

MEP August 2020 Report



On August 3, Mara Elephant Project rangers were called in to assist Kenya Wildlife Service with fighting a fire that broke out near Mpata Safari Club. The fire, thought to be started by herders in the area, was spreading quickly up the hill. Luckily, it was able to be contained and no one was injured.

GENERAL

In August, MEP had the pleasure of hosting some very important visitors to the Mara. In early August, Honorable Najib Balala, Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, visited the Maasai Mara and MEP was honored to spend some time with him while launching the national Lion Strategy Plan, visit MEP and tour the Mara together. On this trip I also met marathon world record holder Eliud Kipchonge who was visiting the Mara for the first time with Hon. Balala. We hosted world famous wildlife photographer and conservationist David Chancellor for several weeks in August. During his time at MEP, he spent time embedded with the MEP Alpha ranger unit stationed in the Nyakweri Forest and during his time with the team, they were responding to conflict day and night as elephants were staging in the forest to take advantage of the ripe crops. David then joined the collaring of a bull elephant in Oderekesi Conservancy as part of identifying the southern Corridor from the MMNR to the Loita Forest. David also followed two ivory recovery operations taking him all the way to Busia. It was a pleasure to have David and we enjoyed his regular posts about MEP on his Instagram account, which gave our supporters a real inside look into our rangers and their immense efforts to protect the Mara's wildlife, communities and habitat. Finally, Wildlife Direct CEO Paula Kahumbu filmed two episodes of her second season of *Wildlife Warriors* with Wilson at MEP HQ and in the Loita Forest. This is an extremely important project focusing on young Kenyans who are wildlife warriors. Because mainstream Kenya TV channels air the program wildlife conservation becomes a topic which Kenyans can learn about from other Kenyans.



Honorable Najib Balala speaking at an event during his visit to the Mara.

On the 18th Jake and I attended the Central Rift Valley Conservation Area National Elephant Action Plan meeting in Naivasha with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). It was a good chance to catch up on collaring plans and share updates from the whole Rift Valley. MEP was requested by KWS to analyse the effectiveness of HEC methods deployed by MEP, which is exactly what PhD student Nathan Hahn is doing. Of specific interest was the use of drones to mitigate HEC and I explained that MEP was planning to get recertified to use drones under the new legislation. MEP has been working with a consultant to help register our drones and get flight permissions to use them to mitigate HEC and on the 25th we received registration documents for the four drones we have (2X Mavic Pro, 1X Mavic Ent., 1X Matrice 210, and 1X Agras MG1) and authorization to operate them for 1 year. This has been a long time coming and I am very excited to get back into the air autonomously. We will need to start training up key staff members and as there are no local training schools, we will need to look at options in South Africa, United Kingdom or India.

Finally, on the 19th, the MEP Board of Trustees met virtually. All of the committees have been meeting in advance sessions and it was a very productive and relatively short meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for the 19th of November when hopefully we can all meet in person.

SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

We had a first of its kind incident on Lake Victoria this month. Our intelligence team led us to Busia near Uganda where we were tracking 15 pieces of ivory coming out of Tanzania. The suspects then decided the safest way to cross the border was via boat through Ugandan waters and then back into Kenya. While the suspects and the informant were on the water a Ugandan patrol boat approached them and they threw the six sacks of tusks overboard.

Unfortunately, the informant did not have a phone where they could drop a pin so for all the world this ivory is lost forever in the depths of Lake Victoria. However, overall the intelligence team did succeed with two recoveries of 5 kg and 35 kg of ivory and arrested three suspects. The 35 kg recovery was in Kitui County near Mwingi National Reserve illustrating how far our intel team travels to recovery ivory.



*The 5 kg of ivory recovered on August 26 and
one suspect was arrested.*

*The arrest on August 28 of two people and
recovery of 35 kg of ivory.*



In terms of bushmeat poaching, three suspects were arrested with 20 kg of bushmeat recovered and 23 snares removed.



Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Mau De-Snaring Unit rangers and government partners confiscated 10 kg of bushmeat and arrested two suspects in the Mau Forest on August 27.



