was better than expected and there was no significant drop in visitor numbers as a result of the increase in Park entrance fees. There was a drop in expected balloon revenue; Musiara Ltd still pay the old rates and have not agreed to pay the gazetted rate of US\$ 40 per client. Our total revenue would have been much higher if Little Governors clients were paying Trans Mara and not Narok County Council.

Our staff costs were higher than expected – mainly as a result of paying allowances for ambushes and arrests. Vehicle costs and professional fees were slightly higher than budget, for the most part we are managing to operate within budget.

	Actual	Budget
Income		
Kichwa Tembo	10,357,258	2,985,840
Assets Disposal	1,015,793	
Balloon Revenue	4,178,178	6,260,000
Donations	3,490,497	2,160,000
Gate sales	1,389,761	800,000
Park entrance fees	91,694,085	68,548,919
Vehicle Revenue	4,344,480	3,427,446
Total Income	116,470,052	84,182,205
Less Direct Costs	(21,591,299)	(9,949,647)
Gross Margin	94,878,753	74,232,558
Expenses		
Operating Expenses	(77,789,256)	(66,277,207)
Operating Surplus	17,089,498	7,955,351
Finance Charges	(1,727,333)	(3,033,410)
Net Income	15,362,165	4,921,941

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of February 2010.	Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
		US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	207,029.00	1,735,460.00	-	959,063.90	
Non-ticket sales	1,425.00	452,300.00			
Balance for Distribution	208,454.00	2,187,760.00	-	959,063.90	
Distributed					
Trans Mara County Council	75,314.19	873,530.60	-	527,485.15	
Group Ranches	39,335.51	329,737.40			
Sub-total	114,649.70	1,203,268.00	-	527,485.15	
Mara Conservancy	93,804.30	984,492.00	-	431,578.76	

Report on Focus for March

Start Tender for Revenue Collection	Started.
Draft Annual Work Plan	Started.
Continue with Chief's Office	Ongoing.
Install more culverts	Installed Three.
Attend Law Enforcement Workshop	Done

Focus for April

1. Complete Revenue Tender and award a contract.
2. Start refresher training for all Ranger IIs.
3. Complete annual work plan.
4. Install more culverts; and
5. Attend Law Enforcement workshop.

