



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

**MONTHLY REPORT
DECEMBER 2013**



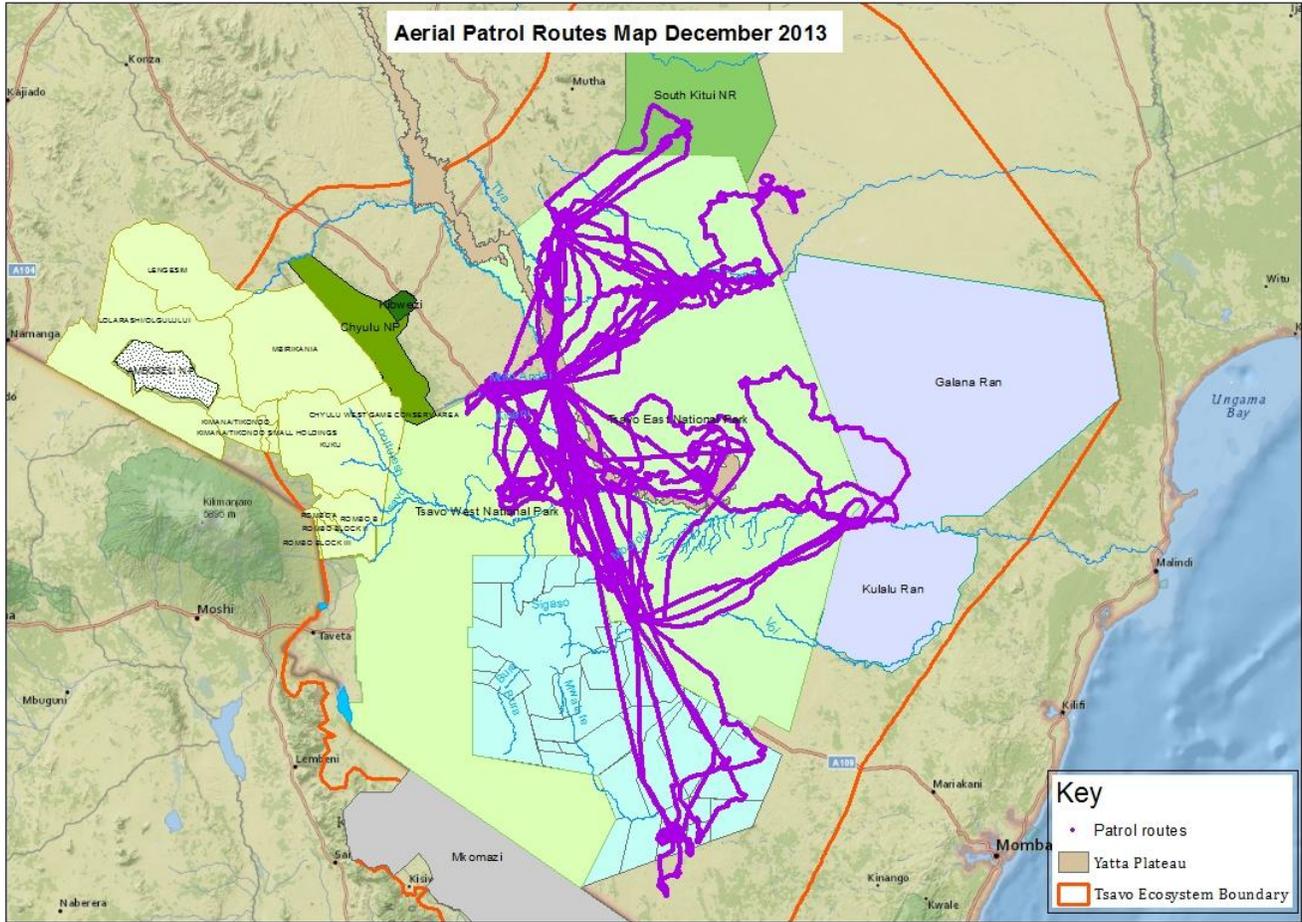


AERIAL STATISTICS

DECEMBER 2013

HOURS FLOWN	46.7
MILES COVERED	3867
AREAS PATROLLED	Areas of focus included the Tsavo region with emphasis on Tsavo East NP, the Ranches and the eastern side of Tsavo West NP as well as Lamu District





The rains set in steadily during the whole of December with excellent coverage across Tsavo and the surrounding communities. Elephants began to spread out making it a lot more challenging to track their positions. Generally the elephants remained in the southern area of Tsavo East NP to the south of Lugards Falls where good rains had fallen, and later to the north of Lugards. Some scattered family groups could be found across the northern area, with footprints being reported by a KWS patrol in South Kitui Reserve whilst three family groups were discovered wandering outside the eastern boundary of Tsavo East NP. Following the absence of cattle around Ndiandasa on the Tiva River a group of over 60 elephants was resident where the Tiva floods out.





