



AERIAL SURVEILLANCE UNIT

**MONTHLY REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2013**

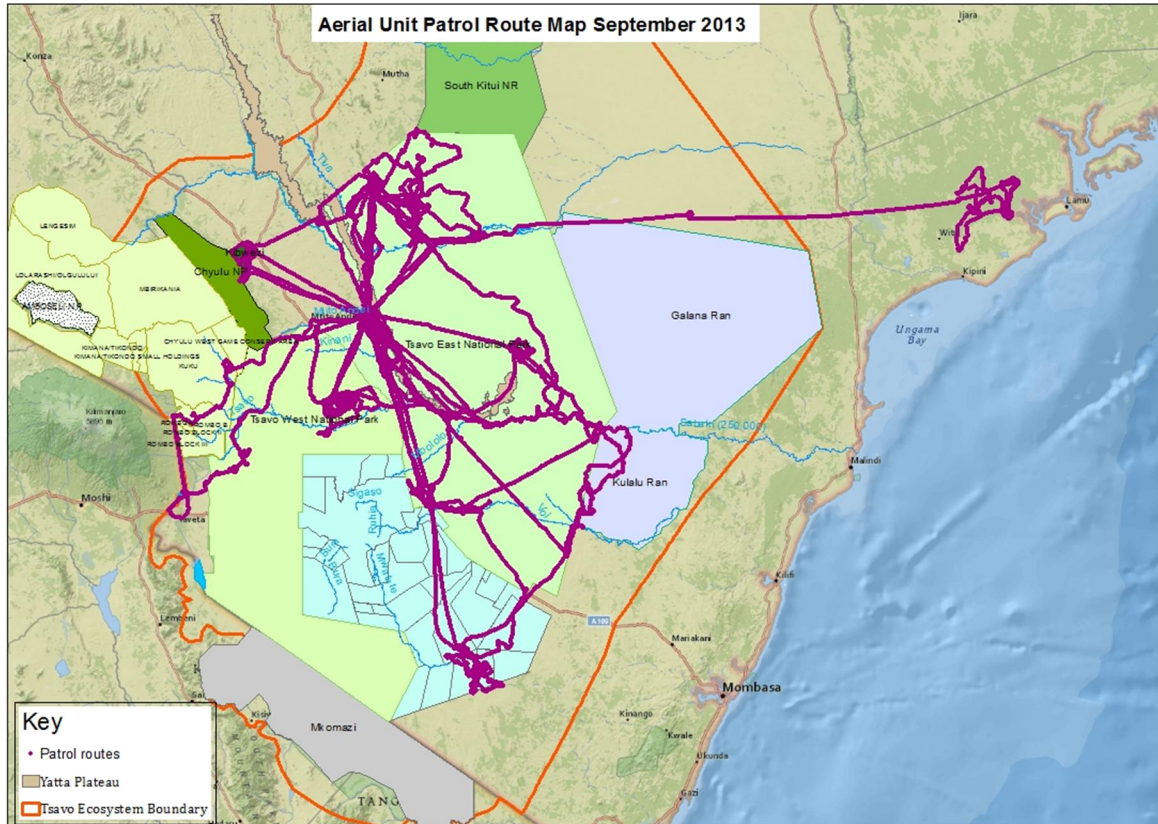


AERIAL STATISTICS

SEPTEMBER 2013

HOURS FLOWN	44
MILES COVERED	3614.6
AREAS PATROLLED	Tsavo East and West NP, Tsavo Triangle, Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, Lake Chala/Rombo community, Maktau/Ziwani, Finch Hatton's, Lamu





Tsavo East and West National Parks were very dry this month, although the weather has continued to be overcast and cool. The Tsavo Conservation Area aerial patrols were carried out over 17 days, with three days covering the Lamu ecosystem.

Aerial patrols were carried out over Tsavo West NP, and included key areas such as the Tsavo Triangle which borders the Mombasa-Nairobi Rd; the Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary where KWS provide round the clock protection of black rhino; the Lake Chala/Rombo community where it was reported that elephants had been sighted amongst the community; Maktau/Ziwani/Finch Hatton's where large numbers of Maasai cattle are grazing inside the park.





Extensive coverage over Tsavo East NP was carried out with a focus on the Ithumba area where the DSWT's elephant orphans live, and where large numbers of wild elephants and ex-orphans mix. One of the key purposes of aerial coverage in the Northern Area TENP is to ensure that the orphans, ex-orphans and wild elephants are kept safe.

