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MEP April 2019 REPORT

MEP hosted two days of Mara MIKE training at MEP HQ.

GENERAL

This month we got some solid leads out of northern Serengeti indicating that there is still a fair amount of elephant poaching going on for ivory. This continued threat to elephants shows that we need to continue to keep up the intelligence work across the border in partnership with Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA).

The MIKE program is a CITES program which strives to gather detailed data on elephant mortalities. Although the Mara ecosystem is not an official MIKE site it has been treated as one in terms of collecting, harmonizing and presenting data to the national government. Each quarter stakeholders collecting carcass data gather around the Mara to harmonize the data which means the data is reviewed together to ensure accuracy. In April, a dedicated MIKE training for all of the conservancies, Narok County Government, MEP and KWS took place. The training is grouped into three two-day sessions that started on April 8. MEP hosted the second installment at MEP HQ on April 10 with MMNR, MEP, KWS, Narok County Government and representatives from Lemek, Pardamat, Olarro, Ol Kinyei, Olare Motorogi and Mara North conservancies and SORALO all in attendance.

MIKE field training with an old elephant carcass.

The main purpose of the workshop was to disseminate and promote MIKE ranger-based monitoring protocols and guidelines as a basis for strengthening MIKE site data collection and management. Improving the ability to collect accurate data helps us identify issues surrounding elephant deaths. Participants were taken through MIKE reporting obligations to CITES that included MIKE data flow from ranger posts to MIKE CCU and ultimately to the production of updated MIKE analysis reports for CITES. Emphasis was put on reporting procedures and quality data collection. They were also trained on use of the GPS units for recording location data, cameras, establishing the cause of death, deducing the reason for death, elephant aging, carcass aging, sexing and recording evidence at the scene. Overall, the MEP training had 45 participants and at the end of the three sessions 92 people were trained in MIKE data collection procedures and harmonization. Mara Elephant Project would like to thank Kenya Wildlife Service for partnering to make this training happen and Ol Kinyei Conservancy, Olare Motorogi Conservancy and Mara North Conservancy contributing financially toward this vital training.

Conflict across the river continues to increase this month and we have moved our Transmara team closer to the crossing points from the Nyakweri Forest were they were previously based.

SECURITY & ANTI-POACHING

In April, MEP rangers along with partners Kenya Wildlife Service arrested two suspects and seized a total of 21 kg of ivory. MEP ranger units also removed a total of 11 snares and one drop spear and confiscated 120 pieces of illegal posts, one power saw and destroyed three poacher's camps.

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The power saw recovered by MEP rangers.

Over 60 posts were confiscated in Loita on April 9.

Seven snares recovered on April 3.

Human-Wildlife Conflict Incidents:

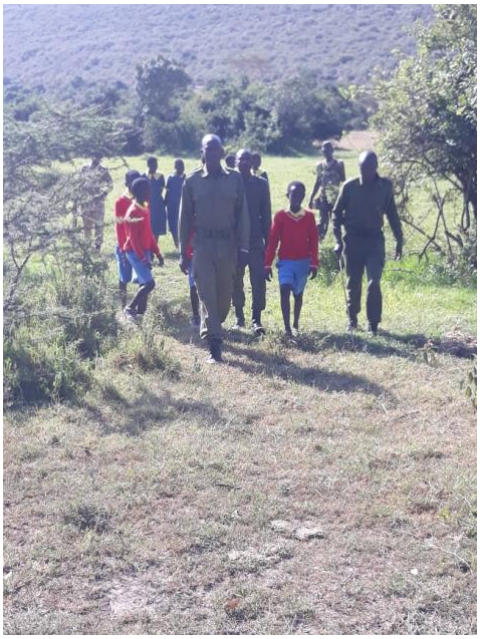
There was a total of 10 human-elephant conflict incidents in April. All were mitigated using firecrackers and the ranger vehicles.

MEP rangers helping repair a fence after an HEC incident on April 16.

MEP rangers using a vehicle and firecrackers to move elephants out of a fenced in area on April 16.

