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

MEP November 2019 Report

MEP CEO Marc Goss at the tree planting initiative on November 1.

GENERAL

This month the rains started in earnest. There has been flooding around the county including in Narok town. The river has come up substantially and it is always amazing to see how fast the whole Mara goes green. Speaking of green, as part of the Mau Forest rehabilitation project spearheaded by the Kenyan Government, MEP was invited to the launch of a tree planting initiative on November 1 together with the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Kenya Wildlife Service, Kenya Forestry Service, Police, Administration and NGO Stakeholders. The Cabinet Secretary Ministry of Environment and Forestry Hon. Keriako Tobiko led the team in planting over 200,000 seedlings manually and oversaw 4.5 million seeds planted through aerial seeding. The rehabilitation process has been an overall success and already a number of plants have started to grow in the previously settled areas. We plan to drop indigenous pioneer tree species like Dombeya Torrida on the steepest areas using the Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter with Seedballs Kenya and DTB Bank. We believe this will further augment the much-needed rehabilitation process in this area.

The tree planting initiative with multiple private and government organizations present.

SECURITY & ANTI-POACHING

This has been a busy month for MEP rangers with an increase in recoveries of snares and incidents of logging and charcoaling being reported. Overall, MEP rangers confiscated 4,140 illegal pieces of wood and removed 25 snares and destroyed 87 kilns. Most of these illegal activities were taking place in the Mau, Loita and Nyakweri forests.

Snares recovered on November 28.

The arrest on November 5 of two suspects with a pit saw and illegal logs.

A kiln destroyed on November 27 in Kericho Forest.

Cedar posts recovered on November 14.

Training for the new Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mau De-Snaring Unit training continues at MEP HQ. They will complete their training soon and be deployed as the second SWT team in the Mau Forest.

The training of the new Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Mau De-Snaring Unit continues at MEP HQ.

Finally, on November 30, MEP intelligence took place in an ivory recovery of 12 kg which was handed over to the Tanzanian authorities to follow up on the investigation.

Human-Elephant Conflict Report:

There were six incidents of human-elephant conflict to report in November. Fortunately, all were able to be addressed using the ranger vehicle and/or firecrackers.

Crop damage recorded from the HEC incident on November 13.

Ranger & Vehicle Tracking:

In November, MEP rangers covered a distance of 2,345 km on foot, 12,556 km by car and 323 km on motorbike.

A MEP ranger removing a snare while on patrol.

HELICOPTER

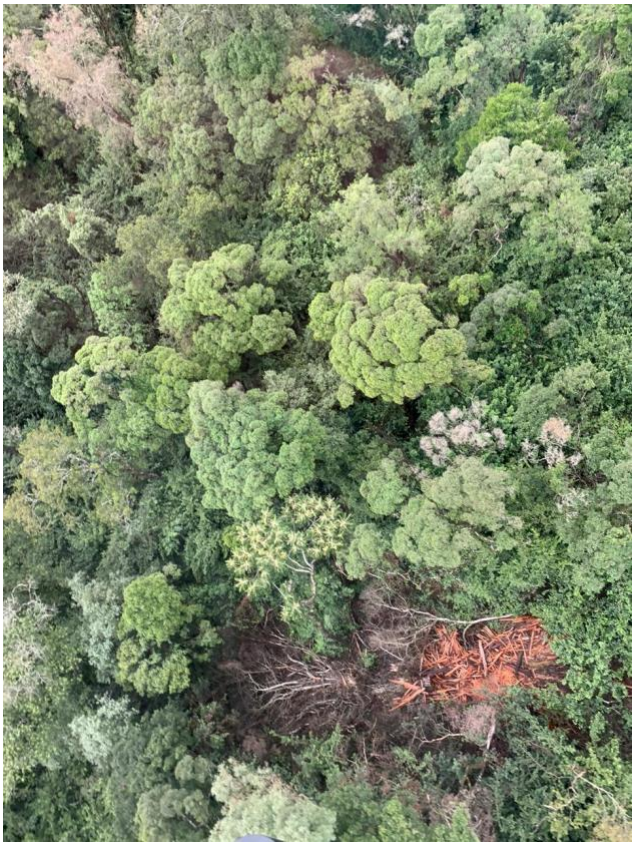
The Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter was vital in November for many various operations. MEP collared a female elephant, Alice, on November 26 in the Kericho part of the Mau Forest. The collaring operation was difficult with thick vegetation and elevation and the helicopter kept all personnel and the elephant safe.

