AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

MONTHLY REPORT

DECEMBER 2017

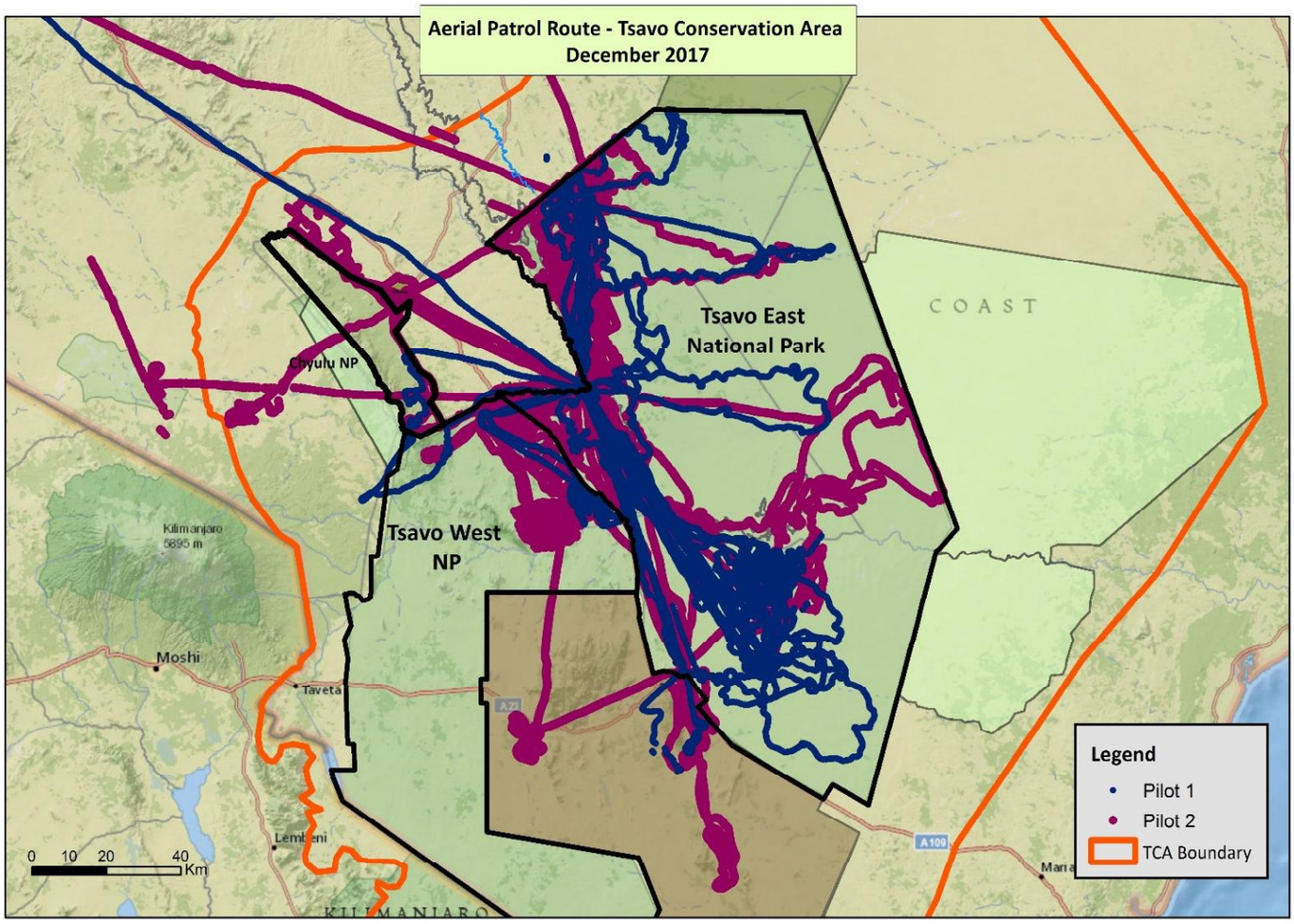
AERIAL STATISTICS

DECEMBER 2017

HOURS FLOWN	106.9
KMS COVERED	13,236
AREAS PATROLLED	Tsavo East, Tsavo West, Chyulu Hills NP, Amboseli and Kimana Sanctuary and bordering ranches

