



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

MONTHLY REPORT
OCTOBER 2015

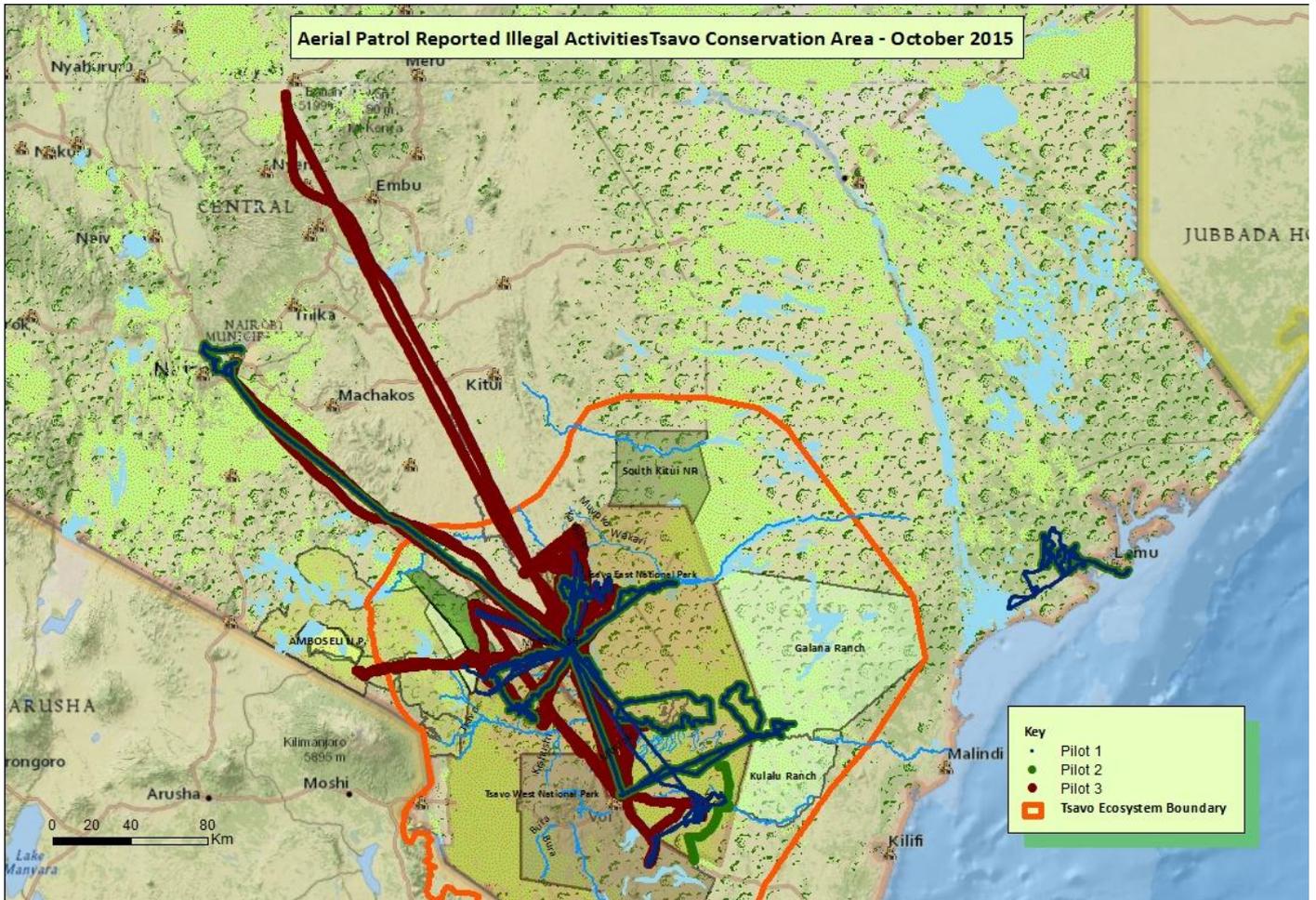




AERIAL STATISTICS

OCTOBER 2015

HOURS FLOWN	125.8
KMS COVERED	17,433.2
AREAS PATROLLED	Tsavo East and West National Parks, Amboseli National Reserve, bordering Ranches, Chyulu Hills and Amu Ranch



October is historically the toughest month in Tsavo because by this point the Park and rangelands are extremely dry. Wildlife at this time is dependent on springs and rivers, whilst the surrounding human populations are hungry and desperate too. The Aerial Unit as a result has been extremely active this month, covering all corners of both Tsavo East and West as well as Amboseli National Park and the Trust’s Amu Project in Lamu County.