Six snares recovered on August 19 in the Mau Forest.

Overall, in August, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested six suspects for habitat destruction activities, recovered one power saw, confiscated 46 trees cutdown, 1,500 posts, 30 timber and destroyed 16 kilns and two sacks of charcoal.



Rangers found four motorbikes transporting 152 red cedar post in the Nkareta area on August 8.



On August 28, SWT Mau De-Sharing Unit rangers destroyed Rangers four kilns in the Mau Forest.

MEP rangers responded to 13 total incidents of conflict in August. In August, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,099 km on foot, 10,079 km by car and 1,120 km on motorbike.



MEP rangers guarding crops at night in the Transmara area to prevent conflict. This area saw regular conflict during August.

HELICOPTER



The Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter operating during a collaring exercise on August 17 of David.

This month we flew an extraordinary number of hours, 48 hours total, due to the far afield collaring exercises and in support of KWS while their helicopter is waiting for replacement parts from the USA. In a sign of gratitude, KWS has extended a free service worth \$3,000 to MEP. The helicopter continues to be an invaluable tool for a wide range of missions.



An aerial monitoring flight of Vasco conducted on August 2.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

August is always a very active month for Mara Elephant Project since we celebrate World Elephant Day. It was made even more so with visits from famous wildlife photojournalist David Chancellor. David spent a few weeks documenting MEP's operations alongside Marc, Jake and the rangers. He was embedded in the Loita and Nyakweri forests where he got a firsthand view of conflict and habitat destruction. He got to document an elephant treatment and collaring operation as well as a joint intelligence operation to root out poachers. During this time at MEP, David, on assignment for National Geographic, [posted on Instagram](#), tagging MEP 12 times to his over 206,000 followers. This created a huge opportunity for MEP to gain brand awareness and followers on our social media platforms. His exposure encouraged [Nat Geo to post](#) to their 144 MILLION followers on Instagram on August 30 about MEP, tagging us alongside David. We can safely say this is the largest exposure MEP has had to date. As of the middle of August we were at 10,200 followers on Instagram and are now over 11,000 followers and rising. We are eternally grateful to David and National Geographic for this rare opportunity.



David photographed with his patrol team while embedded with them in August.

In other media news, Wildlife Direct CEO [Paula Kahumbu](#) came to film MEP for the second season of her show Wildlife Warriors. She spent a significant amount of time with Wilson to gain a local perspective on the work MEP is doing in the Mara. We look forward to the show airing and thank Paula for her spotlight on MEP. MEP celebrated World Elephant Day on August 12 and appreciate everyone interacting with us on social media and supporting us through donations on that day. [Prints for Conservation](#) donated 100% of their funds to MEP alongside photographer [Finlay Marrian](#) of [a print](#) on World Elephant Day; we were also their chosen spotlight charity for the entire month of August. We appreciated their support of MEP. Thank you to [Governors Camp](#) for raising money for Mara Elephant Project in August as well.



The print Clashing of Kings from Finlay Marrian.

MEP released our [2019 Annual Report](#) on August 24. We appreciate everyone's feedback on the document and are proud to continue our success in 2019 into 2020 despite increased challenges. The [second quarter newsletter](#) was also released on August 31. MEP was featured in [an article](#) published in The Telegraph in August. We continue to see wonderful entries in The Greatest Maasai Mara photo competition in August and [the auction](#), run by the Angama Foundation, is still going strong to raise additional funds for organizations like MEP.



An aerial shot taken by Gurcharan Roopra to benefit MEP.

Overall, in August, MEP received a total of \$60,787.75 in donations from over 380 supporters. A special thank you to Geoffrey Peters, Ronald Morrill, Ricard Leirer, Gethrel Franke Bradfield, Kim Kanas, Dr. Jill Sideman and the Leslie Alexander Foundation for their very generous support. Our direct mail campaign in the US continues to perform well and above expectations. We raised \$13,213 via PayPal from 112 supporters and continue to see an increase in monthly donors on this platform. Thank you to Mustafa for raising money for MEP in celebration of his birthday on Facebook. His fundraiser ended in August with over \$300 raised. We raised an additional \$45 on Facebook in August.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Director's Update:

