



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

MONTHLY REPORT

JANUARY 2017



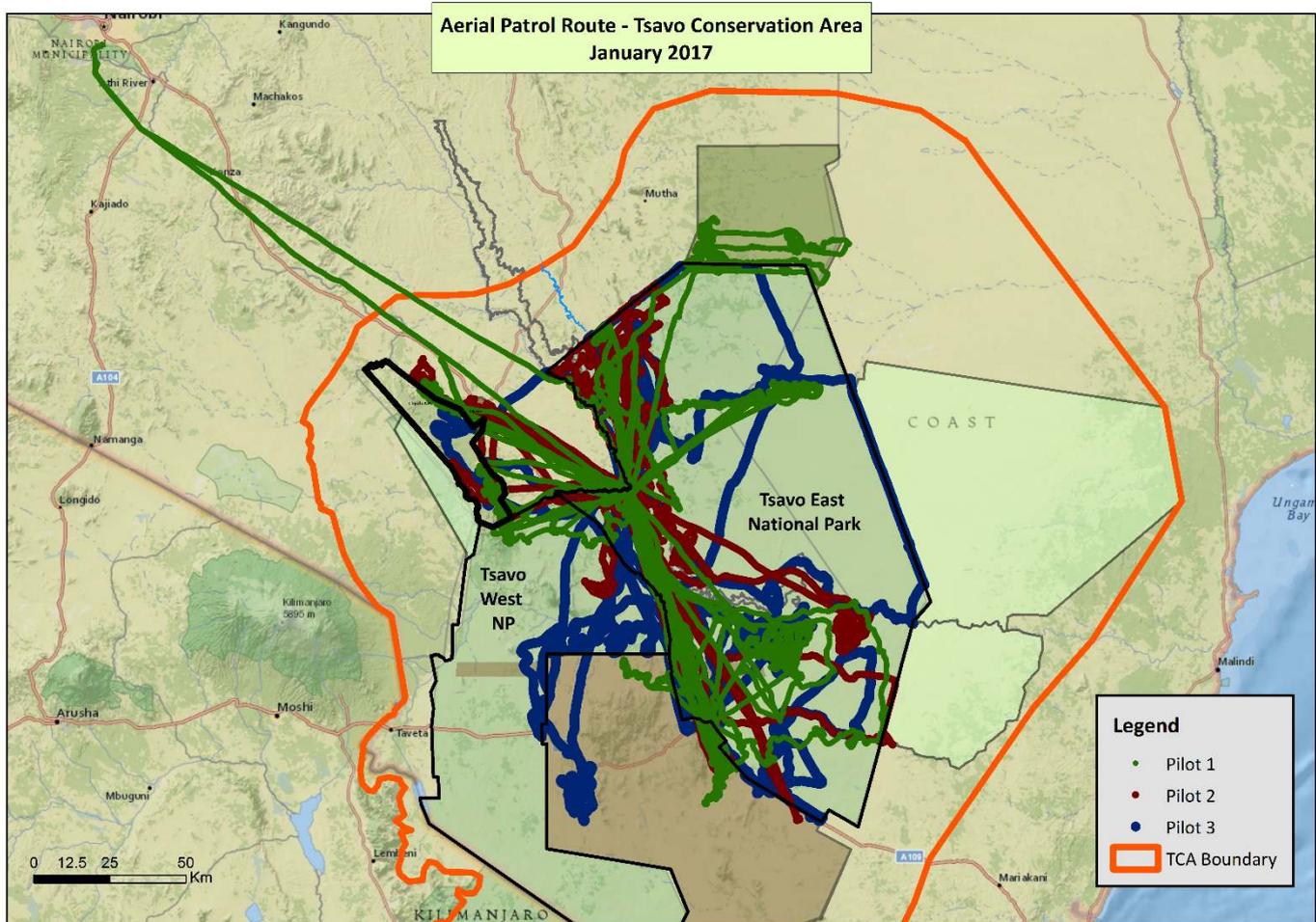


AERIAL STATISTICS

JANUARY 2017

HOURS FLOWN	108.4
KMS COVERED	12,616
AREAS PATROLLED	TENP, TWNP, Chyulus, Amboseli, Taita Ranches





January's report has been a very difficult one to complete, hence the delay, given that we suffered a terrible tragedy. Harry Dyer, one of our very able bush pilots, had a terrible plane accident on the 12th of the month, thankfully one which he heroically survived, but not before being very badly burnt.

The aircraft he was flying was our super cub WRB, the iconic yellow plane that has been featured in many images throughout our reports over the years. This incident has graphically reminded us all of the inherent risks involved with the type of bush flying required to keep Tsavo safe. Harry was flown to South Africa for his medical care and thankfully six weeks on is doing extremely well and we are confident now he will make a 100% recovery.

