

Mara Conservancy

Chief Executive's report for the month of February 2008

General

The security crisis precipitated by the contested election results eased as the two main parties began negotiating a political settlement under the chairmanship of Dr Koffi Annan and his committee of eminent persons. There was a breakthrough right at the end of the month and both President Kibaki and Raila Odinga signed an agreement that will pave the way for the creation of positions for Prime Minister and two deputy Prime Ministers. This will hopefully ease tensions and lead to an acceptable coalition Government.

The rains continued sporadically throughout the first three weeks in February, with heavy, but isolated, thunderstorms during the first ten days. We then had a week of very heavy and widespread rain that re-charged the springs and filled the watercourses.

The Chief Executive held a number of meetings with WildlifeDirect on fund-raising and Mr William Deed came down on the 17th to assist us in blogging. William will be funded by WildlifeDirect and stay with us for six months to assist in fund raising.

The Chief Executive met with the consultants on the 10 year management plan, together with the head of the African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), Dr Helen Gichohi and Mr Allan Earnshaw on the 19th to discuss tourism development in the Masai Mara. This was followed up with a Tourism sector meeting on the 28th in Nairobi. We also held a Core Planning Team meeting for the plan on the same day.

We had a team from National geographic to film a short clip on the Mara Conservancy and the effect of civil unrest on tourism and revenue. They were here between the 19th and 21st. We also had a correspondent from the BBC, from the 20th to 22nd, to film a short news-clip on the impact of reduced tourism on local individuals and the community as a whole.

A Serena vehicle overturned near "Egyptian goose" on the night of the 20th, at 11.30 pm, after a trip to Nairobi. The driver was probably speeding in the reserve and the accident was not discovered until the following morning. Fortunately the driver was not seriously injured.

The Clerk to Trans Mara County Council, Mr Peter Muringe, has been transferred to Marsabit and will be replaced by Mr W Wamblwa. The handing over will take place at the beginning of March.

Wildlife

A female elephant with two calves was found with an injured foot near Little Governor's on the 10th – this happened to be the same elephant that had fallen into the pit at Little Governor's in December; it is very distinctive with a cut-off trunk. We called in the KWS vet, who just happened to be treating another elephant near Main Governors and he was able to come straight over. He darted the elephant and cleaned out the wound, it was about 10 inches (25 cms) deep and either caused by a spear or a sharp object in the Governor's pit. Governor's have worked hard to fence off and cover their pits – so we should not have a repeat. The elephant will probably require a follow-up treatment in early March, as the swelling is still pronounced and the wound infected.

Most the remaining zebra moved North during the month, returning to the Loita Plains.

The cheetah female with four young cubs lost two of her cubs on the night of the 17th, presumably to other predators.

Mr Michel Denis-Huot, a wildlife photographer, witnessed male hippo killing a newborn hippo calf. The calf was first attacked by an immature male and then finally killed by an adult bull.

A routine patrol on the 21st came across a freshly killed lioness, killed by a warthog that she had ambushed in its hole. The warthog was still in the hole – one of its tusks had pierced the lioness' jugular vein and then broken off.

One injured lioness was found towards the end of the month, we will keep an eye on it until a veterinarian can come down and treat it, hopefully in around 3rd March.

Staff

We retired Mr Dennis Kosisi. Kosisi has been chronically ill for some time and is no longer able to carry out his duties.

Mr Charles Gitau lost his younger brother – our commiserations to Charles and his family.

Tourism

February has been another disastrous month for tourist visitations. There was a short period in the middle of the month when people began to return and it looked as if the situation might be salvaged to some extent. However, the stand-off between the two main political parties and renewed threats of mass action throughout most of February meant that tourists are still very reluctant to visit. We may be lucky and maintain the expected 30% of our original estimates for the coming months but can not foresee any significant improvement in tourist visitations before July.

Security

Ten poachers were arrested during February, 9 of them were Tanzanians and the tenth a Luo poacher who had been arrested before. This brings the total to 1,013 poachers arrested since June 2001.

The Ngiro-are team arrested one poacher on the evening of the 9th. He was one of three people entering the Lemai Wedge to hunt along the escarpment near Kinyangaga.

Some meat was found stashed in a tree near Ol Kurruk by a routine patrol between the community scouts and our rangers on the 15th. The following day we mounted a patrol in the Sankuria forest and arrested one Luo poacher, he had been in the forest for six days and had killed a zebra and a waterbuck. Three wire snares were recovered.

The Ngiro-are team arrested two wa Kuria poachers on the 19th as they were traversing the Lemai Wedge, on their way to hunt hippo along the Mara River. They informed us that they had met with another group of poachers, also on their way to hunt hippo on the Narok side of the river. The following day we mounted a joint patrol along the Narok side of the river but found no poacher activity.

