

MARA MONTHLY

SEPTEMBER 2010

Notch's sons continue to spread their strong territories in the Mara Triangle



MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR SEPTEMBER 2010

By Brian Heath

GENERAL

We had over two weeks of rain starting on the 4th. This rain was sufficient to turn all our burnt areas a brilliant green, filled some of the water courses - and attracted thousands of animals.

We had a demonstration of a very hi-tech airplane on the 1st. This airplane, a P-750 XSTOL manufactured in New Zealand and is configured as an Aerial Surveillance Platform, is equipped with very high-resolution cameras, infrared and thermal imaging equipment. It would be absolutely ideal for security and anti-poaching operations, both in daylight and at night, but costs millions of US\$.

We met with Deloitte on the 16th and again on the 20th to discuss a review of KAPS' performance after three months. Deloitte will do a progress report on progress with our new system. On the whole we have been very happy with our new ticketing system. There have been a few issues; happily most of them have been resolved.

Owen Newman and Amanda Barratt completed their filming for Disney's film "African Cats" on the 25th after two years of filming. Owen has managed to take some exceptional footage of lions in this time and we hope that the film will do justice to his amazing talent. Disney

donated a second-hand Suzuki Maruti, a lot of spares and other equipment – for this we are extremely grateful. We have no doubt that the film will be a great success – some of the footage is truly breathtaking.

WILDLIFE

The month started with very few wildebeest in the Triangle. However, that changed with the onset of the rains and by the 9th there were 200,000 – 300,000 wildebeest concentrated along the western third of the Triangle – mostly on the recent burn. Some of the wildebeest were crossing the river in unsuitable areas and over 1,000 died in a single crossing near Maji ya Ndege on the 8th. The Mugoro lions had a field day attacking wildebeest just after they crossed the river at cul-de-sac and were seen to make up to five kills a day. They used the opportunity to teach their eleven-month old cubs and on occasion would let a wildebeest escape after "practising" on it for up to an hour.

The pride male from the Oloololo pride was beaten up by four males (Notch's sons) on the 10th and suffered wounds along the spine and on the hind leg. He was treated by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) veterinarians the same day. We are not sure whether he will lose his pride – Notch's males already control three prides – the Serena/Rekeru and

Mugoro prides, as well as another pride that is based on the other side of the Mara River.

The vets also removed a wire snare from a large male giraffe on the same day – the giraffe was half-heartedly attacked by some sub-adult females while still recovering from the treatment, but he was too big for them to tackle.

Dr Dominic Mijele treated a female elephant with a wound on her right front leg on the 22nd – the wound was probably caused by a poisoned arrow.

A pregnant zebra was hit by a vehicle on the 23rd and died after three hours in the sun. We managed to determine that it was hit between 9.30 and 10.30 am and have been trying to identify the culprit. It is almost certainly the driver of a Toyota Land Cruiser – most probably in a hurry to Nairobi. We would appreciate anyone coming forward with more information.

A lioness was caught in a snare in the Lemai Wedge – our Tanzanian counterparts found the snared lioness and her consort – both had been killed and skinned by the wa Kuria. The male had stayed with the female and had been speared for his devotion. The poachers were arrested, together with their skins.

RESEARCH

Dr Eberhard Zeyhle of AMREF in Kenya has been conducting research on Cystic *Echinococcosis* in Sub Saharan Africa and was accompanied by Dr Dominic Mijele from the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). They took samples from dead wildebeest, all from animals that had drowned in crossings. They found that 10/100 (10%) of the samples contained cystic lesions in the lungs or liver. Nineteen percent of the samples had tape worm cysts *Cysticerci* (*C. Bovis*) in the heart muscle and diaphragm. Other parasites found included: *Taenia hydatigena* in seven percent of the samples and *Fasciola gigantica* in three percent of the samples.

All the above have an economic impact in domestic livestock and *Echinococcosis* - Hydatid disease - can potentially be a fatal disease in humans. Other samples taken by the researchers showed a prevalence in domestic stock 14% of the goats and 41.6% of sheep samples were positive; 12.6% of the cattle from sample at the Kiserian slaughterhouse were also positive. A study done on the human population around Sekenani (279 people aged between 4 months to 70 years) were negative for Hydatid disease. However, an earlier sample of people from around Kichwa Tembo had 4 positives out of a sample of 538. Although only 0.7%, it does indicate that Hydatid disease does occur in the human population in the Mara region.

This is extremely interesting, and practical, research and we look forward to assisting further. At present we are collecting lion scats for analysis by the same researchers – to see the link between these parasites, the predators and herbivores.

DOGS

Morani was used to track armed robbers, who shot and injured a driver on the escarpment on the 16th. The robbers had tried to hi-jack a truck carrying maize near Kerengani, they shot the driver in the hand but he managed to escape.

Morani and the rangers followed tracks until dark in very thick forest before running out of daylight.