His journey has taken a Herculean effort on his part to overcome sometimes what seemed insurmountable odds, but as a strong and fit 24-year-old Harry has defeated those odds. We are so proud of him, of our teams on the ground who helped him through such testing times, and for all the amazing people who rallied to retrieve Harry, and get him to the best burns unit on the continent.

Pilot Harry Dyer at Kaluku Airstrip, Tsavo East



MONTHLY AERIAL SUMMARY

The focus for January was human-elephant conflict. As waterholes dried up following the rain, the majority of water left was found in man-built dams within communities bordering the Park. This, we think, more than crops, is what attracted elephants into heavily settled areas. Nevertheless, their presence causes considerable distress to communities who rely on crops, and so the Trust has invested more time and resources into helping these communities than any month before.

Surveying the area with the KWS Community Warden for Tsavo East in a fixed-wing aircraft, over 200 elephants were discovered, mostly in one large herd, as well as several smaller herds of 10-20. In order to alleviate the situation in the short term, the DSWT helicopter was called to push the elephants away from the farms and towards a neighbouring ranch that serves as a corridor for elephants to and from Tsavos East and West. The push was successful in moving the elephants away temporarily and demonstrating to the community that they had support. The following day, around half of the elephants had returned and the other half had left permanently. A further two pushes were done with fixed wing aircraft until the threat had been removed. With the largest herd out of the picture, the locals were left with a much more manageable situation. In fact, many of the farms in the area have installed beehive fences around their properties to protect against elephants and therefore enjoy a degree of security.







The other hotspot for human-elephant conflict was along the Chyulu Hills Park boundary. This is a particularly sensitive area that the Trust is in the process of electrically fencing. Eventually, the communities that live against the Park will be completely protected from elephants, but in the interim, building the fence is a slow process and in sections where the fence has gone up recently, elephants are still able to get out of the Park and then find themselves trapped outside of the fence when trying to return. This makes pushing them back into the Park even more difficult, and due to local politics, resentment among some factions in the community have blamed the fence, which is ultimately there to protect them, leading to sections being cut and vandalized.

Because of this, every report of crop-raiding elephants was reacted to as quickly as possible, and because of the complication of having to push elephants through small temporary holes in the fence or through gates, the helicopter was used for most of these jobs. A total of 6 flights were taken with the helicopter to push elephants into the Chyulu Hills, which in addition to potentially saving elephant and human lives, provided an opportunity for us to join Big Life Foundation and KWS in approaching community leaders to discuss permanent solutions to the problem and gain their help in assuring their constituents that KWS, DSWT, and Big Life are committed to supporting them to that end.





Elephants encroaching on community farms



Poaching activity increased in January, which is typical after the end of the rainy season. As waterholes begin to dry up, the remaining waterholes become attractive points for poachers to build shooting blinds and take aim at visiting elephants. The helicopter, working with DSWT and KWS rangers was able to find and destroy 4 fresh shooting blinds and 1 active harbour, as well as several older shooting blinds in an area south of Ithumba. These findings have instigated a significant increase in the presence of rangers on the ground. The fixed wing aircrafts identified several more shooting blinds/hideouts along the Yatta Plateau and also near the Tsavo River in Tsavo West National Park (TWNP).

Other significant sightings of illegal activities occurred on the southern end of the Chyulu Hills along the boundary of Tsavo West and Chyulu Hills National Parks (CHNP). Over a dozen plots of marijuana were discovered in both Parks as well as significant charcoal burning activity. Due to the expanse of the marijuana operation, the teams have already spent multiple days destroying the plantations and will have to revisit the sites for several more days to finish the job.



Marijuana plantation in the Chyulu Hills



Illegal Logging



Illegal livestock continues to be a challenge, with more and more cattle being herded into the Park in search of grass and water as a nationwide drought continues to worsen.

The Aerial Unit was also involved in several callouts in response to armed poachers operating in the Park. On some occasions, this involved making stops with the helicopter so that rangers could check for human sign, etc. However, on the 2nd January 2017, the helicopter was called to Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary where shots had been heard on New Year's Day in order to search for anything suspicious. Unfortunately, during the search, the carcasses of two rhinos were discovered (mother and calf) by a KWS fixed wing aircraft. The poachers had already made away with the horns and although the search for them continues, they have yet to be apprehended.



Other rhinos sighted during the search



A honey badger sighted crossing the Tiva River

The helicopter was also involved in the treatment of two injured elephants during the month. One, reported by Wildlife Works in Maungu was treated on Rukinga Ranch with a festering arrow wound on its flank. The other elephant was a female discovered along the Tiva River by one of DSWT's super cubs during a routine patrol with a severe injury on her front right leg, also from a poisoned arrow. The Tiva elephant was given a guarded prognosis, due to the severity of the injury. However, the elephant on Rukinga ranch is expected to make a full recovery.

Highlights in January included sightings of a striped hyena, honey badger on the Tiva River, rhino, wild dog, Tsavo's "autumn colours," and a camel birth.





A striped Hyena in flight



Photographs copyright © 2017 The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