The Ngiro-are team arrested one poacher as he and his companion came down the escarpment to hunt in the Lemai Wedge late in the evening of the 22nd. They recovered four wire snares.

The Ngiro-are team were asked to assist the rangers from Kinyangaga on the 24th. The rangers had confiscated some wa Kuria cattle for illegal grazing in the Lemai Wedge and were taking them to Kinyangaga when they were accosted by an irate mob of wa Kuria, trying to recover their cattle. The situation became tense, with arrows and bullets fired at the rangers. Our rangers assisted in getting the cattle into the Kinyangaga compound and then withdrew. The wa Kuria continued firing into the compound. The Tanzanian rangers managed to apprehend one person with a firearm, only to discover that he was a policeman from the local village.

The Ngiro-are rangers found a temporary poacher's camp at 9.00 am on the 25th in a water-course between Ol Dono Nasipa and Konyoike – about half a kilometre into Tanzania. The five poachers

were the group we had been looking for on the 19th on the Narok side of the river. They had camped upstream from the search area, had killed one hippo and were on their way home after drying the meat. All five were arrested, four by the Ngiro-are team and the fifth after they were joined by the Serena rangers. Three wire snares and three heavy spears were recovered.

Revenue and Accounts

In January we had to re-calculate our budget, based on possibly receiving only 30% of our anticipated revenue. Our January Profit and Loss account indicated that we were up by 2% on Park entrance fees – at Ksh 2.396 million against our projection of Ksh 2.350 million. Our overall income was up by 90%, to Ksh 4.047 million, because of balloon royalties from TransWorld and Mara Balloon Safaris. Our overall expenditure was up by 45% - Ksh 5.623 million against Ksh 3.881 million - on our revised budget, leaving us with a shortfall of Ksh 1.576 million (US\$ 22,500 at the current rate of exchange). The major items making up this over expenditure included: Purchase of maps and promotional materials Ksh 205,000; Administration costs Ksh 829,000; depreciation on the Grader @ Ksh 1.2 million; Secretarial services @ Ksh 71,000 and security expenses @ Ksh 197,000. Although we implemented most of our cost-cutting measures in January the above were incurred prior to revising the budget. We anticipate being able to operate closer to budget in February.

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of January 2008

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	69,451.00	343,650.00	-	1,128,817.70
Non-ticket sales	22,425.00	2,033,850.00		
Balance for Distribution	91,876.00	2,377,500.00	-	1,128,817.70
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	37,336.11	1,242,331.50	-	620,849.74
Group Ranches	13,195.69	65,293.50		
Sub-total	50,531.80	1,307,625.00	-	620,849.74
Mara Conservancy	41,344.20	1,069,875.00	-	507,967.97

We have been very fortunate in receiving support to meet our projected shortfall and would like to thank the following for their support. I would particularly like to single out Dr. Asuka Takita for her support; she has raised US\$ 29,000 in three weeks through her articles and blog for the Mara Conservancy. This shows the power of the Internet in raising funds if the message is right.

Name	Amount (Ksh)	Description
CMC Motors Group	2,500,000	Value of free service and spares for vehicles and tractors to January 2009
Dr Asuka Takita	2,030,000	Donations through her blog
Anne Kent-Taylor Fund	1,050,000 ¹	Donation for community scouts and security allowances
WildlifeDirect	700,000	Donations through the blog
Care for the Wild	70,000	Donation for fuel for anti-harassment
Mr C Phelps and family	70,000	Donation for "Cheetah 1"
TOTAL	6,420,000	

¹ Calculated at the current rate of exchange Ksh 70:1 US\$

Development.

We burnt a small section between the Serena airstrip and Benjamin's Lugga in anticipation of the main rains in March and April. It rained the day we burnt and within days the whole area had turned green and attracted thousands of Thompson's gazelle.

We moved the barrier at Oloololo Gate to a place that closed off all access roads to the Reserve. This will enable us to monitor and restrict all traffic down to the Kichwa airstrip and Little Governor's after dark.

We did some light grading on the main roads after the heavy rains in the middle of the month.

The road team worked on the river road and filled in potholes on the other roads.

The grader moved to Ol Choro on the 24th and should complete it's work by around the 5th March.

We hired out our smaller tractor and trailer to Olonana Camp, to move soil excavated in the construction of a new constructed wetland.

Report on focus for February

Raise funding to meet our projected shortfall	Ongoing, recruited W Deed to assist
Implement all our cost-cutting measures	Done
Apply for Work permit for William Deed and provide accommodation	Done
Hire out grader to work on Ol Choro Oroua	Done, moved over on 24 th
Transfer staff in routine transfer	Done

Focus for March

- Complete grading on Ol Choro Oroua;
- Tractor and trailer to return on 13th March;
- Continue work on road along Mara River;
- Host Leslie Roach;
- Continue with fund raising to meet shortfall;
- Hold Board meeting.