This month the number of elephant carcasses sighted from the air has spiked compared to previous months, crude use of cable snares and arrows being the method of choice by the poachers. Six carcasses were sighted from the air in total, four had the tusks still intact which were recovered and handed in to KWS, whilst two were missing their tusks.

A number of injured elephants were also detected during the month and their veterinary treatments were carried out by both the DSWT/KWS Tsavo Mobile Veterinary Unit and DSWT/KWS Amboseli Mobile Veterinary Unit supported by the DSWT Aerial Unit and ground teams.





OCTOBER 2015

On the 3rd the month started out with a call from the community to assist with three elephant bulls that were in the community areas raiding water sources and destroying fruit trees. Working with the KWS Problem Animal Control Unit the Trust's Super Cub and chief pilot Nick Trent located the three bulls and together with the KWS ground team pushed the bulls towards the Park, a distance of 20 km. The following morning the Cub returned to recheck the area and the bulls were nowhere to be seen and the community was happy.

Regular patrols were also carried out throughout the month with a focus on the Northern area of Tsavo East National Park where incidences of logging and illegal cattle were sighted and followed up by ground teams. Charcoaling was also prolific this month both inside and outside the National Parks.





Rhino were sighted on two occasions, one free roaming and one inside a protected sanctuary. The late rains and extreme dry period make it easier to sight the rhinos from the air at this time of year as the arid bush is devoid of leaves.





This month a shooting blind was sighted from the air. One of the ground teams followed up and destroyed the blind which was estimated to have been used about three weeks previously.

Additionally a report was received this month from tourists about an injured baby elephant with a swollen foot, still being cared for by its mother. Extensive searches were performed from the air and by our ground teams, yet by month end the calf and mother were still not located.

One of the Trust's anti-poaching teams received a call that three poachers had been sighted entering the Park. Within an hour one of the Trust's Super Cubs was on site providing vital aerial support for the team on the ground. Despite extensive efforts one dead snared zebra was sighted, but there was no sign of the poachers, reminding us just how challenging it is to catch the culprits in such a vast area.





Six elephants were treated with help from the Trust's helicopter and planes during the month. The first elephant was spotted on the 3rd in the Ngulia/Kamboyo area which was a bull elephant of about 35 years old with a wound on his left flank about a foot behind his foreleg. The wound had a stain of white puss on it and so KWS Veterinary Officer Dr Poghon (who was in the Kamboyo area) was met by the helicopter and SuperCub to isolate and treat the bull. Dr Poghon hit with his first shot at 1330, but unfortunately the dart failed to discharge despite a perfect shot in the rump of the elephant. It took some time for the team to be sure that the dose had not discharged from the dart (which remained lodged in the elephant) and so it was not until 1400 that the second dart found its mark.

The elephant, which was with another bull, had been guided to a spot right next the Kamboyo runway which is where he fell within easy reach of the vehicles. The other bull was driven away from the darted animal and Dr Poghon was dropped within 30m to allow him to treat the elephant. The wound was treated quickly and before he injected the elephant with the antidote to the anaesthetic, the helicopter was airborne to protect the crew on the ground and the ropes were attached to the animal's tusk to assist him to his feet. The bull got to his feet very quickly with the help of the vehicle and was given an excellent prognosis for a full recovery. It was another excellent example of teamwork with the KWS, and we are most grateful to Dr Poghon for changing his plans to assist us so quickly.





Another bull elephant was treated for an arrow wound on the 8th. A poisoned arrow was removed from his side and he was given a good chance of recovery. On the same day a female elephant was given a follow up treatment. She had been previously treated on the 20th of September and an arrow was removed from her leg. She had improved considerably but was still suffering from the effects of the wound. The additional treatment should put her in good stead for a full recovery.

On the 18th a mother who had a young calf was treated but sadly died during treatment. The calf was immediately taken to the DSWT Voi stockades for care and attention. This mother was sighted a number of times on the ground but unfortunately each time a vet looked for her she vanished. When she was finally treated she was too weak to get up from the treatment due to excessive damage caused by the poison arrow wound.





On the 23rd a 35+ year old bull elephant was sighted by one of the pilots with an arrow wound in the rump, it was a large and open wound easily visible from the air. The bull also had a long heavy steel cable snare trailing from its right foreleg (which looked very recent, with thankfully no wound or damage to the skin at the point of contact). The DSWT pilot on patrol guided the ground teams in. The bull was in the company of three other bull elephants.

