

MEP March 2019 REPORT



An aerial photo of the Mau Forest on fire.

GENERAL

The headline for the month of March was most definitely the fire in the Mau Forest. On March 18, the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mau De-Snaring Unit informed the rapid response unit based at MEP HQ that a fire had started the day before in the area of Bosnia and they needed assistance. On March 19, MEP mobilized the rapid response unit and sent them to Narok Town to collect 50 “fire beaters” and meet the SWT Mau De-Snaring Unit at the site of the fires in the Mau Forest. That afternoon representatives from Kenya Forest Service (KFS) and Rhino Ark flew over the fires and located a total of eight fires. This information was relayed to the ground teams and the SWT Mau De-Snaring Unit along with the additional MEP rapid response unit continued their efforts to put out the fires using fire beaters. That evening, MEP learned that the fire was burning through the secondary forest which had mostly been logged previously for cedar and more recently podocarpus trees. The secondary forest had a lot of the dead wood remaining from the past logging activities, which added fuel to the fire. The deadwood and undergrowth meant the fires were concentrated and extremely hot. Once the fires spread to the bamboo part of the forest it sounded like gunshots because of the hollow bamboo shoots exploding when burnt. As luck would have it, the fires were moving east toward a watercourse which had moving water in it and that night we experienced light rains.



Protecting elephants to conserve the greater
Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org



*A MEP ranger with a fire beater
being loaded to take into the forest
to fight the fire.*

The next morning at dawn we saw that the fire burned to the river and stopped. Large deadwood logs were still burning but this portion of the fire was contained for the moment. Portions of the fire were still alive and when the larger KFS team arrived including 30 officers they were successful at putting this portion of the fire out using the fire beaters. By Thursday 21st of March, two fires remained, and we continued to follow them and work with our partners to put them out. One concern for MEP was the location of our collared elephant, Wilbur, and his herd that resides in this area. On Thursday, the SWT Mau De-Snaring Unit was tasked with locating Wilbur and we're happy to report that though they were found within 3 kilometers of the fire, he and his herd of 40 were in good condition. MEP's response was quick and effective, read more [here](#). The fires continued to start up along the forest's edge in additional locations as the community lighting them believed that the smoke would bring rain. These secondary fires were less intense and the KFS teams were quick to put them out. Heavy showers at the end of the month extinguished all fires completely.

*Fire damage on the ground was extensive in
the areas that were hit.*



SECURITY & ANTI-POACHING

MEP Senior Warden James Ekiru started March off with the SWT Mau De-Snaring Unit and besides being asked to fight fires in March, they also continued to remove snares from the forest and shutdown illegal logging sites. This unit was responsible for the removal of eight snares and one drop spear targeting elephants. They also destroyed two kilns and arrested three suspects for illegal logging.



Warden Ekiru at the Mau Forest camp.



The suspect arrested illegally logging on March 13.



Protecting elephants to conserve the greater
Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org



*The drop spear targeting
elephants confiscated in the Mau.*

On March 4, MEP rangers while out on patrol found an elephant calf that was alone with no herd in sight. After a few hours of searching, the young elephant's herd was located, and he was reunited.

*Baby elephant found alone
by MEP rangers.*





Protecting elephants to conserve the greater
Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org



Baby elephant reunited with his herd.

MEP rangers assisted the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Vet Dr. Limo from the SWT Mara Mobile Vet Unit in two elephant treatments in March, both occurring in Olarro Conservancy. In addition, two suspects were arrested by KWS based on MEP intelligence in possession of 3 kg of ivory and hippo and warthog teeth (*pictured below*).





Additionally, the Olarro MEP ranger team removed two big snares in Siana Conservancy that were targeting animals like zebras.

There were nine human-elephant conflict incidents this reporting period. Most involved elephants breaking into fences or crops and all were responded to by MEP rangers using their vehicle, motorbikes and firecrackers.



