

Mara Conservancy

Chief Executive's report for the month of March 2008

General

The first ten days of March was sunny and dry; the rains then started in earnest around the middle of the month and continued until the end. We had heavy and sustained rain for three weeks, flooding the Ol Punyatta plains along the river, making most other areas waterlogged and filling all the water courses.

The Chief Executive met with Jason King, regional Director of Conservation Corporation Africa (CCA), on the 1st to discuss Park entrance fees and a possible donation to the Conservancy to cover the current shortfall. We had a follow-up meeting on the 18th, between the Conservancy, Council and Oloololo Game Ranch to discuss this issue and any possible conflict between pre-existing agreements between the Council and Oloololo Game Ranch and our request to CCA for support. Our respective lawyers will review the documentation and respond within a month.

The Chief Executive met with Mr Grant Hopcraft from the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS) on the 8th to discuss possible support from FZS. We have prepared and submitted a short proposal to cover the cost of security operations in the area over the next three months. There has been no response to date.

Ms Leslie Roach visited between the 8-10th, she continues to be extremely supportive and has pledged over US\$ 50,000 to cover the current financial crisis. Leslie would like to support a visitor centre for the Mara and we have undertaken to set aside an amount equivalent to her donation from our operating budget towards the construction of a centre within three years.

We held a meeting of the ecological committee for the ten-year Management Plan on the 11th. This was followed up with a two-day meeting in the Mara on the 19-20th to discuss reserve management. The management plan is beginning to take shape, with advanced proposals on: zoning, research, collaboration between the two sides of the Reserve, Park entrance fees and tourism development. We are proposing a presentation to the executive committees of the two Councils on the 13th May in Narok.

The Clerk, Mr Peter Muringe, left to take up a new posting as Clerk to the County Council of Marsabit and was replaced by Mr Wambulwa Wilberforce Malanga, who came to Trans Mara from Kakamega.

Dr Asuka Takita has raised US\$ 51,000 for the Mara Conservancy in February and March through articles she has written, and through her Blog. This is an amazing achievement and we are most grateful for her support. Mr Will Deed and Joseph Kimojino have raised over US\$ 20,000 on the WildlifeDirect Blog in March. This is a great start and we hope that they will be able to raise more in April. You can view our daily blog on www.maratriangle.wildlifedirect.org

The Chief Executive met with Professor James Kiyapi, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Environment, on the 26th. He confirmed that an inter-ministerial committee had been formed to review development in tourist areas and also confirmed that the Clerk to Council and Chief Executive will be co-opted members of the committee when discussing Mara issues.

The Board meeting was held on the 28th, as scheduled. The Board agreed to accept CCA's offer of support of US\$ 200,000, but said that there should be no conditions placed on the release of these funds that might prejudice ongoing negotiations.

We hosted a Japanese film crew for a day and a half. They are making a documentary on Dr Asuka Takita and her work. They wanted to make a link between the dogs she is vaccinating for rabies and canine distemper, and the predator species that are potentially at risk from these diseases. The vaccination programme is going on in conjunction with the District Veterinary Officer, Dr Sarah Durant in the Serengeti and VSF Germany in Narok. Asuka has now vaccinated 3,200 dogs along the border with the Mara Triangle. In all, over 20,000 dogs have been vaccinated in areas surrounding the Mara/Serengeti ecosystem. We would like to thank Anne Kent-Taylor for covering the costs of this vaccination campaign in Trans Mara.

Wildlife

One giraffe was seen with an arrow in its head, unfortunately it disappeared before the KWS veterinarian could come over to treat it. One lion was seen with wounds on its legs, they seem to be healing and it has not been treated. The Elephant that was treated last month was treated again this month, her leg is still infected and very swollen and it appears that this animal may not recover.

One, of two, young female cheetah that have just left their mother had an injured foot and was limping badly. The foot is recovering without treatment but we are monitoring the animals closely.

One, of the two, male lions from the Serena pride is very weak and may not survive - there are no apparent injuries. Dr Dominic Mijeje, the KWS veterinarian based in the Mara, will visit on the 1st and determine its fate. It will be very difficult for the remaining lion to hold onto his territory.

Staff

We received four rangers from the County Council on the 20th. They replace two NCO's who left the Conservancy in July last year.

We have recommended two of our rangers M/s Sancha and Mpilei for dismissal for constant absenteeism. The matter has been taken up with the Council but in the meantime they have been suspended for two months.

Mr Nicholas Sarisar Nkadaru was married on the 29th. We wish them both a very happy future together.

Tourism

We had 1,762 visitors in February, down from 5,584 in the same month last year. In general we had a very quiet March with a three-day peak at Easter, made up of citizens. It is very encouraging to see that Kenyans are travelling to the Parks and Reserves but, with the very low Park entrance fees, they contribute little towards meeting expenses. We can only expect 20-25% occupancy in the coming three months but the prognosis for the high season looks promising.

Bono, a celebrity musician with the band U2 and an environmental campaigner, stayed in the Triangle on the 17-18th, he and his group had a wonderful stay and saw almost everything there is to see in the Mara.

