

# MONTHLY REPORT

FEBRUARY 2011

Leopard in a tree with kill.



## MARA CONSERVANCY CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT FOR FEBRUARY 2011

By Brian Heath

### GENERAL

There was a heavy storm on the 1<sup>st</sup> that was followed by a massive die-off of fish near the confluence of the Mara River and a stream from Kirindon. It would appear that every fish died in a section of the river upstream from Mara Rianta – certainly tens of thousands of fish died – including catfish of up to 10kg in weight. We took samples and sent them to different laboratories for analysis. We have had periodic die-offs in the past but nothing on this scale. We

had one other day of rain in the middle of the month – several hours of rain that started at midnight and continued until 9.00 the following morning. Apart from these two storms February was characterized by hot, sunny days – giving us one of the driest and hottest months in years.

Mr Samuel Kahiga, Managing Director of KAPS, and Charles Gitau, our Finance and Administration manager, spent some time in the Triangle on the 17-18<sup>th</sup>, to review progress on the

revenue collection system. We had noted a number of possible loopholes in the system and had a series of meetings aimed at streamlining the system and closing any gaps. We expect to see the changes in the first week of March.

A meeting was held at Little Governor's Camp to try and resolve the issue of payment of Park Fees for visitors to Little Governor's. Most visitors now pay Narok County Council the Park Fee. Trans Mara County Council sent a very strong team to the

**GENERAL CONT.**

meeting. Unfortunately Narok County Council did not send sufficiently senior people to resolve the issue – a further meeting will have to be held.

**WILDLIFE**

Dr Dominic Mijele darted a young elephant on the 5<sup>th</sup> to check it for Herpes viruses that are specific to elephant. This is part of a study being conducted by Virginia Parsons, in association with Princeton University and John Hopkins Hospital, on Herpes in different elephant populations throughout the World. They have already taken samples from India, Botswana and Samburu, in Kenya.

Zebra started returning to the Triangle towards the end of the month – an indication of how dry it has been elsewhere in the Mara.

The Kichwa pride lost four, of their fourteen, cubs in the middle of the month – we don't know why.

Leopard sightings were excellent throughout the month – many visitors to the Mara Triangle were fortunate and were able to see the “Big Five” in a single game drive.

**RESEARCH**

A paper published in Oryx 45(1) pp 20-27 “Population trend and distribution of the Vulnerable common hippopotamus *Hippopotamus amphibious* in the Mara Region of Kenya” by Kanga E, Ogutu J O, Ollif H and Santema P, counted 4,170 hippo in the Maasai Mara National Reserve and

**Olpunyata and her Calf.**

Photograph taken by Asst. Warden Joshua Naiguran.

adjoining Group Ranches. Although there was no significant increase in the Reserve between 1980 and 2006 there had been a massive increase of 359.4% in the main tributaries and the Mara River outside the Reserve. The overall density was 26.9 hippo per Km<sup>-1</sup> of river. The team counted 1,924 hippo along 53.3 km the Mara River portion of the Reserve in 2006 – up from 738 in 1974 but slightly down from 1,990 along 74.2 km of River (Karstad, 1984).

**DOGS**

Three of the puppies did not make the grade as tracking dogs and were to be sold as pets. The first two went on the 20<sup>th</sup> – both to excellent homes.

The operation on the 15<sup>th</sup> highlighted some areas that required additional work by the dogs, their handlers and the rangers. We have started a training regime aimed at

rectifying these minor, but important, deficiencies.

**STAFF**

We held staff welfare meetings on the 16 – 17<sup>th</sup>.

We paid arrears to the remaining staff – the whole exercise cost the Conservancy Ksh 6,000,000 (US\$ 75,000), not to mention the added monthly cost of the increased salaries.

**TOURISM**

Tourist numbers were reasonable, though not exceptional, for February. The tourism industry is reporting good bookings for the next high season and, barring any unforeseen problems we expect 2011 to be slightly better than 2010.

We were to institute increased “Conservation” fees from the 1<sup>st</sup> March. This increase has now been put off until the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011.

## SECURITY

The Ngiro-are rangers arrested seven poachers between the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> – all of them near Kokamange, on a major route into the Lemai Wedge from Masanga. In the first incident three, of seven, people were arrested at 8.00 pm as they were heading towards Nyakita Pembe. On the second occasion two people were arrested in the same area at 4.00 am on the night of the 12<sup>th</sup> – they were on their way to set wire snares and five were recovered. Two more people were arrested on the night of the 16<sup>th</sup>.