Dr Poghon drove from Voi to Ithumba and his arrival was synchronised with the arrival of the Trust's helicopter at 1pm. As the elephant had not moved very far since first being sighted Dr Poghon quickly prepared a dart while the helicopter and SuperCub got airborne at the same time. The elephant wasn't too far from the road and near an open area. The helicopter managed to provide the darting platform and keep the elephant in the open area which made the whole operation much easier for all concerned. Once he was treated and the cable snare was cut from his leg, the helicopter remained overhead to ensure the waking elephant did not charge any of the team on the ground. He wandered off groggily and was sighted weeks later beautifully healed.

On the 24th news was received from Dr Njoroge about an injured female and young calf under observation by Community Rangers nearby the Amboseli Satao Lodge. They were on very difficult lava terrain inhibiting vehicles getting anywhere close to them. The DSWT helicopter arrived on the scene and collected the DSWT funded Amboseli Mobile Veterinary Unit ensuring he got a very close look at the case from the air. The limp was the result of a congenital defect or a very old wound from which the elephant had recovered. It was using the left rear leg for propulsion and appeared not to be in pain, whilst moving quite well and was taking great care of its calf. The team felt there was no point in traumatising the elephant or calf further and left the group to feed.





On the 27th a call was received from one of the Trust's anti-poaching team leaders near to the Chyulu Hills National Park with reports of three giraffe sighted in the community lands. The community were chasing the giraffe with dogs with an intent to kill and eat them. Nick Trent and the Trust's Super Cub was on site within 30 minutes. One giraffe was saved, the other two collapsed from exhaustion on rocky terrain where the community, 500 strong, overpowered the KWS rangers and butchered the animals. This was a very discouraging sight for all concerned to witness.

On the 30th the DSWT Aerial Unit were very involved in the rescue of a baby elephant from Kamboyo in Tsavo West. After the KWS pilot reported sighting this baby our plane flew to see what could have happened to the calf's mother, or to see if perhaps a herd remained in the area. Sadly no herd was sighted, just a few big bulls, and there was no carcass in the area. The calf was small enough to be airlifted to the Nursery in Nairobi, so a Cessna 208 caravan was soon on site and the young but weak female of about six months was loaded into the plane by KWS and DSWT rangers.

While searching for the calf's mother a bull elephant was sighted with a swollen back leg. The Trust pilots had been looking for this bull for over 6 weeks. His back leg was extremely swollen and the skin grazed off the pad of his foot from dragging it along. He was able to be treated by the DSWT funded Mobile Veterinary Unit and the prognosis for his full recovery is good.







On the 30th a lone bull elephant, approx. 35 - 40 years old was observed from the top of the Yatta by KWS rangers having difficulty crossing the Galana just upstream from Lugard's Falls. The helicopter was called to investigate the sighting, soon finding the wounded bull at 6.00pm. A huge steel cable-snare was deeply embedded in his swollen right foreleg and he was dragging a branch attached to the end of it, whilst limping very badly and obviously in extreme pain.

Arrangements were made for an early morning veterinary intervention the next day. The DSWT Tsavo Mobile Veterinary Unit vehicle used the new bridge at Lugard's Falls to drive around to the north bank of the river whilst Dr Poghon was picked up from the road in the helicopter and taken to assess the elephant from the air. Forty minutes later the vet vehicle was at the scene and the Vet quickly prepared his dart. Once the elephant was down it took over an hour to cut through the thick stainless steel cable. The cable alone weighed 15 kg and the elephant must have been dragging the log behind him for several days in unimaginable agony. Due to the severity of his injury the bull was given a guarded prognosis. The Aerial Unit monitored him for a few days post-operation and he remained inactive during this time, and sadly died a few days later as a result of his injury. The cable snare was the same kind that was found on the Ithumba bull treated this month too. This sort of stainless steel heavy duty cable has not been available in Kenya and we feel that it might well be linked to the new Chinese railway line that is presently being built through Tsavo East and West.

The DSWT Aerial unit would like to recognise the continued support and team work of the KWS ground units and officers who make our work across Tsavo possible. Working in close cooperation with DSWT ground teams and KWS personnel makes our work effective and rewarding. We thank our donors for the support given to us all in making Tsavo a safer place for all wildlife, big and small.







Photographs copyright © 2015 The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