After some technical difficulties for the last several months, we have started ingesting the GLAD Deforestation alerts again. We now include these as part of this monthly report showing the cumulative forest loss events measured in the three forested areas that MEP is operating: Loita, Mau and Nyakweri forests. The current rate of loss in Nyakweri Forest has reached approximately 1 event per square kilometer – nearly twelve times the rate of forest loss as the Loita Forest. The NDVI values (i.e., a measure of vegetation greenness) for the month of August show that this year has been very wet, and green compared to normal. In all regions (Mara, Mau, Rift Valley, Loita) we calculated NDVI to have nearly record values for this time of year and it will be interesting to see how these conditions affect the movements of the migratory herbivores from the Serengeti. Unintuitively, high-rainfall years are also associated with higher incidents of fire (because of the increased grass cover) and

this is something we're analyzing in collaboration with other researchers. We had the inaugural meeting of the restructured One Mara Research Hub in August. Many top scientists and conservationists are now represented on its new 'Advisory Council' consisting of 20 members from organizations/universities with interests in conservation of the Mara. I hope the formalized collaboration that the Hub represents will lead to better capacity for addressing gaps in the conservation research necessary for long-term protection of the Greater Mara Ecosystem and the Hub is currently very much in line with MEP's long-term strategy. Vulcan has now released the 'ER Tracks' mobile app for Android on the Google Play Store (<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=mobile.pamdas.org.roam>). I helped with coding and design of the app and it gives us the ability to track rangers and vehicles cheaply and easily, and even offline while out of data network coverage and using a simple Android phone. MEP will be helping to deploy the app with other organizations and wishing to partner in using MEP's EarthRanger system. Our GIS team continued with fence mapping and logged 107.7 km of fences (60 km Electric, 40 km Wire and 7.7 km Other).



A gruesome demonstration on why fence line mapping is so vital in the Mara. MEP rangers while in the field are noting these incidents.

Tracking Manager's Update:

We had several collared elephants crop raiding during this time period because of the ripe crops. Shorty spent most of August in the Serengeti National Reserve and was crossing into farms at night and going back to the Reserve in the morning. Kiambi was spotted by Olarro Conservancy rangers after we received a low speed alert from his collar. Luckily, he was in good health. Kegol and Fred remained together in a bachelor herd of five bulls and they were breaking geo-fences near a settlement area. Napoleon and Hannibal were both crop raiding as was Ivy. Fitz and his herd of 60 continue to require conflict intervention by MEP rangers in the Nyakweri Forest. Ritan was using the Chemesusi Forest as a staging area to crop raid and was regularly breaking geo-fences at night. As noted previously, MEP took part in two different collaring operations at the request of KWS. The first on August 13, Jepkemoi was collared in Rimoi the second, on August 17, David, was collared in Olderekesi Conservancy after MEP received reports of a group of three bull elephants going into settlement areas and raiding tomato farms along the Sand River.



The team collaring David on August 17.

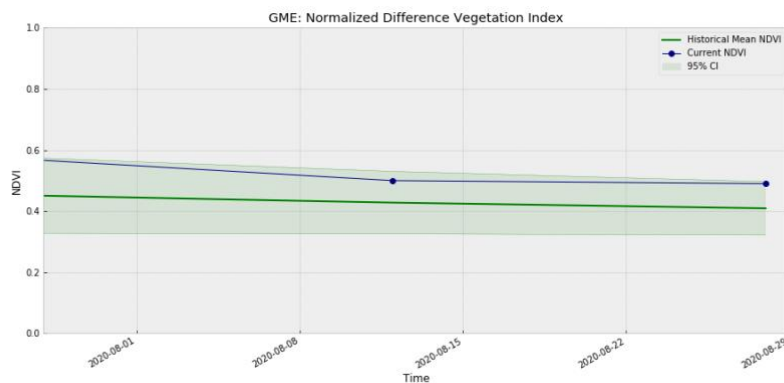


A photo taken by Olarro Conservancy rangers after checking in on Kiambi in August.