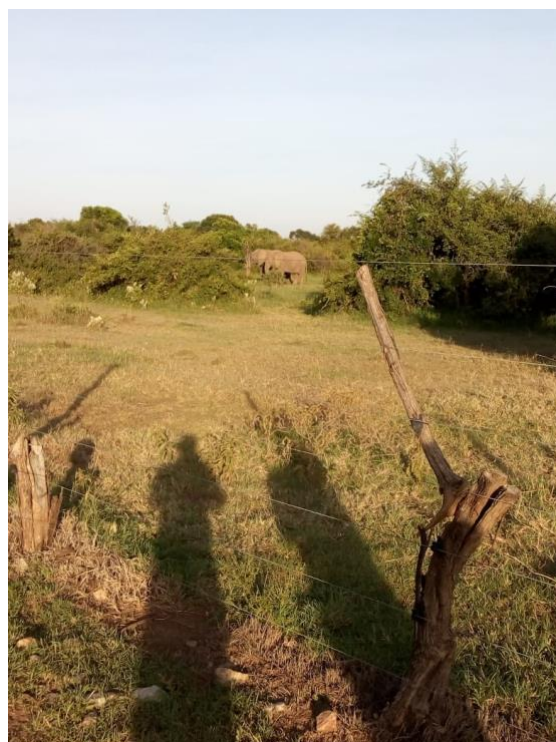
Protecting elephants to conserve the greater
Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org



On March 26, MEP rangers were using their vehicle and firecrackers to chase elephants out of community land and into the conservancy.

HEC response on March 25 by MEP rangers chasing elephants out of a fenced area back into the conservancy.



Ranger & Vehicle Tracking:

In March, MEP rangers covered a distance of 874 km on foot; 11,871 km by car and 3,346 km on motorbike. The Enkutoto ranger team covered the largest distance on foot this month at 283 km which was a result of the high level of conflict they were responding to in Kawai and many areas in Lemek.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Mara Elephant Project was pleased to celebrate World Wildlife Day on March 3 and published a blog about the Mau Forest to tie into the 2019 theme of protecting life below water. While protecting elephants in the Maasai Mara in Kenya seems like a world away from protecting life below water for both people and planet, MEP actually does a lot of work that ties directly into that. The Mau Forest is a forest complex located in the Rift Valley of Kenya and is the single most important water catchment for the Mara River, the life force



Protecting elephants to conserve the greater Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org

behind all flora, fauna and wildlife in the Mara. The Mau Forest has some of the highest rainfall rates in Kenya and is the largest drainage basin for the Mara River, it's also home to an estimated 600 elephants. The Mara River is not only vital to the communities and wildlife living in the Mara, it also flows into Lake Victoria, home to a diverse population of underwater wildlife. Lake Victoria is Africa's largest lake by area and the world's largest tropical lake. In 2010, an IUCN Red List assessment studied 191 fish species in Lake Victoria and found that 45% are threatened or thought to be extinct. The interconnectedness of the forests, savannas and rivers in Kenya is always at the forefront of MEP's mission. When we protect elephants, as an umbrella species, and the habitats upon which they depend, there is a trickle-down effect for every living thing.

Starting March 12, MEP also participated in Twende Porini or Let's Go Wild, Asilia Africa's flagship yearly environmental and community program in the Mara where a group of children from local communities in the Mara area surrounding Asilia's camps participate to win a big prize! MEP partnered with them in 2019 at Rekero Primary School to select four children to be hosted for four days starting on March 12 at Asilia's Rekero Camp where they learn about wildlife and the environment. During their time there, lessons were combined with games and fun activities, including playing sports, talent shows, and storytelling to help the children learn about sustainable tourism and conservation, and the benefits that these have for them and their families. These four children really enjoyed their time at Asilia's Rekero Camp where MEP Administrator Elvis Saayoi presented about the work Mara Elephant Project is doing in their own communities to mitigate human-elephant conflict. It's experiences like these that can change the course of a young person's life and participation in contests like this are very important for MEP to ensure we are encouraging the future generation of Kenyans to be the leaders on conservation.



MEP Administrator Elvis Saayoi out on a game drive with local kids during Twende Porini.