DECEMBER 2017

MONTHLY AERIAL PATROL MAP

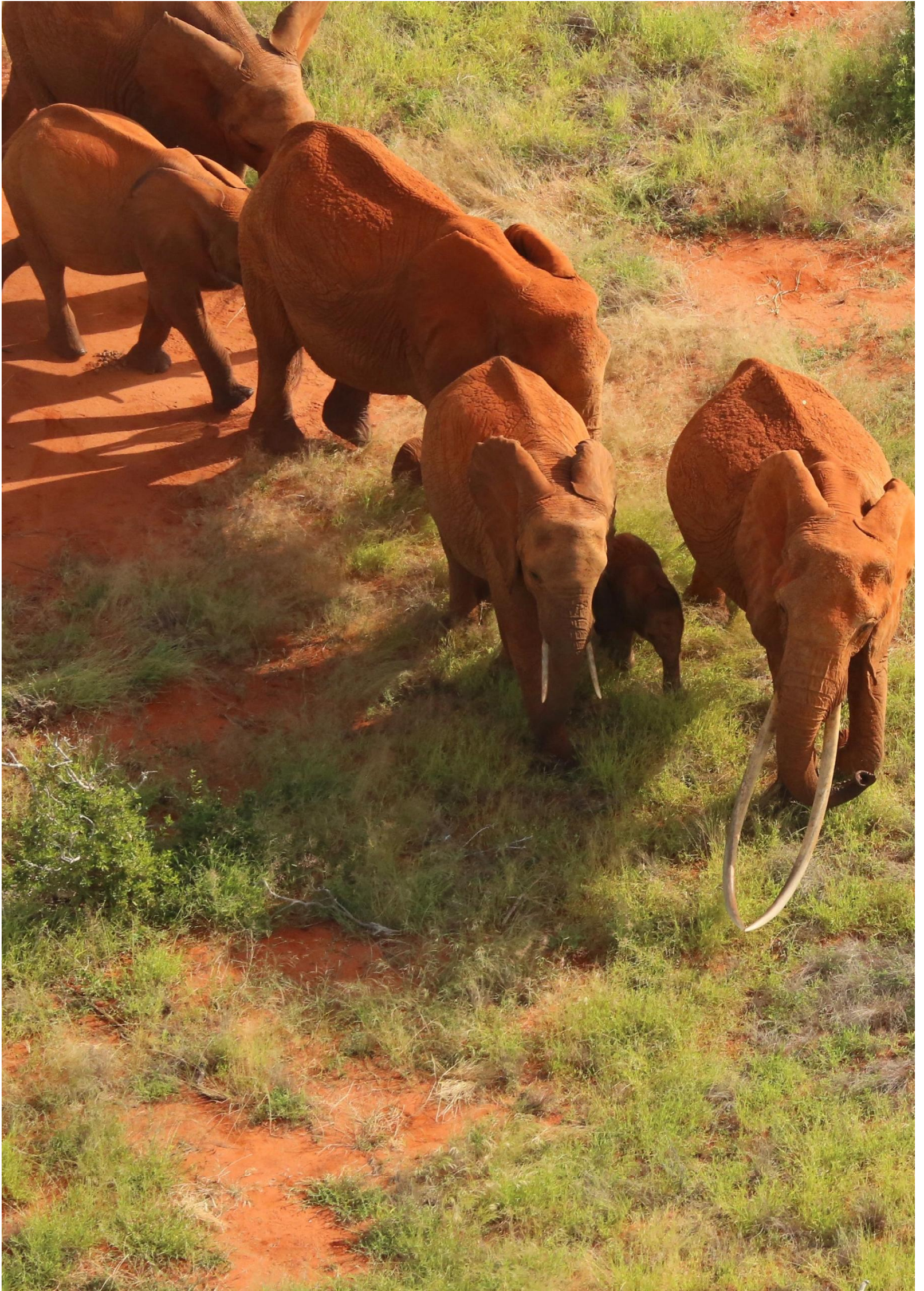


Aruba Dam filled up by the December rains

MONTHLY AERIAL SUMMARY

December rains began looking promising but lost momentum towards the end of the month. Fortunately, there was heavy rain in the southern area of Tsavo East, where most of the elephant deaths due to starvation occurred late in 2017. During this period