Protecting elephants to conserve the greater Mara ecosystem
www.maraelephantproject.org

MEP October 2019 Report

MEP rangers on the ground October 19 safely moving elephants away from the community.

GENERAL

This month we have experienced many localized thunderstorms and the Mara River is in full flow and is a dark brown color indicating erosion throughout the catchment area as a result of the conservancies which have been heavily grazed by livestock and have low grass stocks and are looking quite dry.

Hippos in the Mara River photographed by MEP rangers while out on patrol.

MEP has been focusing on habitat protection activities this month. This has been quite a challenge as communities still rely heavily on cedar and other hardwoods for their houses, fences or firewood and land ownership is unclear. In the Nyakweri Forest individuals own their own plots and they are clearing their land to farm and graze their livestock. Our rangers have therefore only been able to record the charcoal kilns. There is however a pro conservancy movement in the area and some community members seem willing to lease their land for conservation. The challenge will be how to sustain such a program. Currently there are approximately 100 elephants living in this forest including our collared elephant Fitz. Next month we will do aerial reconnaissance missions with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and Kenya Forestry Service (KFS) to identify some of the worst hit spots in an attempt to get their backing to do larger law enforcement operations.

Deforestation in Nyakweri Forest.

On the 16th to the 18th we ran the selection process for the new Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Mau De-Snaring Unit, our second. The nine cadets have since reported to MEP HQ on the 28th and have started their six-week basic training. The training will be run by MEP NCOs and by Narok County Government officers. They have all been measured for their uniforms and we are collecting all of their equipment at the moment. We look forward to mobilizing the new team in December.

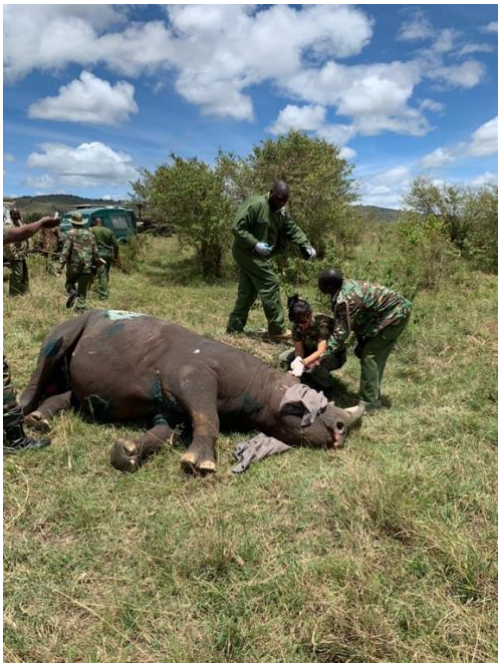
Ranger training taking place at MEP HQ.

Next month we will be interviewing candidates for Administrator, Senior Warden, Deputy Warden and five additional rangers from Loita. On the 5th of November we will host the final MEPT Trustees meeting where we will be approving the Operational Plan 2020.

SECURITY & ANTI-POACHING

During the month of October, one suspect was arrested by KWS with 1.5 kg of ivory based on MEP intelligence. The Transmara teamed destroyed a total of 14 kilns in the Nyakweri Forest and the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Mau De-Snaring Unit continues to have success. They destroyed 23 kilns, 55 bags of charcoal, confiscated 40 illegally logged posts, removed six snares and arrested 10 suspects for illegal logging. The Siana team removed two snares targeting small animals. Finally, the MEP team took part in a black rhino treatment on October 13. We lent aerial support to the KWS Vet Dr. Limo and the rhino was successfully treated and is expected to make a full recovery.

A kiln being destroyed in Nyakweri Forest on October 3.



MEP provided aerial and ground support to the SWT Mara Mobile Vet Unit and KWS Vet Dr. Limo in the successful rhino treatment.

The five suspects arrested for illegal logging in the Mau Forest on October 24.

Human-Elephant Conflict Report:

There were five incidents of human-elephant conflict during the month of October that MEP rangers responded to. In two of those cases, we needed to deploy the Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter to move elephants to safety.

The Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter being deployed to move elephants out of a settlement on October 19.

Ranger & Vehicle Tracking:

In October, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,654 km on foot, 8,890 km by car and 364 km on motorbike.