There is a good chance that Anna, the new dog, is pregnant.

STAFF

Mr Samson Lenjirr, Chief Park Warden, was transferred to Samburu, in the same capacity; by Government. Mr Lenjirr is a Civil Servant, appointed by the Public Service Commission and can be transferred by the Ministry of Local Government.

Three Council revenue clerks transferred back to the Council at the beginning of September. They were replaced by three new clerks on the 21st.

Mr William Deed started his annual leave, he is due back at the end of October.

TOURISM

The Reserve continued to be extremely full, though there was a slight drop in visitor numbers from the peak in August. There were fewer complaints about bad behaviour and we certainly gave out fewer fines. However, the high season continues to highlight the best and worst of the Mara. The best – the phenomenal game viewing; for those who were privileged to be in the Mara in early September – the crossings were amazing and the lion action incredible. The worst – the overcrowding and appalling behaviour at crossings, and near predators; especially if they were hunting.

We get a great deal of pressure to deal with errant guides and drivers – when we do, we face criticism for being too harsh or selective in who we target for discipline. We get clients who complain bitterly that their guide – “the best in Africa” has been fined for a breach of the rules. Some of the criticism we received had racial overtones – such as: we were only fining local drivers and leaving expatriate drivers. Our Warden and his rangers do an incredible job at trying to keep some semblance of order. They should be praised and not slated for the work they do.

This brings me to the crux of the matter. It is time that the tourism industry, and the associations that represent the industry, took some responsibility for their drivers and guides. The industry can not continue to allow “cowboy” guides to operate; those who have no interest in the animals and environment from which they are earning their living. Both guides and their clients need to be educated on the importance of respecting and protecting the most amazing wildlife area in the World – the Mara. A major Government campaign to create awareness on responsible tourism would be money well spent. If this does not happen we will be forced to use pricing to restrict visitor numbers – maybe US\$ 200 for a Park entrance ticket will begin to have some impact.

SECURITY

A total of 21 poachers were arrested during the month – this brings our total to 1,505 since June 2001, an average of over 13 poachers every month for over nine years. One more armed robber was also arrested, as was one stock thief – one other stock thief was killed by his pursers. At least 430 snares were collected.

We arrested a third member of the gang that robbed, wounded and killed visitors in River Camp in late July, on the 8th September in Kehancha. The suspect, named Joel Maruwa, was one of the unarmed members of the gang; four had weapons and three were unarmed. He was arrested in a combined operation with Kilgoris policemen at 6.00 am once we had ascertained where he was sleeping. The operation nearly aborted, when we arrested the wrong person, earlier in the evening (a case of mistaken identity) – a mob gathered and the police had to intervene in order to restore calm.

The Ngiro-are rangers arrested two people at Ngira, near Mlima Hotel in the Serengeti, on the other side of the river, on the 3rd. The two were arrested at around 7.30 pm, as they were coming in to camp. They had 12 wire snares and enough food for a few days.

The Ngiro-are rangers collected 76 wire snares along the escarpment – between Kinyangaga and Kasarani on the 7th. Two wildebeest were found dead in the snares.

The Ngiro-are rangers arrested one, of six, people on the night of the 9th near Kokamange, in the Lemai Wedge. He was arrested as they came in to check their snares – 12 had been found near the Ngiro-are swamp in the morning and another 67 had been found in the afternoon.

Our rangers combined forces with their Tanzanian counterparts on a two-day patrol across the Mara River in the Ngira/Mlima Hotel/Nzozzo areas. They arrested five, of 24 people at 8.30 on the night of the 11th. It was interesting that there were no wire snares – the poachers said that they intended to drive animals into small ravines and water-courses and then kill them with machetes and spears. The rangers reported a number of animals with deep gashes on their backs and legs – ones that escaped after being hacked. The following day the rangers came across a number of old poacher camps but did not find anyone. However, they did find the carcasses of three elephants that had obviously been poached over a period of two or three months. Three poachers were ambushed on the night 12th but managed to escape.

Three people were arrested near Kasarani, in the Lemai Wedge at 10.15 pm on the night of the 17th. The following morning four more poachers were arrested by the Ngiro-are team. They were entering the Lemai Wedge to set snares and 44 were recovered. On another day 33 snares were recovered.

The Ngiro-are rangers recovered 186 wire snares on the 22nd near Kasarani. That night the rangers set up an ambush in that area and managed to arrest 1 person at midnight – unfortunately 18 escaped. Seven more snares were recovered. It is interesting, the poachers were carrying snares in case their other ones had been discovered and confiscated. They would have just set new ones, driven wildebeest into the snares and returned home.

The Iseiya team recovered a few snares, twos and threes, and rescued one wildebeest on their patrols along the Mara River, this side of Mlima Hotel. On one occasion they came across three poachers butchering wildebeest but

the poachers managed to swim across the river and escape.

