



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

MONTHLY REPORT
FEBRUARY 2017



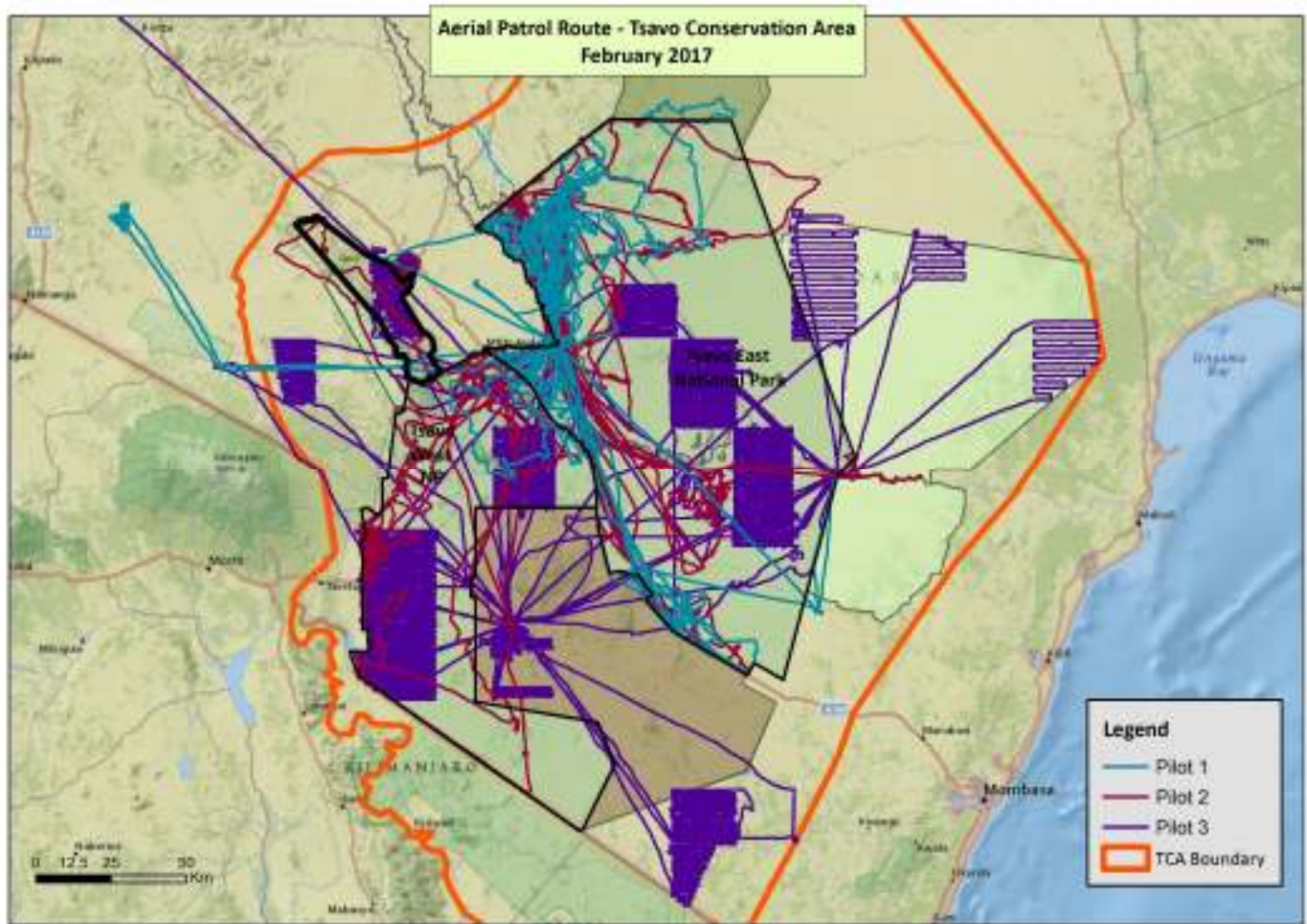


AERIAL STATISTICS

FEBRUARY 2017

HOURS FLOWN	247.5
KMS COVERED	32,429
AREAS PATROLLED	The Tsavo-Mkomazi Ecosystem bordering Tanzania as well as the wider Tsavo Conservation Area





In the month of February, eight aircraft descended on Tsavo for the 2017 Tsavo-Mkomazi Elephant Census. Two aircraft were provided by DSWT, one by KWS, one by Save the Elephants, one by Tsavo Trust, one by Farmland Aviation and two by private owners who also volunteered their time as pilots. Despite having half as many aircraft as the last count three years ago, everyone stepped up to the challenge and completed the count in just 13 days, including 4 days of intensive training. In those 13 days, most planes clocked over 70 hours of flying time in service of the count, with DSWT's aircrafts doing over 150 hours combined.

