



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

MONTHLY REPORT

APRIL 2017



AERIAL STATISTICS

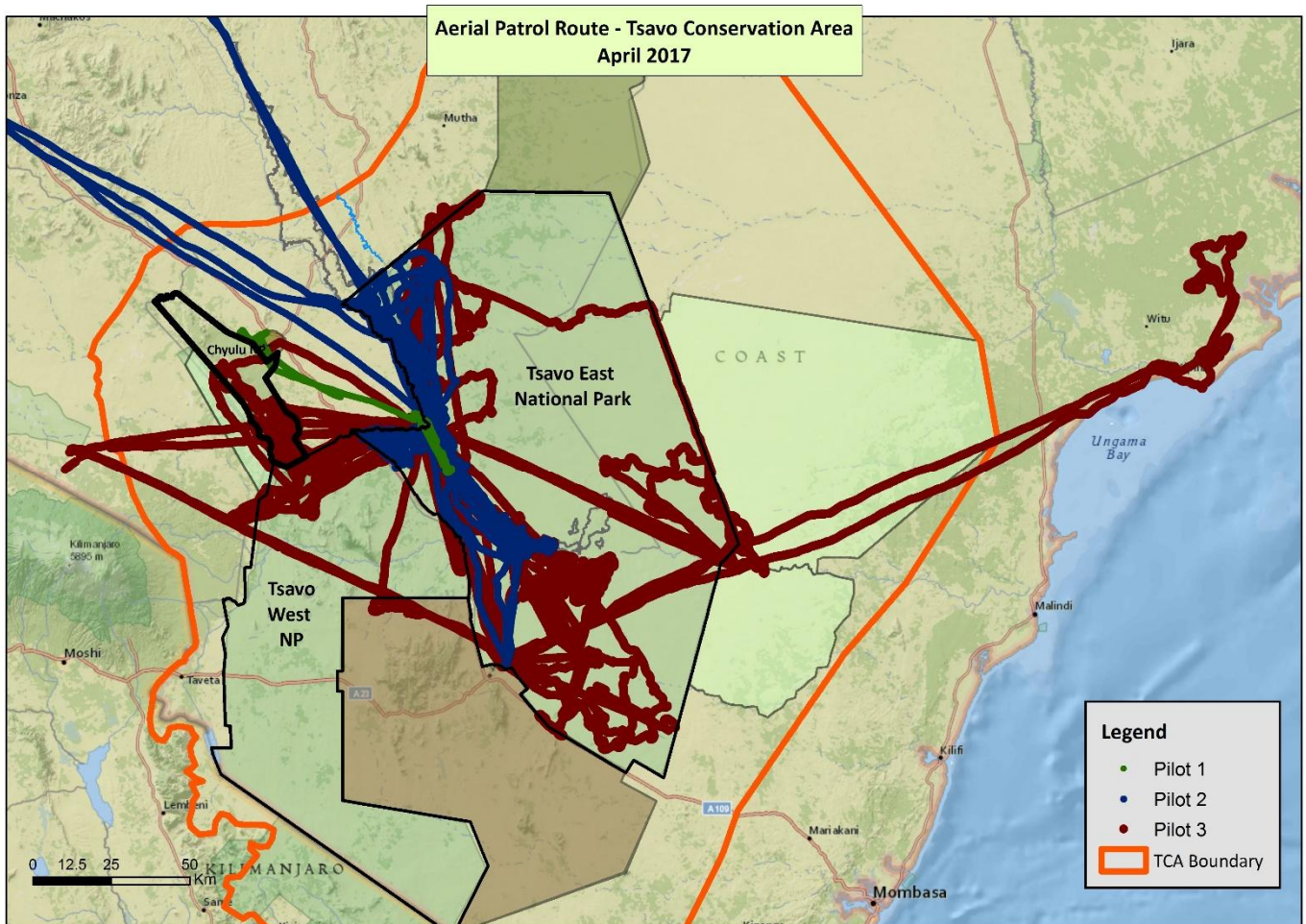
APRIL 2017

HOURS FLOWN	122
KMS COVERED	14,815
AREAS PATROLLED	Tsavo East & West NPs, Chyulu Hills NP, Galana Ranch, Taita Ranches and Lamu District