Protecting elephants to conserve the greater
Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org

For a second year in a row, Crooked Creek Elementary School in Indianapolis, IN held their Global Marketplace to benefit MEP. Kids hand crafted items to sell to students, teachers and staff with 100% of the proceeds donated to MEP.



The Crooked Creek Global Marketplace that took place on March 14.



Protecting elephants to conserve the greater
Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org

The Greatest Maasai Mara photo competition continues to have great entries benefitting MEP. Don't forget to enter if you've recently visited Kenya.



A March entry photograph by Nicky Classen benefitting MEP.

MEP had one Facebook Fundraiser in March run by Jade who out did her goal of £100 and raised £162 pounds for MEP! Thank you for choosing to celebrate your birthday with MEP and thank you to everyone who donated to MEP in March on Facebook, we received \$323.80 in donations. DJI released [the video](#) they produced while visiting MEP in February and directly encouraged donations on their various social media channels to MEP. We would like to thank Brett Velicovich and the folks at DJI for making this happen. As a result of this and a generous donation by a new supporter, MEP had \$4,124 in PayPal donations in March.

MEP's very own Trustee Beatrice Karanja has been appointed to the judging panel of the annual TUSK Conservation Awards. This is a very prestigious appointment and we congratulate her on this amazing success! Read more about Beatrice's appointment [here](#). In other trustee news, *MABINGWA* a film executive produced by MEP Trustee Trey Fehsenfeld was awarded the Award of Distinction from the [Best Shorts Competition 2018 Humanitarian Awards](#). *MABINGWA* was hand selected by the judges and staff, from the entire pool of entries to the competition throughout 2018, as a film that represents both the spirit of humanitarianism combined with quality filmmaking craft.

The Explorations Company included Mara Elephant Project as part of their ecotourism package for 2019. Additionally, they've included us on [their website](#) as a project that they



Protecting elephants to conserve the greater Mara ecosystem

www.maraelephantproject.org

support and encourage their travelers to support as well. We had four visits in March to MEP HQ from Saruni Mara, Kicheche and Richard's Camp and we thank these camps for including MEP in their Mara itineraries. The final visit was from a delegation of US Congress people who were in Kenya representing USAID. MEP CEO Marc Goss hosted them at HQ and presented them with compelling evidence that the Mara should be included in the USAID considered funding.

Finally, MEP finalized a direct mail campaign that will be going out in the United States in March. This is a new tactic for MEP to see if we can continue to diversify our donor base. We should see results by May 1 and will be able to report back on the effectiveness at that point.

RESEARCH

Director's Update:

I attended an AfriMov workshop the week of March 25 in Tanzania that was funded by a grant received by Grant Hopcraft and Tom Morrison at the University of Glasgow. The goal of the workshop was to consolidate movement data on African species into a single database and then ask general questions – i.e., compare & contrast the movements of animals across species and regions. One of the many good discussions that came from this workshop was on spatial data layers which are essential to movement ecology analyses and solutions for creating a central point for the data.

I met some interesting people while at the workshop including Anna Estes from the Serengeti Elephant Program who is involved with collaring and elephant ID data in the Serengeti. She's involved with collaring and also has 6,000 ID photos from the Serengeti.

I was also able to collar my first official MEP elephant in March. On February 18, MEP collared elephant Lempiris' collar stopped reporting. Mara Elephant Project and Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) rangers nearby his location were sent with a VHF tracker to try and locate his collar and found it had stopped working do to hardware failure. Though the collar needed to be exchanged for a newer model, we were happy to see that Lempiris was in good health. Lempiris is a large adult bull elephant that was originally collared by MEP on the 10th of November 2017 in response to an increase in human-elephant conflict along the border of Olarro Conservancy. Since Lempiris was in a high human-elephant conflict area, it was vital that we continued to gather movement data on him so rangers could respond in real-time to help save communities. Additionally, his movement data helped MEP define a northern corridor when he travelled in 2018 all the way to the Mosiro escarpment. That's why on March 10, with the approval of KWS, MEP re-collared Lempiris in Olarro Conservancy. KWS Vet Dr. Limo with the SWT Mara Mobile Vet Unit and Olarro Conservancy rangers partnered with MEP during this operation. Lempiris was fitted with a brand-new Kevlar collar and an arrow wound was treated on his right rear leg. The operation went very well and Lempiris' new collar is reporting with zero issues.