Aruba dam, originally built by David Sheldrick many years ago, filled for the first time in recent years, and hundreds of waterholes as well as a thick flush of vegetation in the area, brought relief to elephants and plains game that gathered there in large numbers.

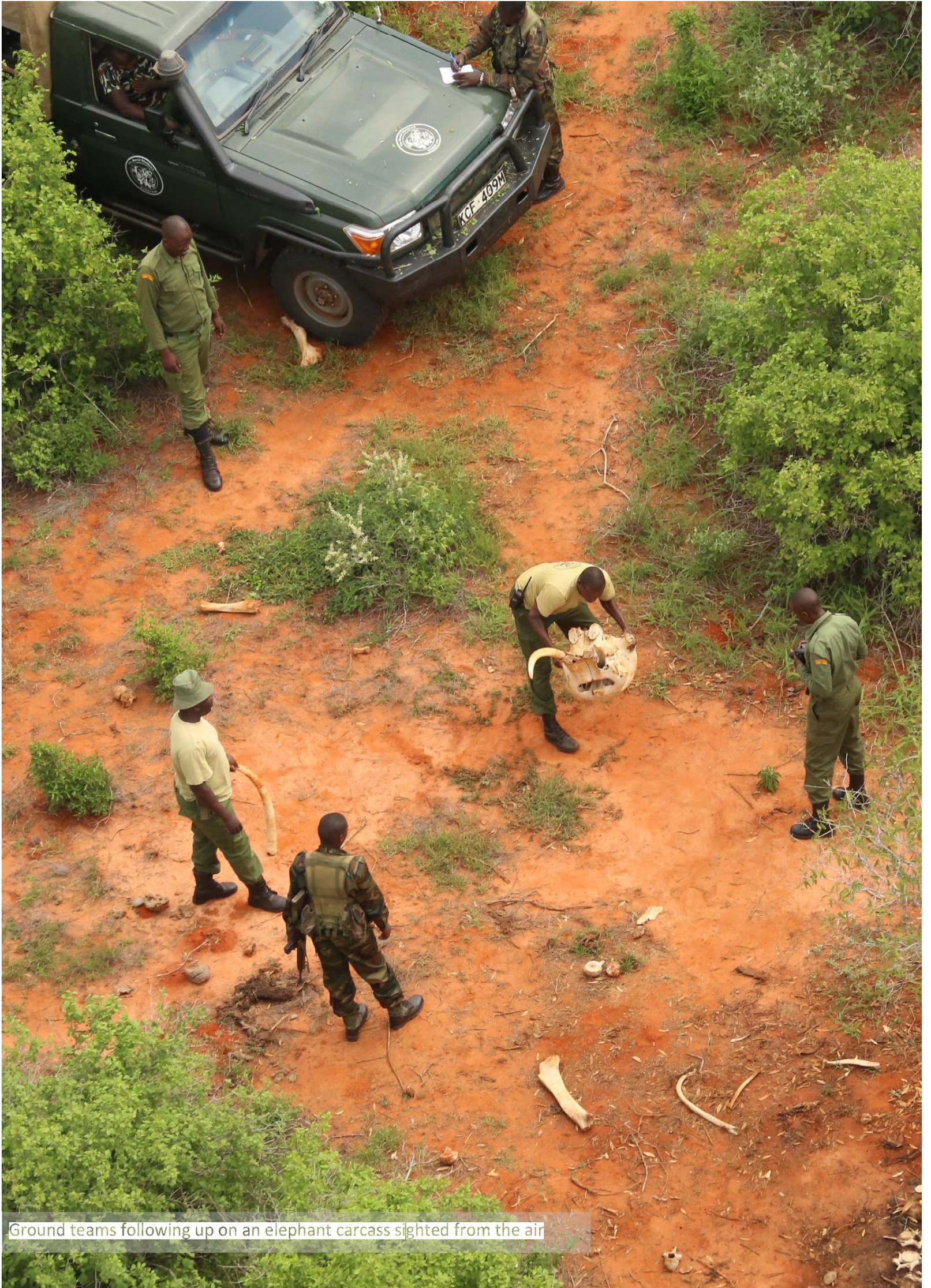
An elephant quenching its thirst at a remote watering hole filled up by the December rains