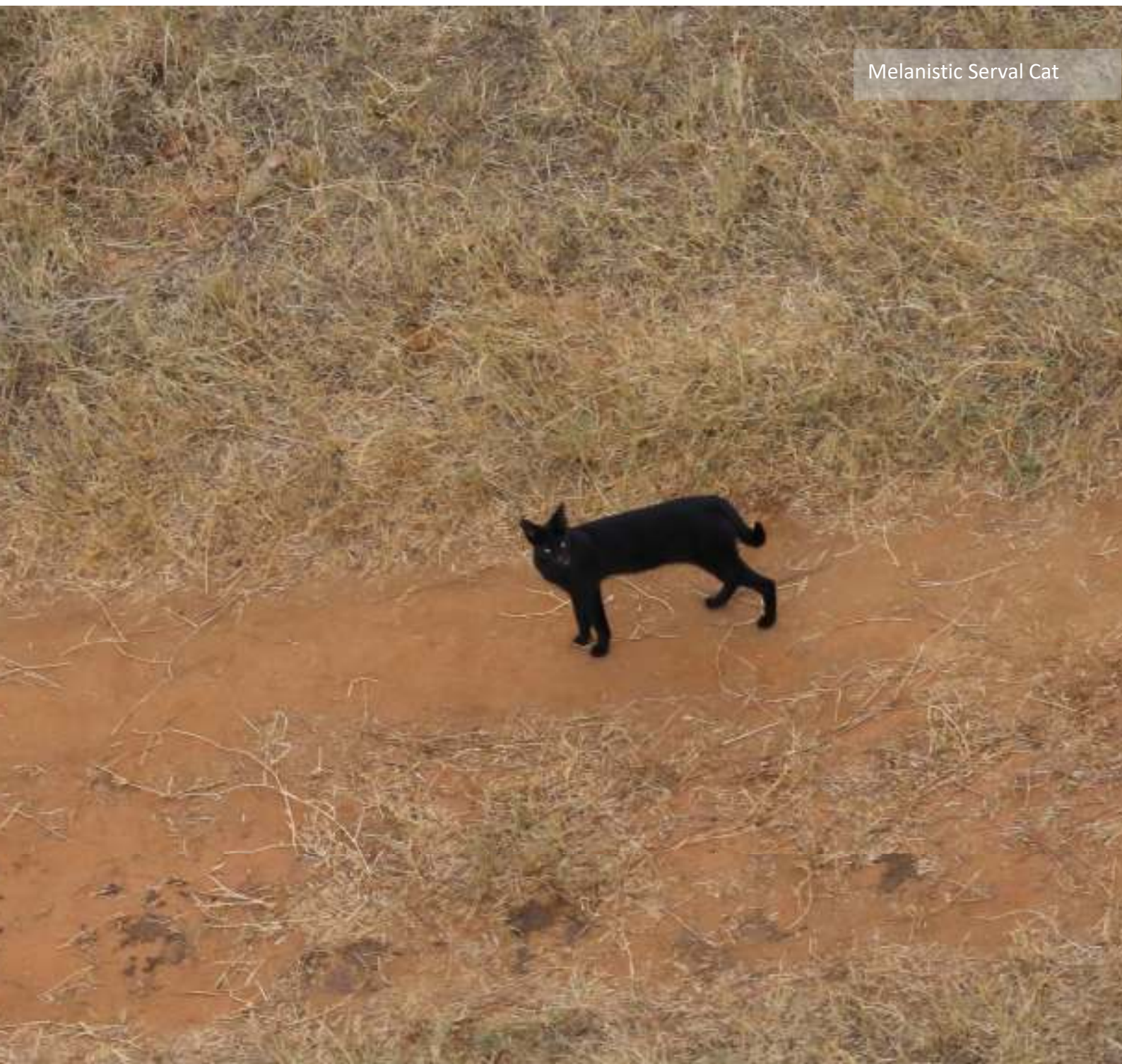




MONTHLY AERIAL SUMMARY

We are eagerly awaiting the results of the count, which will indicate how successful our efforts over the past 3 years have been in preserving not only elephant numbers, but giraffe and buffalo numbers as well. In addition to counting these large mammals, the pilots and their spotters made many exciting observations of rare and elusive animals including a melanistic serval, African wild dogs, lions, cheetahs, leopards and bat eared foxes, among other species.