Ranger & Vehicle Tracking:

In April, MEP rangers covered a distance of 874 km on foot; 11,935 km by car and 3,822 km on motorbike. The Naroosura ranger team covered the largest distance on foot this month at 314 km which was a result of their patrol in Loita Hills and the southern side of Naroosura town, responding to illegal logging.



Rangers escorting kids to school on April 4 in a high human-elephant conflict area.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

On April 13, over 4,000 people participated in the Global March for Elephants, Rhinos, Lions and Other Endangered Species in Nairobi, Kenya. Mara Elephant Project not only participated; we were one of the key sponsors for the event. MEP CEO Marc Goss along with MEP rangers Moses Lekekwar and John Sakaja, Tracking Manager Wilson Sairowua, Administrator Elvis Saayoi, Finance Officer Stanley Misoka and Trustee Moses Kamau marched to represent MEP. Locally, the march aimed to create awareness about the importance of protecting Kenya's wildlife by encouraging the message: No Market. No Trade. This is all pointing to the key conservation decisions being made in May at the CITES meeting in Sri Lanka. CITES is the global treaty that regulates wildlife trade and many of the key decisions that directly affect the elephant population are made at the World Wildlife Conference. Legal markets for ivory undermine MEP's efforts of protecting elephants and with that in mind, MEP along with other conservation organizations, government and concerned citizens in Kenya call for the closing of all legal ivory markets around the world. MEP was proud to participate in the Global March alongside our partners Kenya Wildlife Service, Wildlife Direct and other conservation organizations. The crowd was energized and came up with many chants and slogans and the colorful 4,000 plus people definitely turned heads across the city center as the march proceeded the 10 km from the National Museums of Kenya to the KWS HQ. It was an amazing experience for MEP!

The MEP team marching alongside other conservation organizations and Kenyans in the Global March on April 13.

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Pictured at the March in Nairobi: MEP ranger John, Tracking Manager Wilson, Finance Officer Stanley, MEP ranger Moses and Administrator Elvis.

On April 22, MEP celebrated Earth Day by distributing seed balls from Seedballs Kenya with famous Chinese actress, singer and photographer Jiang Yiyan. It was a pleasure hosting her and we thank everyone for the seed ball donations that continue to come in for MEP.

Actress Jiang Yiyan with Administrator Elvis at MEP HQ.

There continues to be amazing entries coming into the Greatest Maasai Mara photography competition. Thank you to everyone who entered in April and supported MEP with your entry fee. Thank you to Isabella Steinhoff, Silvia Gonzalez, Stephen Underwood, Mara Irma Cuellar, Munir Virani, Rihaz Sidi and India Bulkeley. Amazing pictures!

Entry "Holding Hands" from Stephen Lesanjo in the April Greatest Maasai Mara photographer competition. His entry fee benefitted MEP.

On April 26, MEP kicked off a three-week long Facebook fundraising campaign for the ranger school fees program in 2019. We are extremely grateful to everyone who has donated so far and will continue to help raise money to full fund this amazing program. In April MEP raised a total of $2,148.53 on Facebook. We also received confirmation we are the recipient of a grant from the J.E. Fehsenfeld Foundation. We also successfully applied for funding for a dedicated vehicle to support the Loita ranger unit from the Elephant Crisis Fund, an initiative launched by Save the Elephants and the Wildlife Conservation Network, in partnership with the Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation. As a result of a generous donation by a long-time supporter of MEP, MEP had $4,088 in PayPal donations in April.

RESEARCH

Director's Update:

In April, my focus was setting up and running MEP's own EarthRanger (www.earthranger.com) instance. EarthRanger is a platform developed by Vulcan Inc. based in Seattle that extends the real-time monitoring system I developed during my PhD with Save the Elephants. EarthRanger integrates data-streams from a wide variety of sources (e.g., elephant collars, Garmin inReach GPS used by the rangers, the Spydertracker that tracks the helicopter etc.). Data is stored and accessed securely in a cloud database. EarthRanger has a web-app to help us visualize the data feeds in real-time and also to collect new information about 'events' as they occur (e.g., elephant carcasses, illegal logging, etc.). We also use the STE mobile tracking app for quickly locating tracked elephants while in the field. Switching to EarthRanger as our primary data collection and storage tool has been a major adjustment but I believe it will help us in the longer-term in our goal of protecting elephants and their environment and will promote useful research, collaborations with other organizations and data-driven conservation.