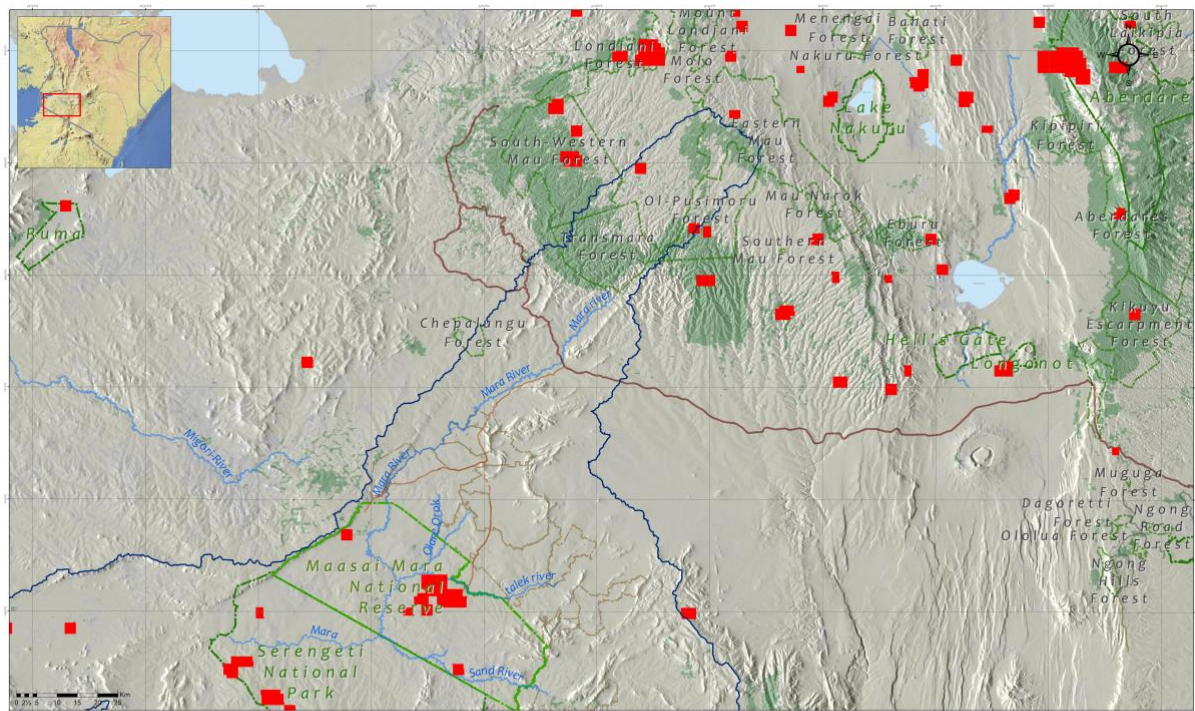
This photo was taken during the successful collaring operation, we're fitting the collar.

Starting in March, I've added a fire burn area map to the environmental section of the monthly report. Fire is a very important process in both forest and savannah ecosystems in terms of its effect on vegetation and wildlife movement. Unfortunately, Wilbur's collar stopped reporting on the 25th of March. The Mau Forest rangers were sent to find his location but were unable to do so because of the thick vegetation. We continue to look for him and his herd that were just checked on a week before his collar stopped reporting.



On March 5, collared elephant Chelsea's collar stopped reporting and the closest MEP ranger unit was deployed to get visual confirmation of her whereabouts. Luckily on March 6 she was spotted with her collar intact and working again and in good health with her calf.

Burn/Fire Areas:



Fire Incidents - March 2019



Red blocks indicate burn areas. A large fire was started intentionally in the Mara Reserve as part of reserve management. Fires threatened the Mau Forest and were actively fought by MEP staff.