HELICOPTER

MEP is happy to announce that Director of Research and Conservation Dr. Jake Wall and his fiancé Christina welcomed a healthy baby boy in early October. He came earlier than expected and luckily the MEP helicopter was able to get everyone safely to Nairobi for delivery. On the 13th we used the Karen Blixen Camp Trust (KBCT) helicopter to treat one of the male black rhinos in the Mara Triangle who had quite a bad filarial worm infection. He is expected to make a full recovery. On the 14th we rescued a man using the KBCT helicopter who was gored by a buffalo. The Mara North Conservancy rangers rushed the man to MEP HQ, and we rushed him to the Tenwek Hospital. He was losing a lot of blood and his lungs were punctured. The Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter rescue most likely saved his life.

The KBCT helicopter being used on October 14 to rush the injured community member to the hospital.

The KBCT helicopter was used several times this month to push elephants away from settlements in the Siana Area.

The KBCT helicopter pushing elephants away from the community and into safety in October.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Mara Elephant Project's CEO Marc Goss and Director of Research and Conservation Dr. Jake Wall began October in the States finishing their fundraising tour. On October 1, they met with Google on their campus in California and on October 2, they met with Vulcan and gave a Great Hall Speech to key staff within the organization. Both of these meetings were well received and helped MEP develop key relationships with technology partners on the cutting edge of software that can help MEP work smarter, faster and more efficiently.

MEP CEO Marc Goss and Director of Research and Conservation Dr. Jake Wall along with Sidekick Foundation Executive Director Brian Kearney-Grieve with the Vulcan staff.

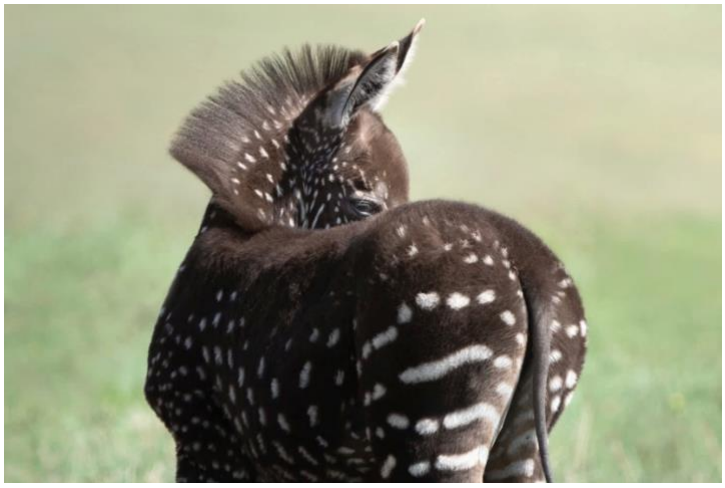
All of this culminated in Indianapolis, IN with a MEP fundraiser that took place on October 3. Thank you to Google, Vulcan and to the Angama Foundation for providing amazing wildlife photographs to be auctioned off at the event. MEP raised over $9,800 at the event with additional donations from individuals to bring our total fundraising from individuals to $14,833 for the month of October. On Facebook, MEP received a $20 donation in the month of October. All of this is a great kick off to the holiday giving season.

Marc and Jake presenting at the event in Indianapolis.

MEP received a grant in 2018 for ranger equipment from the Bently Foundation. We purchased 37 backpacks for rangers in October and distributed them, so they are deployed in the field. We would like to thank the Bently Foundation for their support of MEP rangers over the last year. The new direct mail campaign for MEP has kicked off in the US and we've donations are starting to come in from this effort.

MEP rangers with their new backpack's courtesy of Bently Foundation.

MEP was featured on GeekWire magazine this month along with Wanderlust magazine. The Greatest Maasai Mara photo competition came to a close in October for 2019 and MEP had the most entries yet with 30! Thank you to Julien Bundun, Romit Shah, Fernando Morales Roca, Meghana Srinivasan, Harshni Malde, Gerhard Brunner, Sascha Feuster, Nirmal Jajodia, Graham Dowd, Frank Liu, Roisin Allen, Deborah Marquis, Rihaz Sidi, Barbara Jensen Vorster, Sushil Chauhan, Adam Zdebel, Jacques-Andre Dupont, Shazmeen Bank, Kathy Houle, YARON SCHMID, Alissa Everett, Pranav Chadha, Ritesh Patel, Lennart Hessel and Shivani Chandaria for supporting MEP with your entries.



One entry this month benefitting MEP was of the rare spotted zebra by Frank Liu.

RESEARCH

Director's Update:

The month started while Marc and I were still in the US on our fundraising trip. On October 2, we presented work at the Google Headquarters in California. Izhak Shafran was our host for the day and we discussed a number of collaborative projects including the application of machine learning to movement behavioural classification.

Marc and I along with Sidekick Foundation Executive Director Brian Kearney-Grieve at Google Headquarters in California.

Within 48 hours of my return I took unexpected paternity leave for two weeks. While away our rangers and Wilson continued to monitor and record illegal logging, illegal charcoal production, arrests, snares, bushmeat, elephant sightings, collar deployments and failures, VHF spot checks and movement labels into our EarthRanger system. I made more progress with the landscape dynamics database (*landDx*) and setup an Esri Image Service that will host satellite information being collected by the Smithsonian Institute across the Mara. The Njia app was extended to be able to record many more types of fencing in anticipation of our upcoming fence mapping exercise.

We met with Rebekah Karimi – the manager of Enonkishu Conservancy – to discuss MEP's involvement in a fencing project on the northwest boundary of Enonkishu that would help prevent elephants moving into community areas to crop raid. The area has been a major source of conflict and a fence may improve the situation. We plan to use the elephant movement data and crop-raiding incidents to help inform the construction of any new fences and also plan to work with Enonkishu closely to measure the conservation impact carefully.

Tracking Manager's Update:

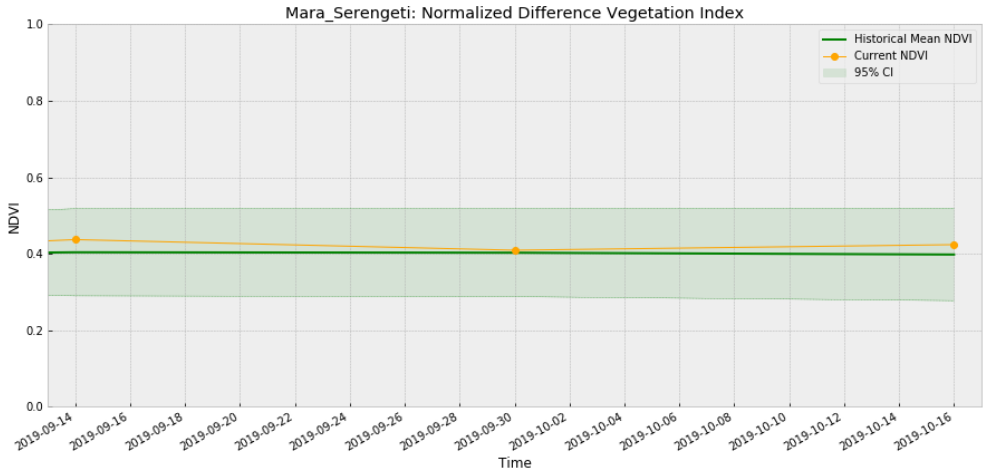
Chelsea with her calf spotted by MEP rangers while out on patrol.

Namunyak photographed with her herd in October.

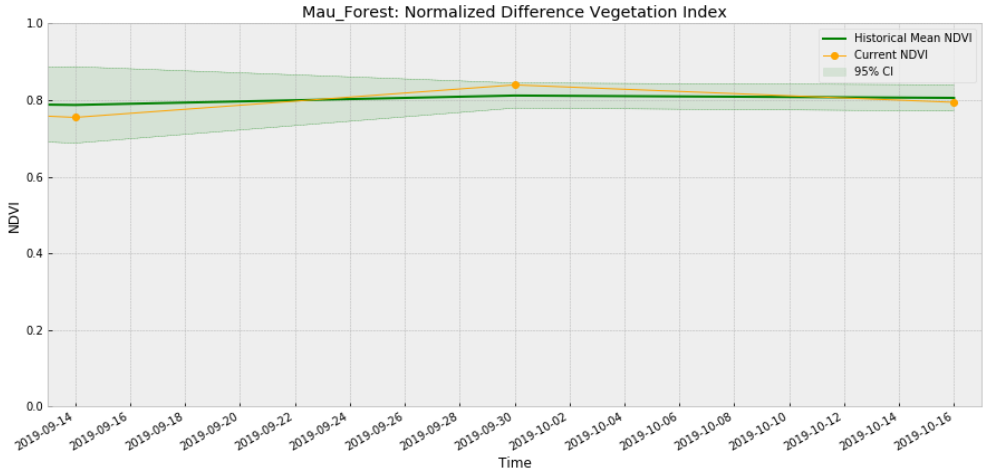
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