Six cattle were stolen from Saruni Leshan's homestead on the escarpment on the night of the 23rd; Saruni is a driver with the Conservancy. The stock thieves were followed and the cattle recovered near the big fig tree on the way to Ngiro-are at 5.45 am. The pursuers killed one of the thieves, and another one was arrested on the 24th. The thieves had originally intended to hunt hippo along the river and had camped very close to Little Governor's Camp for two nights – we had just patrolled that area the day they arrived. There was another attempted stock-theft on the night of the 26th. The thieves fired three shots when stealing the cattle. The cattle were recovered after about two hours but the thieves managed to escape.

The Ngiro-are team collected 53 wire snares on the 27th; these snares were collected in three main areas of the Lemai Wedge. This was on top of another 33 snares collected the day before.

Two staff from Little Governor's Camp were arrested in Lolgorien by the Kenya Wildlife Service for being in possession of a lion skin, a leopard skin and 11 warthog tusks. They pleaded not guilty and have been released on bail. We understand that they have been dismissed by their employer.

17 wire snares were recovered in the Lemai Wedge on the 28th. The Ngiro-are rangers arrested five poachers on the night of the 30th along the Mara River, near the Daraja Mbili/Mara River junction. The five were part of a larger group of 20 people, the other 15 swam across the river.

REVENUE AND ACCOUNTS

Our Gate revenue has been slightly higher in 2010 than in the same period for 2009; made up largely from a significant increase in June revenue. This was the result of a 50% increase in Park fees instituted in July 2009. July and August revenue was slightly lower than for the same period last year – a slightly surprising result, given that the camps and lodgers were all full during this period. This does indicate, that with our current bed capacity and entrance fees, we have reached our maximum expected revenue for this time of year.



| Month | US\$ | | | Ksh | | |
|--------------|----------------|------------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| | 2009 | 2010 | Difference | 2009 | 2010 | Difference |
| June | 99,234 | 211,593 | 112,359 | 1,414,970 | 2,591,705 | 1,076,735 |
| July | 429,246 | 421,127 | -8,119 | 3,828,481 | 4,331,185 | 502,704 |
| August | 405,081 | 396,288 | -8,793 | 6,303,000 | 5,773,490 | -529,510 |
| TOTAL | 935,570 | 1,031,018 | 95,447 | 11,548,460 | 12,098,390 | 1,049,929 |

REVENUE COLLECTED & DISTRIBUTED FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 2010

| Collected | Gate Revenue | | Balloon Revenue | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| | US\$ | Ksh | US\$ | KSH |
| Ticket sales | 396,288.00 | 4,002,450.00 | - | 1,105,167.20 |
| Non-ticket sales | - | 1,771,040.00 | | |
| Balance for Distribution | 396,288.00 | 5,773,490.00 | - | 1,105,167.20 |
| Distributed | | | | |
| Trans Mara County Council | 142,663.68 | 2,414,954.00 | - | 607,841.96 |
| Group Ranches | 75,294.72 | 760,465.50 | | |
| Sub-total | 217,958.40 | 3,175,419.50 | - | 607,841.96 |
| Mara Conservancy | 178,329.60 | 2,598,070.50 | - | 497,325.24 |

DEVELOPMENT

- We managed to re-surface the worst sections of the main road between Oloololo Gate and Mara Serena and also to patch up some potholes that were appearing along the river road.
- We graded the road down to Serena’s pumping station along the river.
- We collected our new Suzuki Maruti – Cheetah II and to sell our old Land Cruiser for Ksh 1.2 million.
- We made blocks for the proposed toilets at the hippo pools.
- We have purchased supplies for a new kitchen and mess at Oloololo Gate and the toilets. Work started on the new kitchen towards the end of the month.
- We repaired buildings at Iseiya.
- We used the back-hoe to open up blocked culverts.

REPORT ON FOCUS ON SEPTEMBER

| | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Collect new Suzuki and fit with radio and tracking device. Sell Cheetah II | Done |
| Fit radio and tracking device in new land Cruiser. Sell old Land Cruiser | Done |
| Work on main road to Oloololo | Worst sections re-gravelled |
| Start work on new road from Sankuria to Little Governors | Done |
| Install Culverts | Not done |
| Start on kitchen and mess at Oloololo Gate | Started |
| Get environment impact assessment on toilets and platform at the hippo pools | Deferred |
| Continue with follow-up on armed robbers | Ongoing |

FOCUS FOR OCTOBER

- Continue work on kitchen and mess at Oloololo;
- Hold Board meeting and review Audited accounts;
- Complete sale of old Suzuki Maruti; and
- Patch up damaged sections of road.
- Continue work on kitchen and mess at Oloololo;
- Hold Board meeting and review Audited accounts;
- Complete sale of old Suzuki Maruti; and
- Patch up damaged sections of road.



Mara Conservancy
P O Box 63457-000619
NAIROBI
Tel: (02) 3749 632
Fax: (02) 3749 636

<http://www.maratriangle.org>