



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

MONTHLY REPORT

NOVEMBER 2016

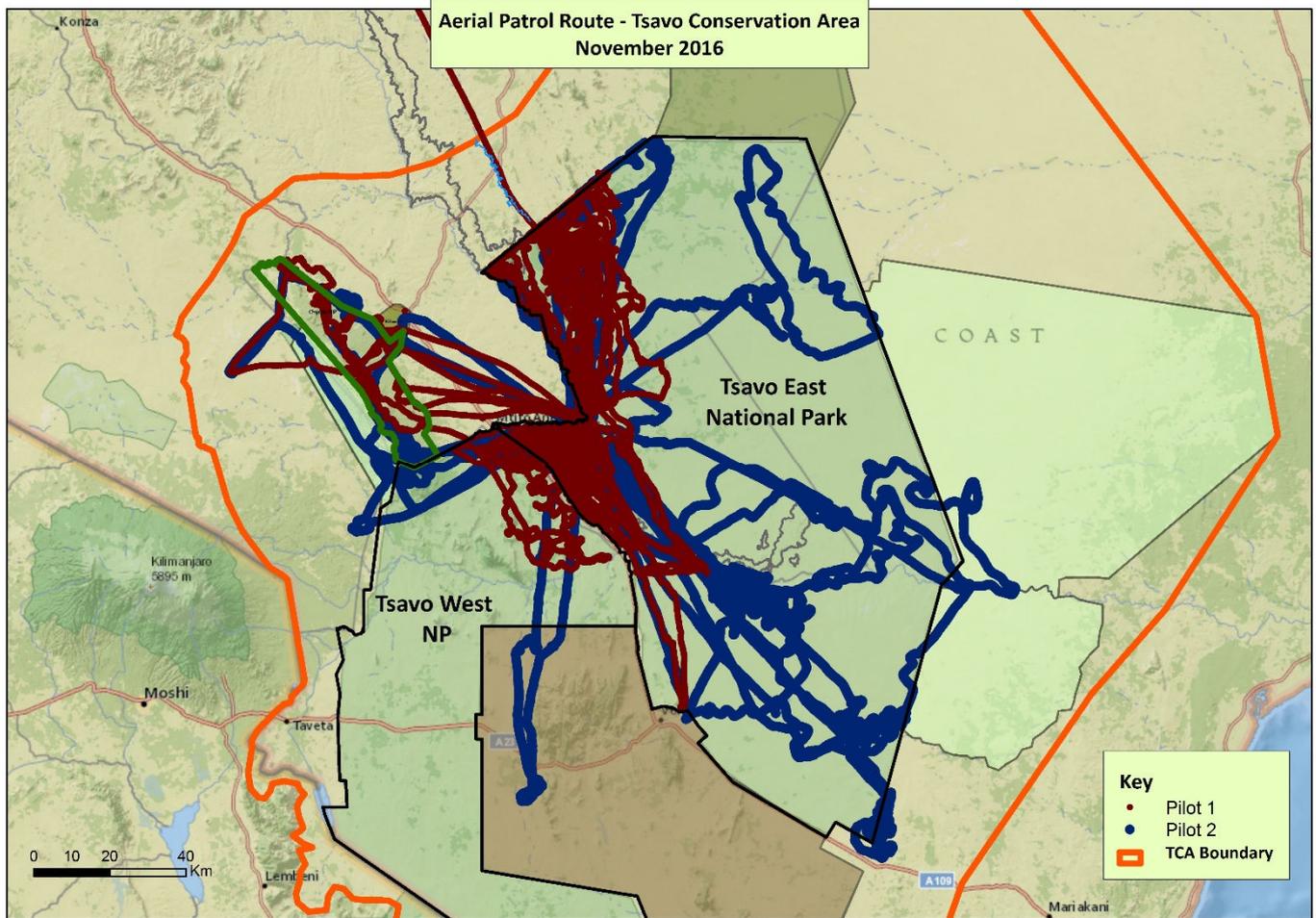


AERIAL STATISTICS

NOVEMBER 2016

HOURS FLOWN	108
KMS COVERED	12, 843
AREAS PATROLLED	Tsavo East, West, Chyulus, Mbirikani, Kuku Ranch, Rombo Ranch





November marked the start of the rains and the end of a very long drought in Tsavo. Whereas much of the country experienced heavy rainfall as a result of el Niño, Tsavo missed out. Unfortunately, more than 40 elephants known to the DSWT died due to the drought, and even more tragically, many of these died very suddenly after the onset of the first green vegetation. After months of malnutrition, their digestive systems could not handle the sudden change.