The team prepping for the collaring of Alice in the Mau Forest.

The KBCT helicopter was also used during a baby elephant treatment done by KWS Vet Dr. Limo. A young calf had a snare wound that needed to be treated, but the helicopter was essential in keeping the mother at bay while Dr. Limo worked.

The young calf being treated for a snare wound.

It was also used toward the end of the month of do some reconnaissance of illegal logging and charcoaling sites. Finally, the Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter was used to transport a KWS ranger to the hospital after he was shot in the cheek with an arrow after a community incident.



An aerial patrol from the Karen Blixen Camp Trust helicopter that uncovered an illegal logging site.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

November is the start of the big holiday push for MEP's year-end giving campaign. We kicked it off by sending out the third quarter MEP newsletter, which did really well both on social media and in inboxes. We published a blog about all of the secure ways to donate to MEP and highlighted our Amazon Smile account as well as our Amazon Wish List. We posted about the MEP fundraiser that took place in Indianapolis, IN in October and thanked our partners. We also shined a light on the Bently Foundation whose grant kitted out MEP's rangers in 2019. Mara Elephant Project is excited to be included for its best practices in community engagement in a publication from the National Geographic Society. We were also featured in Corporate Knights magazine. We also highlighted Sheldrick Wildlife Trust's commitment to funding a second team in the Mau Forest. The MEP Giving Tuesday campaign kicked off on November 26 and will run for one week. We'll finish this big push up with an email that will go out to donors on December 3.

Twende Porini took place in early November with Wilson Sairowua joining the kids at Asilia to present about Mara Elephant Project. MEP CEO Marc Goss also participated in a tree

planting ceremony alongside Kenya Forestry Service, Kenya Wildlife Service and Seedballs Kenya to highlight the green movement in the reclaimed areas of the Mau Forest. Speaking of, we received two seed ball donations this month totaling 35 kg of seed balls for MEP rangers to distribute in the Mara, thank you for donating.

MEP Tracking Manager Wilson Sairowua presenting to Twende Porini kids.

MEP raised $58,980.26 in individual donations during the month of November. Thank you to Mary Woulfe for her generous gift of $20,000. We also received a grant of $15,000 from the Horne Family Charitable Foundation in support of our anti-poaching and human-elephant conflict mitigation work, $1,500 from Carla Kessler, and $1,000 from the Bentley Family Fund. Also, thank you to the McCormick Family Foundation for supporting the protection of an elephant for three years in the Mau Forest. This newly collared elephant, Alice, has already provided critical data. We received $1,589.51 on Facebook in November and have 14 donors give over $1,500 to launch our Giving Tuesday campaign thus far. Through PayPal we received $2,500 from Evan Rapoport for a new weather station to support our research efforts, and donations of more than $400 each other individuals.

MEP's latest collared elephant, Alice, supported by the McCormick Family Foundation.

The Angama Foundation hosted MEP's Director of Research and Conservation on November 28 for the annual Greatest Maasai Mara grand prize event. MEP received a check of $20,300 from the Angama Foundation, which reflected their total support in 2019.

MEP Director of Research and Conservation Jake Wall accepting the check in Nairobi.

Overall, in 2019, MEP had 138 entries, the most of any organization and we had one finalist in the top 10, Gurcharan Roopra. We were also delighted to learn that the Angama Foundation has approved a three-year grant to MEP of $30,000 per year.

Gurcharan Roopra's finalist image in the Greatest Maasai Mara photo competition.