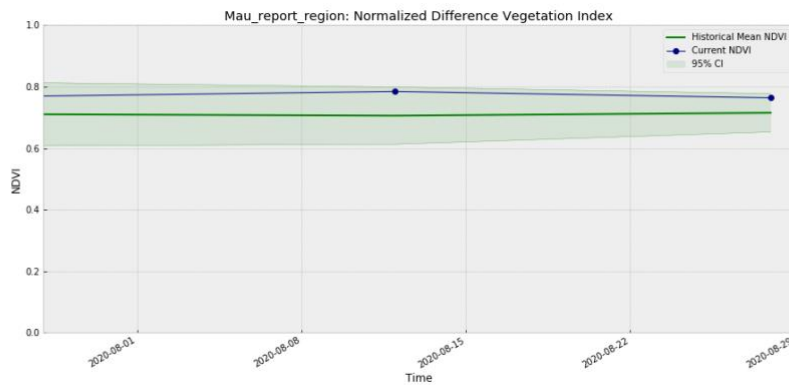
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a measure of plant photosynthetic activity. Higher NDVI indicates the plant is greener. The blue trendline shows the current value while the green area shows the 95% distribution of values centered around the green trendline from values measured back to February 2000.

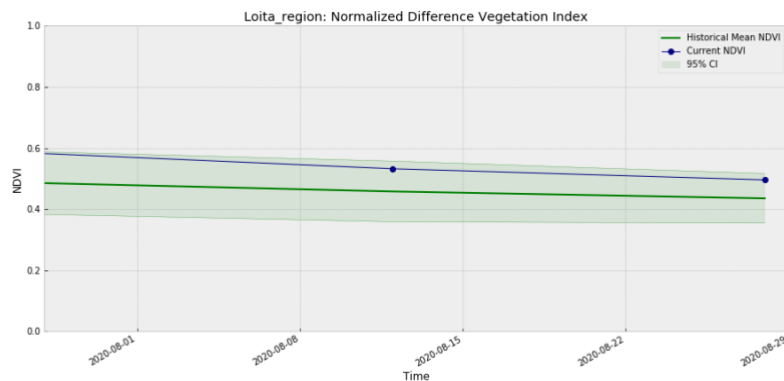
Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