As expected there were a number of reports of organized poaching gangs heading to Tsavo East in search of elephants and their ivory. The Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) rangers were on alert in the northern area, and though hampered by the rains and muddy conditions they managed to be out on patrol regularly.

No elephant carcasses were sighted north of the Tiva River during the month of December. Further to the south at least 15 fresh elephant carcasses were found including three in the ranches further south, outside of the National Parks.

During a search for elephants reported to be in South Kitui Reserve there was plenty of evidence of major charcoal production. Numerous charcoal kilns were sighted along with charcoal villages. No elephants were seen. The rains and vastness of the landscape made it very difficult to locate a small group of elephants from the air

Three elephants killed on the ranches near Kasigau



Near the eastern Tsavo East NP boundary 7 elephant carcasses were found in early December followed by a further five in late December, all expected to be killed by the same gang which KWS intercepted recovering ivory



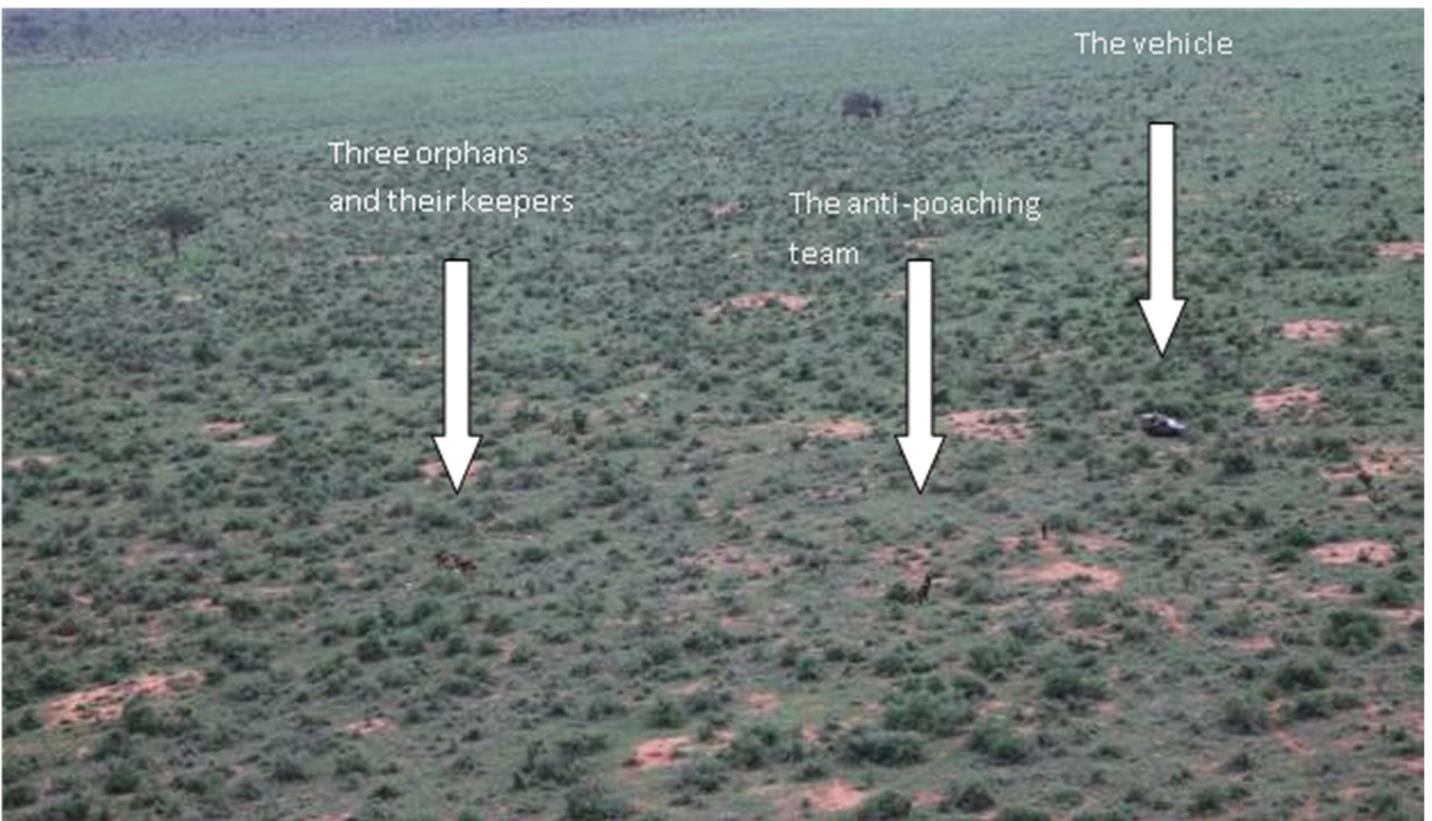
A couple of flights were made this month to Project Amu in Lamu County on Kenya's north coast. Here the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust is working closely with the local people to protect this amazing habitat. The aerial patrols conducted provide the Trust's ground teams in the area, and the KWS, with an overview of the challenges they face and successes that have been achieved through the protection of the forest and wildlife. Large numbers of topi, buffalo and giraffe were seen on Amu Ranch, while in the surrounding areas extensive clearing was seen. Plans are under way to fly the Kenya Forest Service and map all the encroachment and illegal logging taking place in the area.