RESEARCH

Director's Update:

In early November, we hosted Dr. George Wittemyer at MEP HQ and had meetings about designing an elephant sighting protocol to answer questions about the Mara elephant population. We plan to implement the new sighting protocol in January 2020. Dr. Wittemyer recently attained tenure at Colorado State University and is a welcomed advisor to MEP. We hosted Dennis Schneider from Vulcan who is helping MEP with our EarthRanger system. He especially helped us to configure GLAD alerts disseminated by Global Forest Watch and the University of Maryland. These alerts identify areas that have been deforested in near real-time based on Landsat imagery. We've begun using the alert location as patrol targets for our ranger teams and have been able to identify many more illegal logging sites across the Mau, Nyakweri and Loita forests than in previous months.

In late November, I joined colleagues from the One Mara Partnership Research Hub in Narok for a meeting about contributing to the Narok County Government spatial plan. MEP will be contributing outputs from our tracking program, such as overall elephant range, core hotspots, corridors and connectivity metrics to the NCG spatial plan to help ensure that elephants are well represented in conservation planning. We purchased a new Kibo motorbike (made locally in Kenya) to continue with our fence line mapping field work. In conjunction with the Njia app and the landDx database we hope to make further progress in mapping fence proliferation across the Mara in the coming months.

The new fence mapping motorbike.

Tracking Manager's Update:

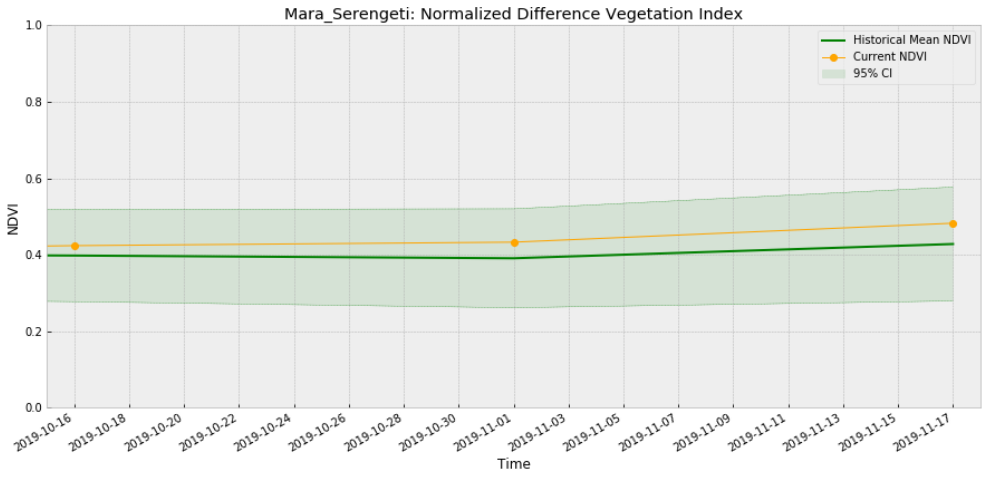
MEP now has 20 collared elephants monitored in real-time daily. Alice, just collared in the Mau Forest, was our 20th.

MEP collared elephant Chelsea was spotted with her large herd of 40 in November.

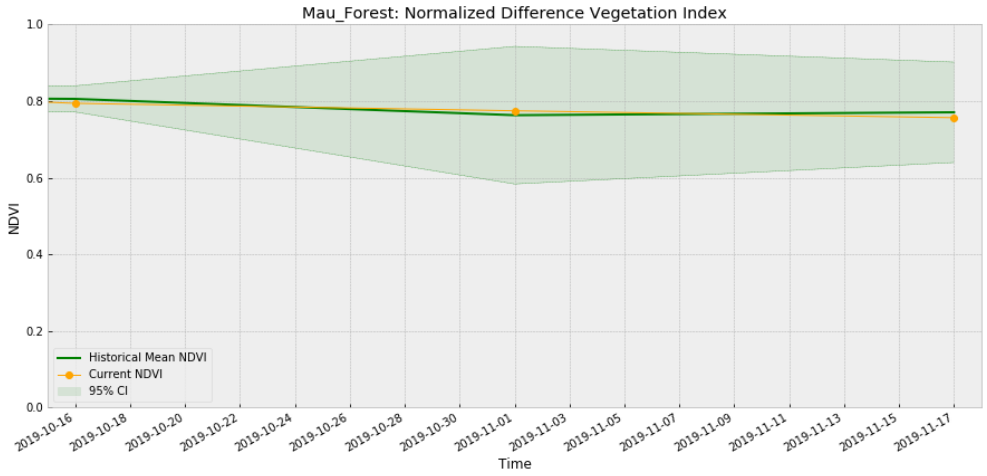
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