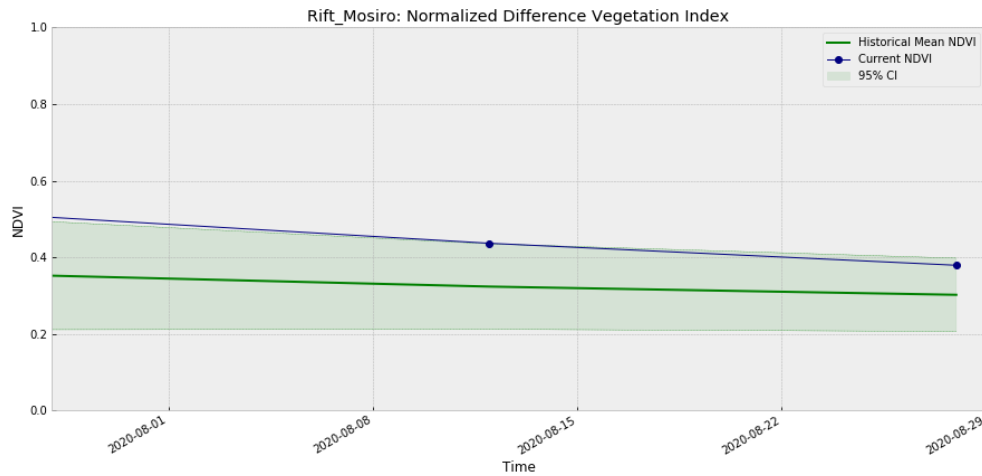
Mau Forest



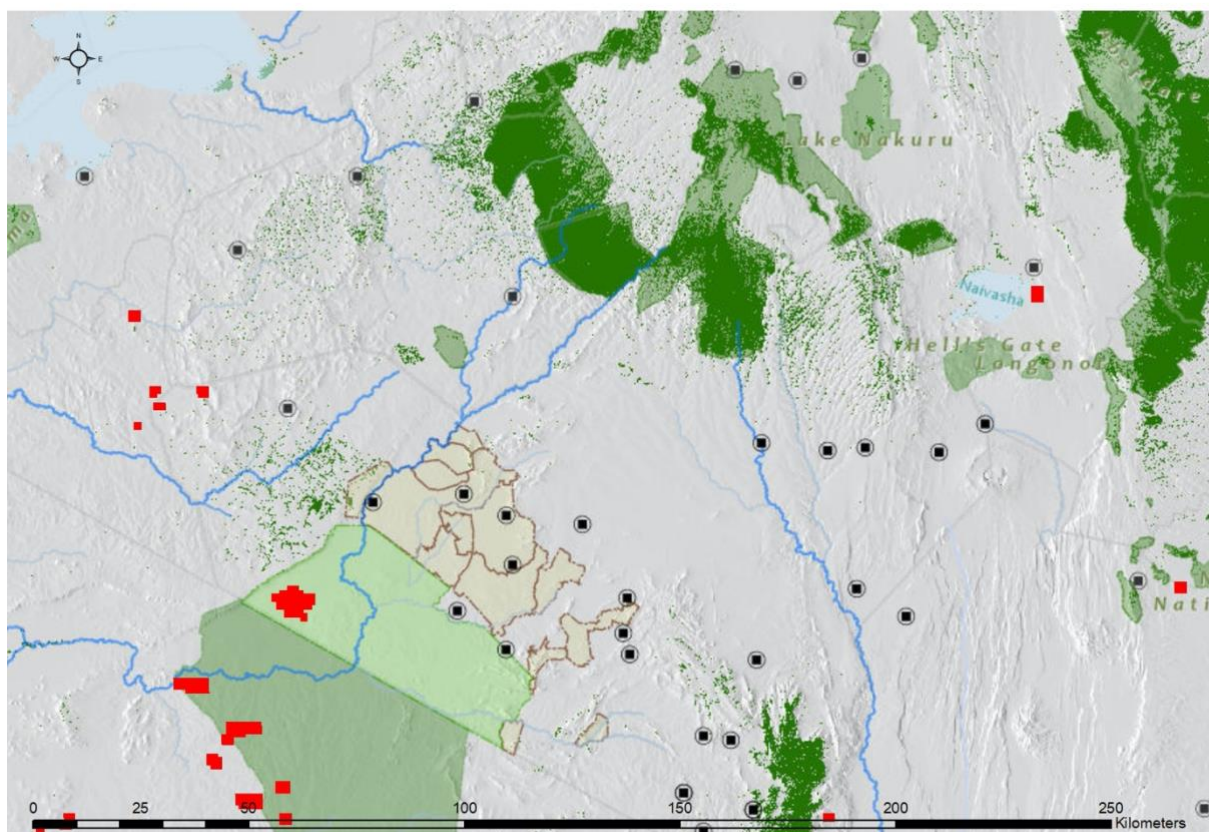
Loita



Rift Valley



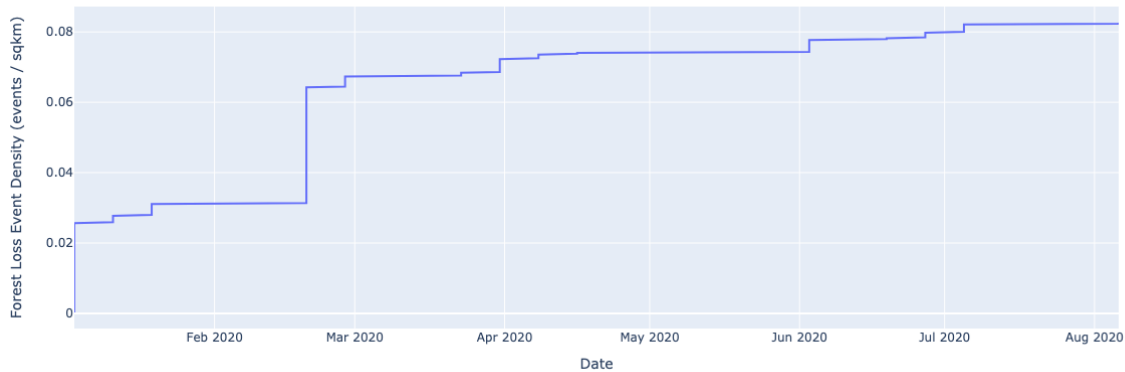
ENVIRONMENT: Burn/Fire Areas



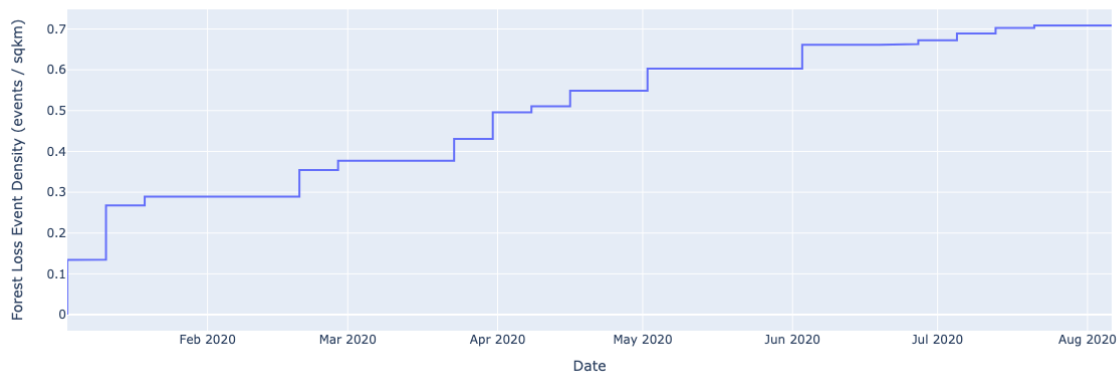
Red blocks indicate burn areas as measured by NASA's FIRMS dataset during the period Aug 1 – Sept. 1, 2020.
Accessed through Google Earth Engine.

ENVIRONMENT: Deforestation

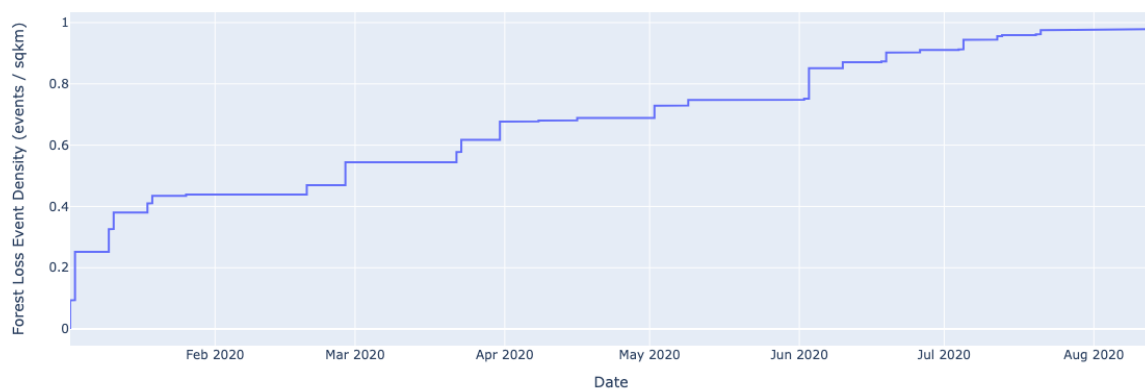
Cumulative GLAD Forest Loss Event Density in Loita Region



Cumulative GLAD Forest Loss Event Density in Mau Region



Cumulative GLAD Forest Loss Event Density in Nyakweri Region



Cumulative forest loss events in 2020 in three forested regions MEP is tracking elephants and deploying ranger teams: Loita, Mau and Nyakweri. As of the August, the forest loss rate in Nyakweri is 12x that of Loita with nearly one event recorded per square kilometer in 2020. (Data source: Global Land Analysis & Discovery group at the University of Maryland: <https://glad.umd.edu/dataset/glad-forest-alerts>)