Felled doum palm trees; a sign of rapid, illegal land-grabbing and deforestation in the Lamu area



On December 6th three elephant orphans which had recently been brought down to the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's Voi Stockades for reintegration back into the wild, suddenly found themselves fast-tracked into the wild program. A group of ex-orphan lead by Emily 'kidnapped' the orphans and took them off where they quickly mixed with a wild herd. The three newcomers were rather excited to have so much attention. The stockade team called in the Trust's Top Cub to locate the three before nightfall. This was done quickly with the help of a keeper in the rear seat.

The stockade team, assisted by the Trust's anti-poaching team, was then directed to the herd by the aircraft. This took a while as it was a long way off-road. The car then broke down, fortunately near the herd. The stockade team was instructed to call out loudly, which they did. Immediately the wild herd was aware that humans were nearby and they took off with speed in the opposite direction. The three orphans, recognizing friendly familiar sounds that made them think of milk, broke away from the wild herd and sped towards the keepers who were calling them. Reunited they began the long walk back to the stockades arriving just after sundown.





December is always a month of crop raiding, which is strange as one would expect that with all the lush vegetation and waterholes in the park that the elephants would be content. Outside the park near Mtito Andei the communities have been praying for rain for months. They have planted their hard-worked fields and jumped up and down with joy when the rains came in full. Crops sprouted, and then came the elephants. This month the Trust's aircraft has been working closely with the Mtito Andei Human-Wildlife Conflict Resolution Group, and KWS Community rangers to reduce the damage caused to crops by the few sweet-toothed elephants that live over the river in the national park.

Crop-raiding elephants' tracks through maize fields give a tell-tale story of destruction the night before



As a result of the ongoing cooperation between the Trust, the community and the KWS Community warden and rangers, there has been no culling of any crop raiding elephants this month. The community is obviously upset with their losses, but they are encouragingly relaxed about the progress being made. They accept that living on the edge of the park comes with its hazards, and that is why they have established a group to mitigate the problem. Whilst the KWS is left to face requests for compensation, we are all continuously discussing future ways of reducing this annual problem.

December is always a month of great beauty in Tsavo. The land that is usually red turns green. The rivers flow and subside again leaving new beaches and patterns. The elephants at first congregate and then spread out. They particularly stand out as they cover themselves in red mud and walk the carpet of green. Flying across Tsavo becomes a little more hazardous, not only because of the rainstorms but also because of the huge numbers of migrating birds, heading south for winter. Flocks of Open Billed Storks, European Rollers and Amur Falcons are frequent company in the skies. Strange sights appear too; the Tiva River in full flood, emptying suddenly at the end of its course inside Tsavo East; a male giraffe walking on a rocky outcrop to avoid the slippery muddy ground that he is not familiar with.







It was David Sheldrick who first put the Super Cub to full use in Tsavo. Many years later the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust continues that legacy by patrolling the skies above Tsavo East and West with its growing fleet of airplanes.

December saw the arrival of an addition to the fleet, a bright yellow Super Cub. Joining the Top Cub and the Cessna 185 it will bring added coverage of Tsavo through aerial patrols. The northern area is vast and with few roads. The Super Cub makes it possible to provide the snapshot of what's going on on the ground to park management. It will allow for better support of the Trust's eight anti-poaching teams on the ground, as well as to the many calls to support KWS rangers and the trust funded veterinary unit. With a growing aerial capability the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust continues to protect Tsavo, its wildlife and its surrounding communities, while working in close cooperation with Kenya Wildlife Service. Your support is essential and much appreciated. Thank you for being part of the team that keeps Tsavo alive.

More information about the DSWT's Anti-Poaching program and each team's monthly report can be found at www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org







Reported by Nick Trent

Field Operations Manager, DSWT

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