MONTHLY AERIAL SUMMARY

One victim was a female found collapsed by a Tsavo Trust pilot, who spotted a young calf standing next to her mother as she lay dying, and notified Dr. Poghon and the DSWT who together with a team of keepers from the Voi Stockade were mobilised to attend to the mother and her calf.

Sadly, the mother was so far gone, with no milk left to feed her calf, having been ravaged by a brutal dry season; KWS Veterinary Officer Dr Poghon rescued her young calf who we have managed to save despite her poor condition, thanks to the fortuitous sighting by the Tsavo Trust pilot.

A mother elephant collapsed, suffering from the effects of a prolonged drought





The drought victim's calf being rescued in Tsavo



Illegal activities were generally very low in November, which is common for this time of year. When the rains come many would-be poachers, who are also subsistence farmers, return to their homes to cultivate their land. They are also influenced by the movement of wildlife, especially elephants, which spread out during the rains and become much more difficult to target.

Charcoal burning and logging also came to a dramatic halt, with only a few kilns being discovered and no fresh logging activity at all. The Aerial Unit took this opportunity to spread more “seed bombs” with the hope of regenerating some of the areas that have been hardest hit.

In some places both inside and outside the Parks, overgrazing has been so persistent over the years that there is nothing left to take root when it does rain. With no ground cover, millions of grass seeds are washed away, along with millions of tons of topsoil, so even in the height of the dry season, large areas still look like the surface of the moon. This condition, unfortunately, is spreading into the Parks, and every year cattle, sheep, and goats are herded further and further into protected areas in search of green grass, eating much of it before it has had a chance to go to seed.



Erosion gulleys created throughout the Parks and protected areas by livestock intrusion



Livestock moving long distances in search of grazing

Another characteristic of the rains in Tsavo is the annual increase in human-wildlife conflict. Dozens of elephants move out of the Parks and into community farmland, partly in search of tempting crops, but also following ancient migratory routes. One group of elephants, who had wandered out of the Park through an open gate, were successfully pushed back into the Park through the same gate by the DSWT's helicopter before they could do any harm or be harmed themselves.

The helicopter was also busy during the month, patrolling areas with high elephant concentrations, landing at waterholes and deploying rangers to look for human signs (foot prints, shooting blinds and platforms, etc.). Although no fresh signs were found, several old shooting platforms and shooting blinds were discovered and destroyed. On the way back from one patrol, the pilot sighted a lone elephant calf very near to the place where a lactating female had been struck and killed by a vehicle on the Mombasa highway only days before. An attempt was made to rescue the calf, but due to its size and the lack of visibility in the thick vegetation, this attempt was unsuccessful, but the search and rescue efforts continue by all teams.





The helicopter has also been active patrolling with the Dog Unit this month deploying the dogs, their handlers and KWS rangers on patrols for exercise and to sniff out any evidence of human presence in targeted areas.

Their continued presence has not been lost on the poachers making the canine unit an effective deterrence with tangible results, as fewer elephants are being poached through poisoned arrow poaching than in previous years.





Highlights during the month included the sighting of 10 out of 13 of Tsavo East's rhinos in one flight – a very rare occurrence; finding a den of wild dog with puppies and of course, the rain, which transforms Tsavo from a desert into a veritable jungle.

Migratory birds also flock to Tsavo in huge numbers from as far as China to feast on the billions of insects that hatch simultaneously during the rainy season. Most notably are the huge flocks of Amur falcons and European rollers, particularly fond of flying at the same altitude as our pilots.







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