



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

MONTHLY REPORT
FEBRUARY 2018



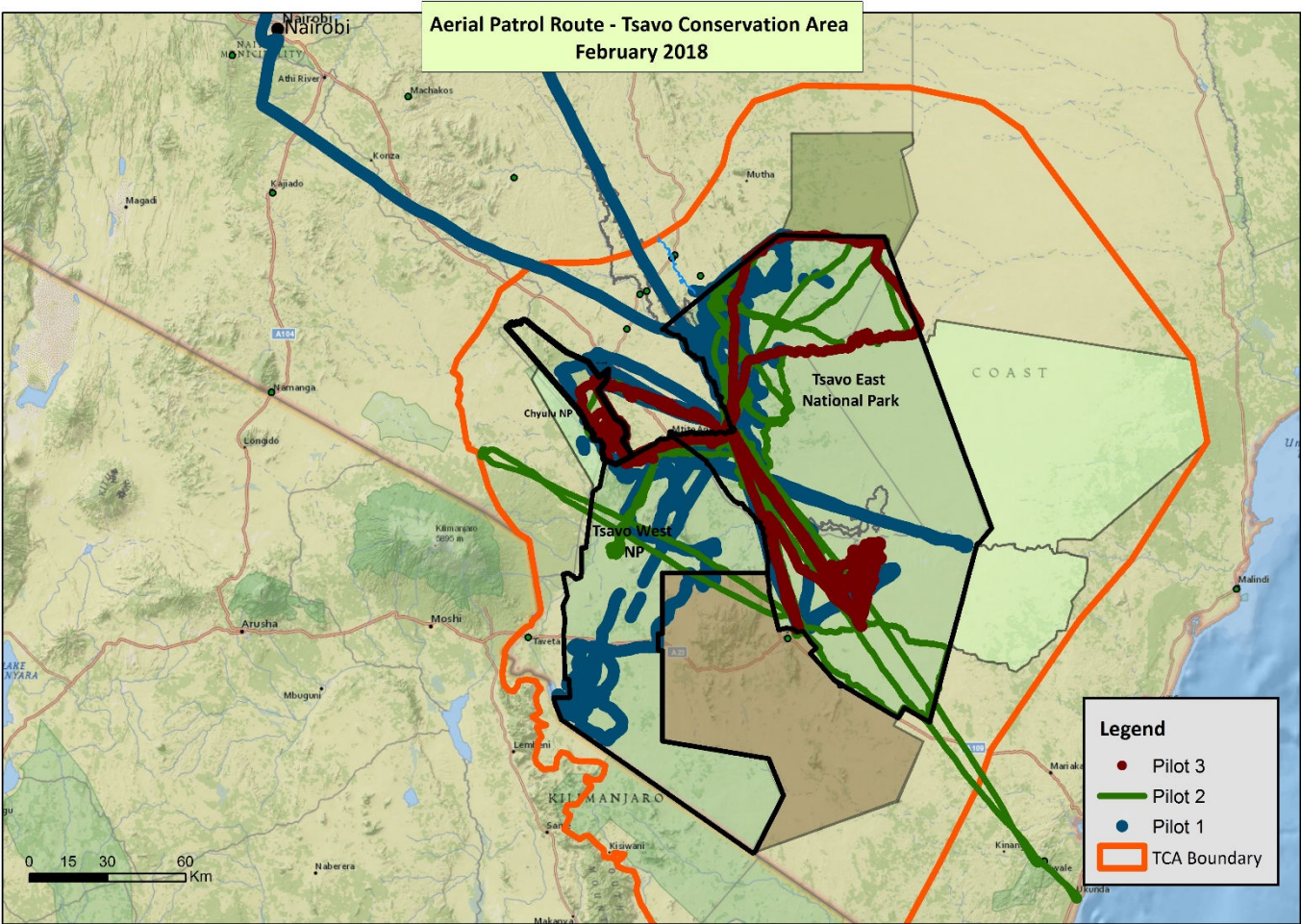


AERIAL STATISTICS

FEBRUARY 2018

HOURS FLOWN	98
KMS COVERED	12,795
AREAS PATROLLED	Tsavo East, Tsavo West, Taita Ranches, Chyulu Hills NP, Kimana Sanctuary,







MONTHLY AERIAL SUMMARY

After a disappointing rainy season in November/December, February was once again very dry and although we were worried about the possibility of the March-April rains failing, we were encouraged at the outset of the month by a widespread flowering of acacia trees across the entire Park. One generally expects the rain to come within about a month of such an event, so we were therefore not surprised when a couple of very light showers arrived in February before the heavens opened as soon as the month was over on the 1st of March.