Regular aerial coverage around the Ithumba stockades along with daily ground patrols carried out by the DSWT/KWS patrol teams allows the keepers and the orphans to head off into the bush with the least threat possible of poaching incidences.



Additional areas covered by air this month include ranches bordering the National Parks (Kulalu, Galana, Taita Ranches) where large numbers of elephants frequent amongst charcoal burners and game-meat poachers. The Chyulu Hills and Kibwezi Forest zones were also patrolled.

Surveillance was also done along the Tiva River where large numbers of Orma cattle have invaded the park and where illusive elephants come for water in the night. The Voi River was also patrolled where a number of arrowed bulls have been treated recently, as well as monitoring the Galana River to Sala, where elephants head as soon as it dries off. The aircraft also patrolled the Yatta Plateau where there are a number of fresh springs favored by the poachers during the dry season.



The Northern Area of Tsavo East is vast, with few roads. It faces threats from poachers using poisoned arrows as well as firearms; from cattle herders seeking grazing and lighting fires, from charcoal burners and loggers. The regular flights provide ongoing information to the management of KWS, allowing them to allocate their already stretched resources.

Further south the Galana River cuts through Tsavo East, creating a concentration of elephants and other wildlife in the dry season, and making for a poachers paradise. This month regular flights have been made along the Galana River to keep up an aerial presence where poachers may lurk and cattle may come into the park to illegally graze, pushing aside the elephants at times.

The threat of poaching intensifies during the dry months. The elephants disperse and come to known water points which need regular aerial surveillance. Unfortunately the poachers do succeed now and then, as the odds are stacked on their side. This month three carcasses were found on the same day, all with their tusks hacked out.

More information about the DSWT's Anti-Poaching program and each team's monthly report can be found at www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org





On occasion elephants leave the protected areas and venture into communities where they are tempted by crops. Sometimes they will travel around a fence-line at night into the community. As the sun rises they take refuge in limited thickets, near the angry community members whose crops they have raided. What develops is a potential disaster as irate community members try to push out the elephants, which in turn get confused and angry. On occasion a member of the community is killed and KWS is called in to cull the guilty elephant.

The DSWT airplane often gets called in to assist when elephants are sighted by the community. The first task is to locate the animals, establish how many there are what the best strategy is; to push them out or leave them until dark. On most occasions due to concentration of farms, houses, and schools the decision is to send a ground team in to monitor them and to push them out at night, when it's least danger to community members. On other occasions the airplane 'herds' the elephants back to where they belong.

This month there were two occasions where elephants were caught out in the community. One group was located after searching the area, and was left in peace until nightfall. KWS rangers pushed them back into Chyulu Hills NP where they hopefully remain. The other group consisted of two bulls that had found themselves near Kibwezi Town amongst cattle and goat herders, and on the west side of the Mombasa/Nairobi road. They were herded by the plane back into Kibwezi Forest, with help from the DSWT ground team.



Other significant factors this month have included the request by the KWS Research Office to locate two of their collared elephants. The collars had not been transmitting for some time, and so the question was; “Has it stopped working, or has the elephant been poached?”. After multiple searches for both elephants nothing was found. In order to confirm that the planes telemetry was actually working a known bull was tracked down and located. His collar was fine, giving off a strong signal. The whereabouts of the other two remains a mystery. The search continues, as their collars are easily spotted from the air.

Something that tends to go unnoticed is the burning of the Tive River flood -plain by Orma herdsman. While the intention is likely to be the expectation of creating grasslands after future rains, the reality is that the ground never recovers and bare earth remains, which is later eroded by the rains. This is a unique habitat, home to much wildlife and some big bull elephant.





Sometimes work takes the Top Cub to communities outside the parks. This month while on patrol with KWS, we sighted a baby giraffe that was being attacked by three domestic dogs. Nearby was a butchered impala. So we landed nearby, and while the plane was admired by Maasai school children, the KWS officer went off and shot the dogs and recovered the impala meat.

Toward the end of the month a visit was made to the Voi Orphans Project. One was so happy to see me he splashed me with Tsavo mud-bath sending me home covered in red.





Reported by Nick Trent

Field Operations Manager, DSWT

Photographs copyright © 2013 The David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust