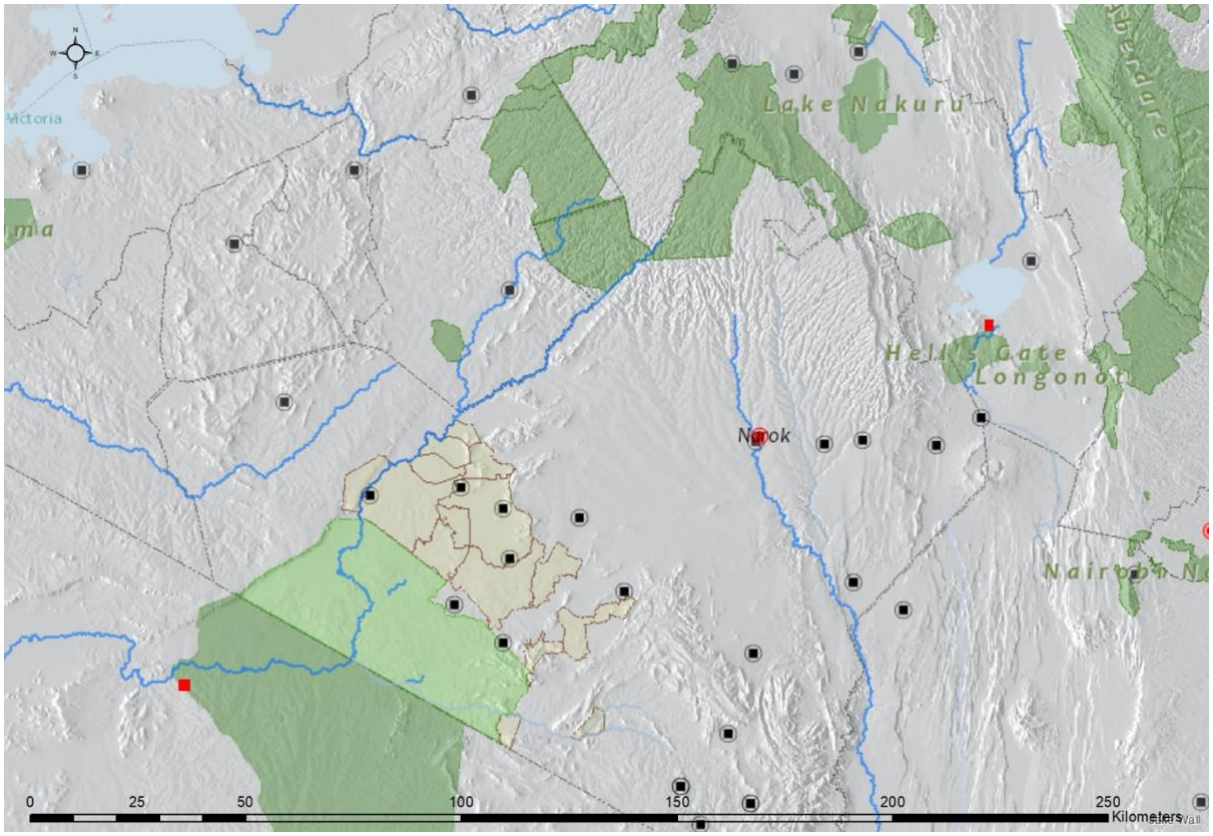
Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a measure of plant photosynthetic activity. Higher NDVI indicates the plant is greener. The orange trendline shows the current value while the green area shows the 95% distribution of values centered around the green trendline from values measured back 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. There were no fires in the Mara or Mau during November.