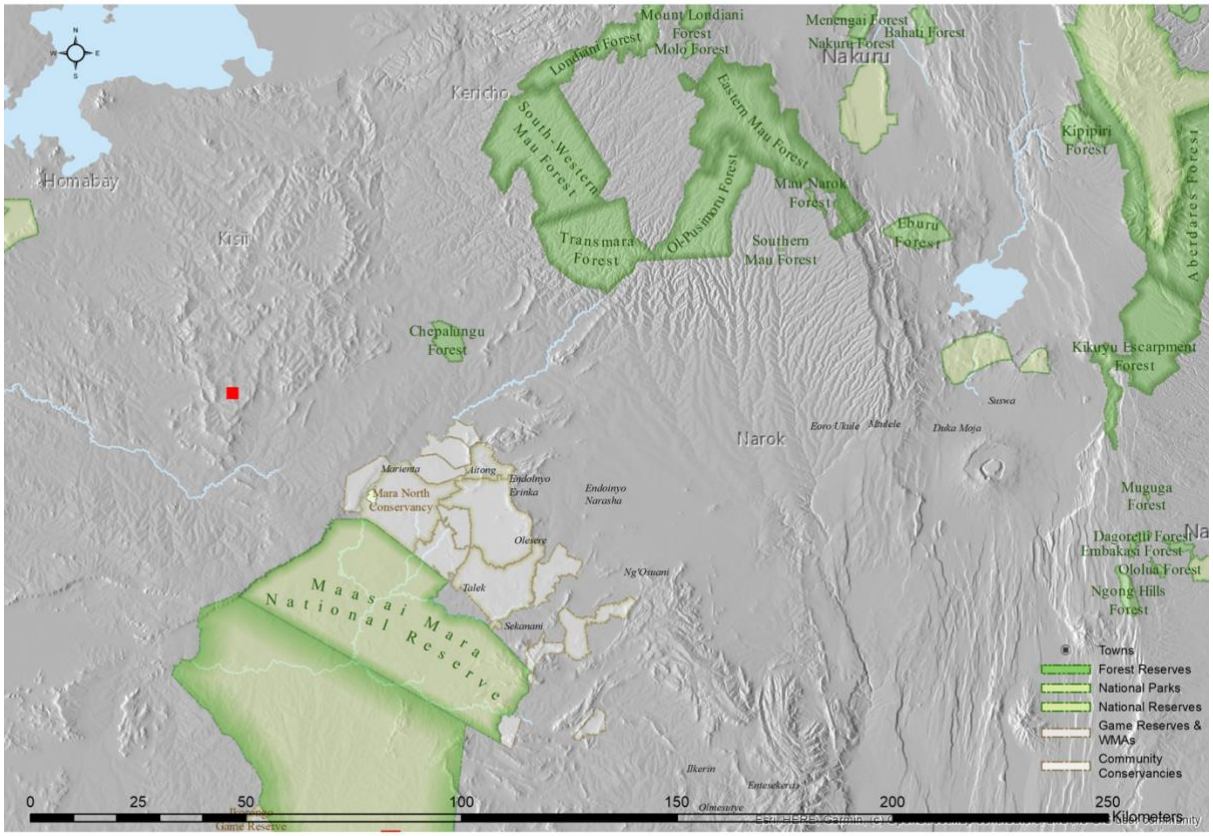
Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a measure of plant photosynthetic activity. Higher NDVI indicates the plant is greener. The orange trendline shows the current value while the green area shows the 95% distribution of values centered around the green trendline from values measured back to February 2000.

Mara - Serengeti



Mau Forest



ENVIRONMENT: Burn/Fire Areas

Red blocks indicate burn areas as measured by NASA's FIRMS dataset. Accessed through Google Earth Engine.