During the same period, the rangers missed two groups of poachers. The Iseiya team came across two poachers along the river, near Mlima Hotel, on the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup>. The two crossed the river and managed to escape into the darkness. A routine patrol through the Island, upstream from Iseiya, came across a poachers' camp on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately the poachers heard our rangers as they crossed the river and managed to escape – four spears, blankets, food and utensils were recovered and the meat from one young hippo that had been killed was destroyed. We spent the whole day trying to track the poachers, estimated at between 6-8, with the dogs but were unsuccessful.



**Giraffes stay out of the sweltering heat.**  
Photograph taken by Warden of Tourism,  
Joseph Kimojino.

Two people were arrested late in the evening of the 18<sup>th</sup> as they entered the Lemai Wedge, near Kokamange. They were part of a group of four who were heading towards Daraja Mbili with spears and dogs. They had not yet started hunting.

The Ngiro-are rangers arrested one person on one of the main routes, the Masanga route, into the Lemai Wedge on the 21<sup>st</sup> at 6.00 pm. He was alone.

A combined Mara Conservancy/ Care for the Wild team arrested two people, at Olesheti, on the escarpment on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. One was a woman, found with game meat – the man had meat and two wire snares.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> we received a report that a woman had been abducted near Logorien the previous evening. The kidnapper wanted a ransom of Ksh 200,000 for her release. We immediately deployed the Ngiro-are team with Morani – one of the tracker dogs. The rangers found the woman in a forest, tied to a tree and blindfolded. She had been raped but was able to identify her kidnapper. He was arrested a day later by the police and members of the community.

One of five tame white rhino was killed by poachers on the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> – at 1.00 am, as the rhino slept in their pens. Her horns were taken and she was found to be 12 months pregnant. These rhino are based on the Ol Choro Oroua Conservancy and have been a huge attraction to people staying in the Conservation areas within the greater Mara. The Mara Conservancy immediately sent the dog team and rangers to try and locate the poachers, arriving on the

scene by 4.00 am – we were joined by a large contingent from the Kenya Wildlife Service, the directors and landowners from Ol Choro, the police and rangers from Narok County Council. The poachers have not been apprehended, although there are one or two leads.

## REVENUE & ACCOUNTS

All the camps and lodges paid for their resident vehicles. Revenue for February should be higher than for December and January. It will drop again in March, April and May – with April and May being the 'height' of the low season.

Expenditure tends to exceed revenue in these low season months and we have to rely on reserves built up in the high season to make ends meet.

## DEVELOPMENT

We completed resurfacing the road into the main hippo pools and completed a public toilet at the site. We also made a pathway into the hippo pools and will place a railing at the viewing point.

We graded the new road from Sankuriai to Little Governor's and changed the alignment over the Sabaringo lugga.

We purchased 22 new culvert rings for use on the new road and installed two sets of culverts on the new road to Little Governor's.

We opened up drainage ditches on the main Mara Serena to Oloololo Road.

We graded the main road from Oloololo Gate to Little Governor's Camp.

**DEVELOPMENT CONT.**

We received samples of the new signs that we want to install at the gates and airstrips to indicate park fees and park rules. We are looking

for an attractive alternative to the hardwood that is so prevalent in Kenyan signage, despite its scarcity.

## Revenue collected and distributed for the month of January 2011

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	166,640.00	1,524,685.00	-	1,588,800.00
Non-ticket sales	23,165.00	300,100.00		
<b>Balance for Distribution</b>	<b>189,805.00</b>	<b>1,824,785.00</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,588,800.00</b>
<b>Distributed</b>				
Trans Mara County Council	72,731.15	713,941.60	-	873,840.00
Group Ranches	31,661.60	289,690.15		
<b>Sub-total</b>	<b>104,392.75</b>	<b>1,003,631.75</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>873,840.00</b>
<b>Mara Conservancy</b>	<b>85,412.25</b>	<b>821,153.25</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>714,960.00</b>

### Report on Focus for February

Hold Board Meeting on the 4th.	Done
Work on toilets at Hippo Pools.	Completed.
Continue on spot repairs of the lower road to Purungat.	Done.
Start six-month evaluation of KAPS	Started
Start upgrading the new road from Sankuriai to Little Governors Camp.	Completed.

### Focus for March

1. Start road works on drift and swampy sections of the new Sankuriai - little Governors' road using the Japanese sand-bag technique.
2. Complete six-month evaluation of KAPS.
3. Resurface threshold on Serena Airstrip.
4. Install three more culverts.
5. Complete railing around hippo viewing point.