February was a busy month, especially for the helicopter. Farmers were preparing to harvest their crops, so the helicopter was involved in several cases of pushing crop-raiding elephants back into protected areas. On one occasion a group of 6 elephants were successfully pushed out of the community and back into the Kibwezi Forest through a dropped section of fence.

Three veterinary interventions were also conducted with assistance from the helicopter, including one of our orphans who was preparing to return to the wild. While out in the bush with some of the older “ex-orphans” an opportunistic lion attacked the young elephant, who was fortunately protected by older companions, who then walked him back to the stockade in search of help. The helicopter was able to rush a vet to the scene and although there was some permanent damage done to the tendons and ligaments of one leg, the elephant is healing well. Two other injured wild elephants were also darted and treated from the helicopter, one with two arrow wounds and another with a horrendous cable snare around its neck. Both were given a good prognosis and are expected to make a fully recovery due to the timely intervention they received.





As a follow-up to the elephant found and treated with arrow wounds, additional patrols were conducted with the helicopter to land at various waterholes and inspect for shooting blinds and other human activity. Several old shooting blinds were discovered and destroyed, and one fresh shooting blind was discovered at a waterhole where fresh blood was also found. The area was combed thoroughly, and proof that the poachers had fled due to the heightened activity was evident. Fixed wing aircrafts also helped in the transfer of Tsavo's Mobile Field Veterinary Officer to Kimana Sanctuary near Amboseli to treat an elephant suffering from spear wounds. This beautiful famous big bull will need follow up treatments, so the prognosis remains guarded.



Helicopter and DSWT/KWSrangers during aerial patrols



Further south, on a routine exercise with the K9 unit, an active harbour was discovered atop the Yatta Plateau. Two freshly killed dik diks and a water container were found; however, the poachers having been discovered, fled the Park on foot. Several hours of tracking with the dogs led the team to a place where they had crossed the Athi River and out of the Park, so they were unfortunately not apprehended.

During a patrol in the North of Tsavo East, the helicopter sighted bicycle tracks, which were followed to an area with several cut trees. Although there were many instances during the month where tracks were discovered and did not ultimately lead to an arrest, in most cases the poachers were aware that they were being followed and the risk of getting caught is a strong deterrent, and one which we hope will keep them and others that they warn from returning any time soon.

The fixed wing aircrafts flew further afield, monitoring mostly other forms of illegal activity in addition to poaching. Livestock incursions were noted along the Eastern boundary of Tsavo East, but to a lesser extent than the same timeframe last year. KWS has been consistently dealing with the issue of livestock so numbers of livestock in the Park have been reduce dramatically as well as the distance into the Park that they are venturing.





In the Chyulu Hills, livestock incursions as well as charcoal burning were observed. A few farmers were found to have been cultivating crops along the boundary so follow up was necessary from ground teams to remove them from the Park. A permanent solution to this encroachment and to persistent charcoal burning will be an electric fence being funded by DSWT that will skirt the entire Eastern Boundary of Chyulu Hills National Park. Most of this has already been completed and the balance will be finished within three months with the total distance of electric fence built and monitored by DSWT will be 93 kms along this sensitive and vulnerable boundary.

Two carcasses were discovered during the month. One of these was a juvenile elephant with two small tusks that were recovered by a ground team; it is thought to have been among the elephants that died during last year's drought. Another adult elephant carcass was also discovered on patrol and the tusks later collected with the help of the helicopter due to the inaccessibility of the carcass' location. The cause of death remains uncertain.





Highlights for the helicopter included several sightings of large cats as well as a sighting of two wild dogs cooling themselves in the Athi River.

A major highlight for the month was the sighting of 12 out of the 15 rhinos currently residing in Tsavo East on a single patrol. This is a rare event and remarkable considering the size of the area that they occupy.







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