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MONTHLY AERIAL PATROL MAP



A major focus for the fixed-winged planes this month was trying to root out charcoal burning in the Chyulu Hills. With sustained efforts in the Gazi area of Tsavo East, charcoal burning has been almost eliminated, so we are targeting similar results on the south-eastern slopes of the Chyulu Hills where charcoal burning and wood carving is still relatively out of control. Forty-seven charcoal kilns were found in total in the Chyulu Hills and most of these were destroyed or in the process of being followed up on by the ground teams who also made several arrests. In efforts to try and restore nearby heavily degraded land on the western side of the Chyulus, the DSWT also aurally distributed over 30,000 bio char seed balls on Kuku Ranch to assist in reforestation efforts.

A charcoal kiln being destroyed by one the DSWT/KWS teams in the Chyulus





MONTHLY AERIAL SUMMARY

Livestock similarly continues to be a continuous battle as herders repeatedly try their luck re-entering the Parks. With on-going pressure from the current drought, this situation is unlikely to improve. Unfortunately, with few small rains having fallen in parts of Tsavo, elephants and livestock are coming into close contact in competition for small patches of green vegetation. This on-going challenge is being tackled by the Kenya Wildlife Service.





Last month we reported that a group of poachers had been responsible for the deaths of several elephants but that heavy ground and aerial patrols had likely influenced them to leave. Unfortunately, in April, another two carcasses were discovered in the same area. Both carcasses were around 3-4 weeks old and thought to have been poached around the same time as the previous carcasses; however, the ground team that was sent to recover intact ivory from one of the carcasses discovered fresh footprints of the poachers on their way there. It is possible that they had left and returned when they thought things had quietened down, but it is difficult to say. The DSWT helicopter was immediately mobilised to collect a tracking dog and handler to follow the poachers' scent. The dog successfully led a joint operation of KWS and DSWT rangers to a camp containing 4 poachers. Unfortunately, the harbour was positioned at a large rocky cliff on the edge of the Yatta and the poachers were able to escape over the edge before the rangers could apprehend them. Several hours of searching from the ground and air failed to turn anything up and it wasn't until the following day that 2 sets of footprints were picked up but ultimately lost.

The next day, however, the helicopter pilot spotted footprints from the air while flying down the Yatta Plateau around 20 kilometres north of the camp. The dog and handler were deployed again, this time in the back of a Super Cub that dropped them at a remote airstrip where they could be transferred into the helicopter and deposited on the tracks. The team did an amazing job of following the tracks for many kilometres in extremely hot conditions whilst the helicopter leapfrogged ahead of them searching for more footprints. This continued until the following morning before the tracks eventually led the team to a point where the poachers crossed the Athi River out of the National Park. It was difficult for everyone to have come so close to catching these poachers – whose camp was found littered with bows, poisoned arrows and axes – after following them for a staggering 75 kilometres; however, the search is far from over and our teams are following up on leads, which they hope will result in an arrest soon. What was a highlight of the exercise was witnessing such great coordination between KWS and DSWT and the determination of everyone involved until the very end.



An elephant carcass found with tusks already removed by poachers

An elephant carcass with tusks intact



Other poaching activity was limited, with only one poachers' camp being discovered during helicopter patrols. The helicopter was also involved in the rescue of a young snared buffalo. It had actually been discovered during a routine patrol by one of our ground teams, but the helicopter was also in the area and able to land nearby to assist in the safe removal of the snare.