Fifteen elephant carcasses were still discovered in December in the southern area, however, all of these had died in previous months as a result of the 2017 drought in Tsavo. It will, indeed, be good to close this dark chapter in Tsavo's history. The positive news is that none of the carcasses found were poached elephants.

Also positive was the complete lack of new shooting blinds discovered this month compared to more than 20 blinds which were discovered the previous year in the same month. This is largely attributable to the increased ability to make targeted visits to waterholes with KWS rangers in the Trust's two helicopters, destroying any shooting blinds that have already been constructed and dominating the area with rangers' footprints and the canine unit, sending a message to would-be-poachers that they are not alone and certainly not safe. Several old shooting blinds were discovered between fixed wing and helicopter patrols, but some of these were over a year old, and were duly destroyed.

An old shooting blind sighted from the air



Ground teams following up on an elephant carcass sighted from the air

The helicopters have also been instrumental in responding to numerous cases of human-elephant conflict (HEC) in farms bordering the Park this month. This time of the year is always difficult for farmers who watch in despair as elephants trample their crops; this is primarily due to a lack of land use policies whereby many subsistence farms are situated on the migratory routes of elephants, or flush with the boundaries of the National Park.

The helicopters responded to 4 cases of HEC, successfully removing all elephants from farms and pushing them back into the protected areas. 2 KWS rangers were airlifted from the top of Sagalla Hill by the DSWT helicopter after they were injured by a charging elephant while trying to force a herd out of community land. Both of them have received treatment in Voi and are expected to make a full recovery.

A KWS ranger being airlifted for medical attention after being injured by a charging elephant

One of the most remarkable cases attended to this month, aided by the Trust's helicopter, was the treatment of a young male calf near Taita Salt Lick Sanctuary with a deeply imbedded cable snare around his neck. We believe the calf to be one that was first sighted two years ago, and while reports and a photograph was sent through he was never located again until now! The calf had survived for a long time with the snare, but by now it was cutting deep into his neck and must have been excruciatingly painful to live with. We felt extremely fortunate that the baby was once again spotted and that together with the DSWT ground teams, the DSWT funded Amboseli Veterinary Unit headed by KWS Dr. Ephantus, managed to operate and remove the cable snare and treat the wound. This operation was not without its fair share of drama however as his protective mother charged the veterinary vehicle slamming into the driver's door. Thankfully both the mother and driver were OK, although the mother did break a part of one tusk off in the incident and the car needs some extensive repair work on the door!

The snared calf being treated near Taita Salt Lick

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Highlights this month included 5 cheetahs sighted during two different flights, several rhinos and a calf, and a pack of wild dog attempting to hunt buffalo in Tsavo West. Another sighting of the young elephant with only 3 legs was also made again. The calf appeared to have been born this way and was highly adapted to walking on 3 legs, it was even running to keep up with his family when they moved away from the aircraft.

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