A few recent elephant carcasses were also discovered, which have triggered active KWS investigations, and on the third day of counting, one of the DSWT Super Cubs sighted a bull elephant with a large protrusion on its abdomen that was later treated by the KWS/DSWT Mobile Veterinary team. Sadly, one of those elephants found dead was another iconic tusker; although his tusks were still intact he is presumed to have been poached by poisoned arrow. This same elephant was treated for poisoned arrow wounds by the DSWT Mobile Veterinary Unit on three separate occasions.



Melanistic Serval Cat



African Wild Dogs



The census also revealed surprise concentrations of elephants in areas that are normally devoid of elephant herds during this time of year when water sources are limited. This revelation will guide DSWT's aerial patrol activity over the next few weeks, since our areas of focus generally follow the highest concentrations of elephants (especially those in remote and vulnerable areas).

Whilst two of DSWT's super cubs were busy with the count, aerial surveillance throughout the Tsavo Conservation Area continued between the Trust's third super cub and its helicopter. The super cub was instrumental in locating livestock and livestock enclosures during an intensive drive by KWS during the month to evict thousands of cattle that had entered the Park illegally. The drive was very successful and only one single cow was sighted on the last flight in the area. More concrete success was found when the discovery of an active charcoal kiln on top of the Yatta Plateau led to the arrest of a charcoal burner the following day by one of our ground teams.



Air and ground teams pushing illegal livestock out of the Park



Herders and their livestock digging water wells in sand rivers in the Park



Two elephant carcasses were found during the month by the Aerial Unit. One was a fresh carcass that had had its ivory removed and had been covered in branches to conceal it. The second carcass was discovered along the Galana River in Galana Conservancy outside Tsavo East National Park; however, it was later confirmed to be a known carcass.

Three vet treatments were carried out in February with assistance from the Aerial Unit. The first was an old male elephant found northwest of Amboseli with a spear wound to his lower front leg. The treatment was successful and he was later sighted doing well. The second was a re-treatment of a female treated last month on the Tiva River with a suspected gunshot wound to her right front leg. Her prognosis remains guarded and she will be closely monitored. The third was a bull elephant discovered in Tsavo West near Ziwani with a large protrusion from its abdomen. Unfortunately, the Tsavo Mobile Vet Team was away, so the Amboseli Vet was airlifted to Ziwani for the treatment. After inspecting the wound, Dr. Ndambiri of the Amboseli unit, determined that the initial infliction had been a hernia which had developed into an open wound. He was able to treat the wound and has given the elephant a favourable prognosis. Again, we will continue to monitor his progress.







Human-elephant conflict remained a challenge throughout a dry February, and the helicopter was involved in two incidents pushing elephants out of community land and back into protected areas. Three elephants were pushed out of an area near Soto along the boundary of Chyulu Hills NP and another two were pushed out of the community near Darajani and back into Tsavo East NP. Thankfully both operations were successful thanks to ground support from KWS and DSWT teams.

The helicopter was also busy during the month locating and destroying shooting blinds around the vanishing waterholes in the Tundani area of Tsavo East, near Ithumba. Destroying blinds and showing a presence at waterholes is a huge deterrent to poachers who will avoid areas where they know rangers are patrolling. Being able to drop rangers at dozens of waterholes a day with the helicopter, and sometimes with the DSWT Canine tracker dogs and handlers, is a highly effective and efficient way to dominate an area. The helicopter was also able to inspect several known harbours along the Yatta Plateau, and recent activity in one harbour led to follow up on the ground by one of our anti-poaching teams, which led to the arrest of an ivory poacher.

Helicopter and rangers landing at water holes





The helicopter and DSWT Canine Unit patrolling at potential poacher camps

The major highlight of February was participating in the Tsavo-Mkomazi Elephant count, with the pilots getting the opportunity to collaborate with dozens of other enthusiastic conservationists including KWS and other conservation NGOs towards a common goal. Another exciting moment was the first ever aerial sighting of Tsavo East's youngest rhino. The two-month-old rhino had only ever been seen once before by a ground patrol and brings Tsavo East's rhino population up to 14 individuals.





Lesser Kudus



Photographs copyright © 2017 The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