The Aerial Unit was involved in 3 veterinary cases this month in Tsavo. Early in the month, the Trust received word from Tsavo Trust rangers near Dakota in the southern part of Tsavo East that an elephant had been sighted with an injured leg. With Dr. Poghon away on leave and a chance of losing sight of the elephant, a DSWT Super Cub was sent to collect Dr. Ndambiri from Amboseli. Upon arriving, the elephant was found a few kilometres from the Dakota KWS outpost and treated for a large festering wound on its leg caused by either an arrow or spear. Fortunately for the elephant, the infection had not spread into the joint and despite being nearly roughly a square foot in size, the wound was largely superficial. After treatment, Dr. Ndambiri gave the bull elephant a good prognosis and was ferried back to Amboseli.

An elephant with an injured leg in southern Tsavo East





An elephant treated for another leg wound by the Tsavo Mobile Vet Unit

Another elephant with a slightly more serious wound, also on its leg, thought to have been inflicted by a poisoned arrow, was sighted by a DSWT Super Cub responding to a report from a tour operator. Dr. Poghon was present for this treatment and removed about 20 kg of necrotic flesh from the wound that would have undoubtedly led to the elephant's death.

The third vet treatment took place many miles away on mainland Lamu in Northeast Kenya on the 14th April. The DSWT received word of an injured lion that had been seen by rangers on Kipini Conservancy. The lion was suffering from a rope snare around its front right leg. Dr Poghon was flown the two hours in a DSWT aircraft to the site and after quite a journey getting to the patient the team successfully treated the lion, which was given a good prognosis. You can read more about this story [here](#).





With the lion attended to, the plane continued on to Amu Ranch, where DSWT supports the Lamu Conservation Trust in protecting over 60,000 acres of pristine coastal habitat. In the absence of aerial coverage, the ground teams have done an exceptional job of keeping illegal activities at bay. Only one small cattle enclosure was found and a relatively small number of cattle. No evidence of logging — a common sighting a few years ago — was not seen anywhere on the ranch. What was evident, however, was the severity of the drought that has been afflicting the region. Several dried-up waterholes were seen with the dried up remains of dozens of hippos and buffaloes that got trapped in mud as the last drops of moisture evaporated. Very little grass remains and so far the rains, which were expected in March, have only reached one small corner of the ranch where a few waterholes are attracting the remaining herds of buffalo and topi. Elsewhere, the biggest water pans and estuaries are still parched and desolate. The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust has in the past few months drilled two boreholes that pump water constantly to keep two water pans full — and these have been able to save a good number of Amu's hippo and other wildlife. Mwalimu Baddi, from LCT, explained that around 160 hippos in the Lamu District have so far died of thirst or starvation, many of which drank seawater in the mangroves out of pure desperation.

Carcasses of hippos sadly found in dried up watering holes in Lamu District





Despite the drought there is hope, as the DSWT has installed 2 new boreholes on Amu to supply water for wildlife







This month the Aerial Unit was pivotal in the rescue of an orphaned elephant that was first sighted abandoned and alone by tourists. Our aircraft was sent out to patrol the skies and relocate the calf. He was found to be approximately 3 years old when he was rescued by the DSWT Voi elephant Keepers along with our antipoaching teams and KWS rangers. We have called this elephant Pasaka, which means Easter in Kiswahili. He was a challenge to capture and ten men were needed to restrain and load him into the back of a lorry, but thankfully he is now safe at the DSWT Voi stockades and thriving. He will soon be part of our orphan herd down in Tsavo, never having been brought to the Nairobi Nursery given his size.





Highlights of the month were certainly the snared buffalo, lion and elephant rescues as well as a stunning leopard sighting near Lugard's Falls. Even more exciting was the arrival of the Trust's New Airbus AS350 helicopter, which has a much greater carrying capacity and will enhance our ability to deploy rangers and react to emergency situations, including medical evacuations, and human wildlife conflict incidences. Also, with the addition of a Bambi Bucket in the future, this helicopter will enable us to start fighting the devastating annual wildfires that ravage the Chyulu Hills.







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