We launched the *Njia* tracking app on April 1 with all of our ranger vehicles. Njia – meaning 'path' in swahili – is an Android application I created based on the Esri GIS system. It is meant to be a low-cost solution for collecting tracking data on all of our vehicles and can periodically synchronize data to a cloud-server. The next step will be to link the data feed from Njia with EarthRanger to receive the information in near real-time. Njia was also developed to help us collect relevant spatial data layers (e.g., roads, fences etc.) and we are undergoing a training exercise in May to help our rangers begin to collect any missing information about the landscape.

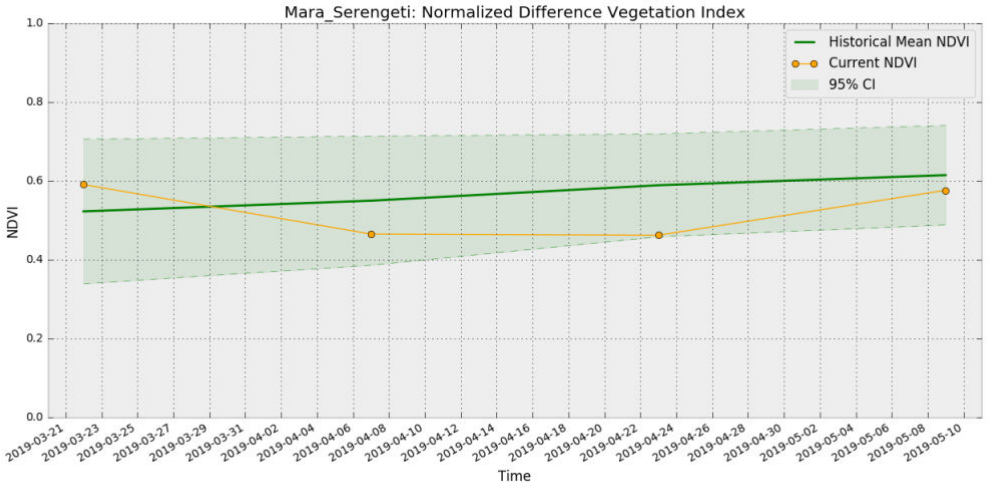
Tracking Manager's Update:

Ivy and her herd were crop raiding toward the end of in Kirindon and were pushed by MEP rangers to the safety of a nearby conservancy. Hugo, Kegol and Fred were all together during the month of April.

Collared elephant Chelsea spotted in April.

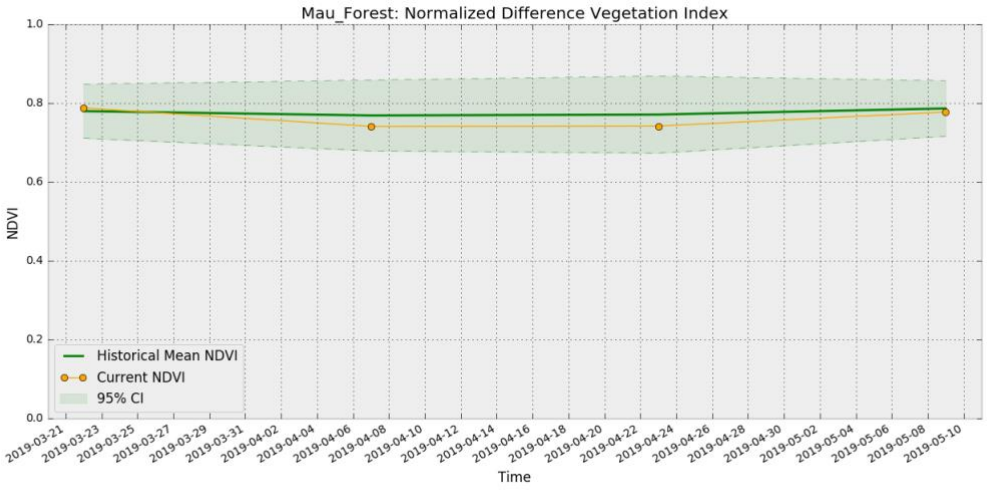
ENVIRONMENT

NDVI (Maasai Mara):



The Mara experienced lower than average vegetation greenness in mid-April after being greener than normal in the early part of the year. On April 23 the NDVI measurement was two standard deviations below normal for that time of year.