Security

Only two poachers were arrested during the month, bringing the total arrests to 1,015. It has been a frustrating month, on several occasions we found poacher camps or tracks, only to find that they had passed, or left, one or two days before.

Twenty-five cattle were stolen from the Kipsigis on the night of the 2nd. The cattle were driven through the Reserve and into the Lemai Wedge. We followed and caught up with the cattle just as they left the Serengeti, into the wa Kuria reserve. Unfortunately neither TANAPA, nor ourselves, have the authority to follow stock thieves or poachers outside the Serengeti and we had to sit and

watch as they disappeared. We did, however, recover two cattle and arrest one of the thieves, just before they crossed into Tanzania; another of the thieves may have been killed by an elephant. The report has not yet been confirmed.

We found recent signs of poaching in the Mara Triangle on two occasions between the 7th and 10th. In the first instance the rangers found an abandoned camp downstream from the salt-lick. Two days before, the rangers had been chased out of the same thicket by elephant – it seems that the elephant were in fact running from the poachers – the poachers then left everything behind. On the 10th we received information of a poaching in the riverine forest downstream from Little Governors. Two camps were found; one had been left the previous day. They had killed one hippo.

Governor's Camp reported that three people crossed the river towards the Triangle close to their Private Camp, at 6.00 pm on the 26th. We immediately mounted an operation and set up ambushes in three different places. No one was arrested that night, but the following morning we mounted another operation in the same area and arrested one of the three, the other two managed to escape, leaving their identity papers and documents. The three, all Luo, were camped in the Triangle, downstream from Little Governor's and had been hunting across the river when they were seen. They had not killed anything. 5 wire snares were recovered. On the 31st we followed-up on the two escapees and arrested one of them in his home at least 50 kilometres from the Reserve. He informed us that there had in fact been six poachers, one of them a woman who had been wounded in the buttocks in an ambush in 2002. He also informed us that the same group had killed the hippo we had found on the 10th.

Cattle were stolen on the night of the 29th. The cattle were recovered after the stock thieves fired shots at their pursuers on the escarpment and our rangers immediately set up three ambushes for the thieves. A hippo walked into one of the ambushes in pitch darkness and was mistakenly shot.

Revenue and Accounts

We saw a 74% decline in February revenue, from Ksh 13.8 million in February 2007 to Ksh 3.6 million – the lowest collection in several years. We can expect similar levels of income through March, April and May, especially as the Kenya Shilling has regained most of its value against the Dollar. Despite the cut-backs we have made we will still be operating at a monthly deficit of over Ksh 3 million (US\$ 50,000).

Revenue collected and distributed for the month of February 2008

Collected	Gate Revenue		Balloon Revenue	
	US\$	Ksh	US\$	KSH
Ticket sales	44,855.00	517,850.00	-	469,623.90
Non-ticket sales	375.00	256,900.00		
Balance for Distribution	45,230.00	774,750.00	-	469,623.90
Distributed				
Trans Mara County Council	16,354.05	327,721.00	-	258,293.15
Group Ranches	8,522.45	98,391.50		
Sub-total	24,876.50	426,112.50	-	258,293.15
Mara Conservancy	20,353.50	348,637.50	-	211,330.76

Our February income was Ksh 5.5 million (US\$ 89,000); made up of Ksh 2.1 million (US\$ 35,000) in revenue collections and Ksh 3.4 (US\$ 54,000) in donations. This was against a total expenditure of Ksh 6.3 million (US\$ 101,000) - part of the amount reflected in the expenditure included commissions to Earthview and KATO of Ksh 450,000 and depreciation of Ksh 1.6 million (both amounting to US\$ 33,000). If we remove these two items we were within 9% of our revised budget for the month.

Development.

Road works started on the remaining section of the Serena to Mara Bridge Road on the 19th. This coincided with the onset of the rains, which stopped work. One new culvert was installed near “Egyptian Goose” on the road to Mara Bridge. Work has also begun on the Serena to Oloololo Gate section of the Road; with the excavation of murrum.

A routine check at Mara Bridge found that the Bailey bridge over the river had become significantly more unstable – to the extent that a person walking over the bridge could feel it swaying. This information was passed on to the District Engineer who immediately recommended its closure. This has already started causing problems – over Easter the river came up and some people were stranded on the other side of the river for a few hours. The Provincial and District Roads engineers inspected the bridge on the 28th. They confirmed the decision to close the it and have undertaken to have it repaired in the first week of April.

We have filled in the most flooded sections of the river road to Oloololo Gate, a lot more work is required on this road before it becomes all-weather.

We erected two uni-huts at Mara Bridge, to replace two tents that were worn out and no longer habitable.

Report on focus for March

Complete grading on Ol Choro Oroua	Done
Tractor and trailer to return on 13 th March	Done
Continue work on road along Mara River	Ongoing
Host Leslie Roach	Done
Continue with fund raising to meet shortfall	Ongoing
Hold Board meeting	Done, 28 th March

Focus for April

- Continue with fund raising;
- Prepare Annual Work Plan;
- Have Mara Bridge repaired;
- Complete Government contracts on main road;
- Start staff appraisals; and
- Hold meetings for 10 Year Management Plan.