NDVI (Mau Forest):



Vegetation greenness was slightly lower than average in the Mau in April.

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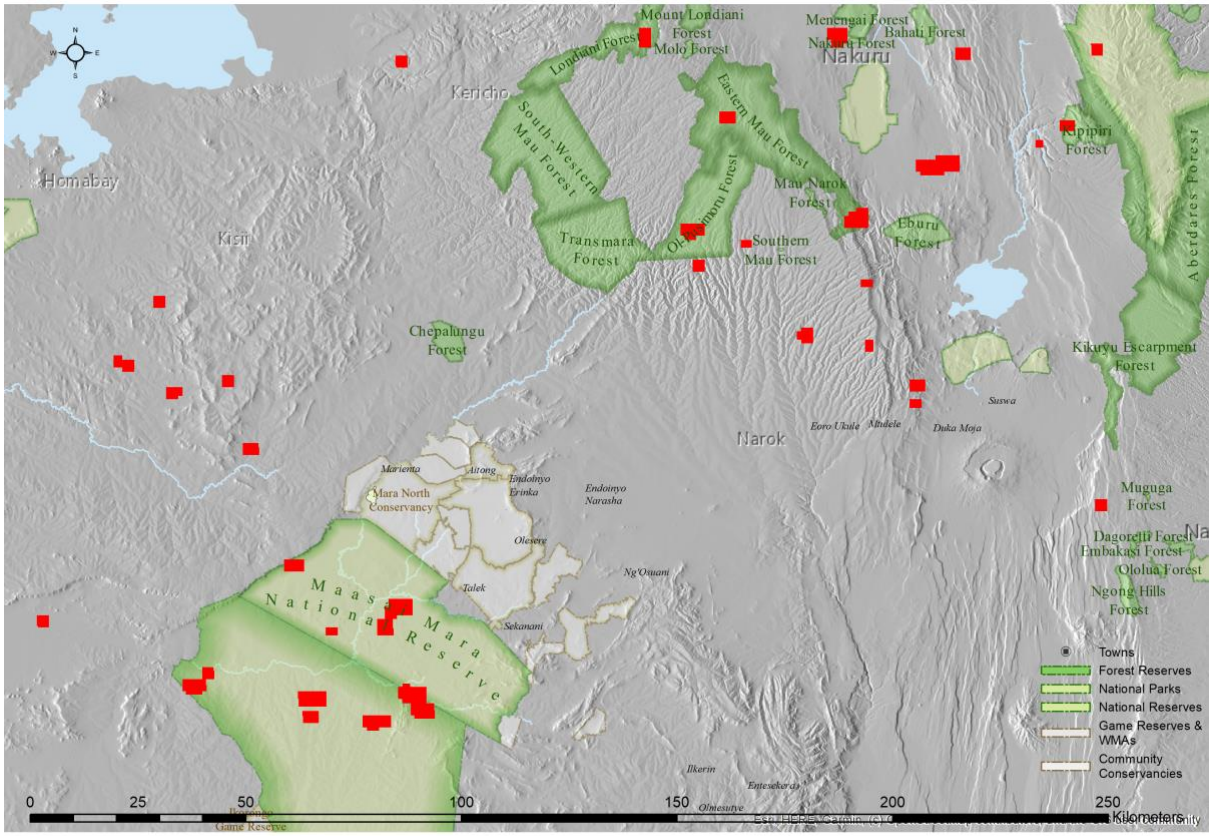
Burn/Fire Areas:



Fire occurrence in April 2019. Red blocks indicate burn areas as measured by NASA's FIRMS dataset. Accessed through Google Earth Engine.