MEP December 2020 Report

The entire MEP Ultra MARAthon team on December 12.

GENERAL

2020 has been a challenging year globally and as we wind the year to a close it is always good to reflect on positive stories and Mara Elephant Project has a couple to share. This year MEP raised a record amount of funding which has allowed us to expand our boots on the ground efforts to include a new team in the Loita Hills. We can largely accredit Lori Price for supporting this extremely important forest protection unit. MEP has retained our full complement of rangers through these difficult times which has also led to a record number of arrests and recoveries. Keeping the rangers deployed has been extremely important this year as we have seen an increase in bushmeat poaching and habitat destruction.

MEP staff photographed in December at HQ.

On the 1st we had a general staff meeting at the MEP HQ in which management and rangers had a good chance to discuss our success and challenges and plan for an exciting 2021. We also conducted a promotions ceremony and had a feast to celebrate the end of the year and a job well done for all. On the 3rd we held our final MEP Trust Board of Trustees meeting in Nairobi and we are proud to announce that Beatrice Karanja is the new vice chairperson of the board. Bea has brought invaluable advice to the organization for a number of years and we are super excited to be working more closely in the future.

On the 13th the MEP ranger team participated in the Ultra MARAthon, which was a 50 km relay race to raise funds for rangers in all of the Mara conservancies. This was a partnership between ForRangers, MMWCA, Salomon and MEP. The first prize for the fastest ranger team was a Boran bull. We are very proud to announce that the MEP ranger team took 1st prize and took the bull back to HQ the same day. We then sold the bull and split the winnings amongst the four team members who won the race. This makes the MEP rangers officially the fastest rangers in the Maasai Mara.

MEP CEO Marc Goss with rangers Stanley Kashu, Cosmus Bett, Edward Kuyo and Nashola Karia.

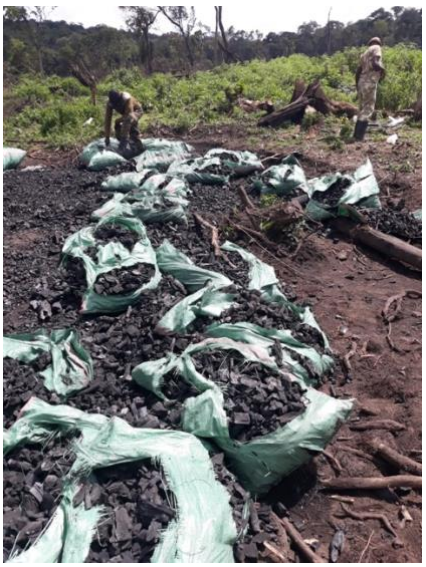
SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

After graduation of the new Loita team they took two weeks off and we deployed them at the start of December with all their new kit and instructions to stop deforestation in the Entesekera area. The team has already made a dent in the logging cartels working in the area and the community and local administration has been supportive of our newly increased efforts to stop the forest destruction and employ their youth.

Some of the new MEP recruits on patrol in the Loita Hills.

As the SitRep indicates we have had a number of successes this month. We have been frustrating logging operations, arresting bushmeat poachers, and arrested one suspect with ivory. In January our data shows and increase in conflict so we will be gearing up to protect farms as the crops ripen.

Rangers alongside KWS destroyed 20 sacks of charcoal on December 7 in the Nyakweri Forest.



Overall, in December, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested two bushmeat poachers and confiscated 12 kg of bushmeat. As mentioned, one ivory suspect was arrested, and 7 kg of ivory was confiscated. MEP rangers also arrested a total of 24 suspects for habitat destruction activities and confiscated three power saws, three trees that were illegally cutdown, 370 posts and eight timbers. They also destroyed 24 charcoal kilns and 36 bags of charcoal. In December, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,180 km on foot and patrolled 6,727 km by car and 2,144 km on motorbike.

Six kilns were destroyed by the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust Mau De-Snaring Unit on December 5 in the Mau Forest.

HELICOPTER

This month we conducted one HEC flight in the Suswa region where a large herd of 72 elephants were destroying community dams and disturbing herders near Suswa Mountain. Collared elephants Hannibal and Napoleon are in this herd. The community and Kenya Wildlife Service were both very helpful to MEP during this operation. Unfortunately, the herd has not moved far from this area, but we hope they move back to the Mosiro area soon. There were four total incidents of conflict MEP rangers responded to in December. We also used the helicopter to provide top cover for the Ultra MARAthon which ForRangers financially supported. We used it to move buffalos off the course and an elephant which was getting a bit curious.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Mara Elephant Project continues to be humbled by the overwhelming support donors have given our organization in a very trying year. In December, we raised over $188,000 for core support from 442 individuals and foundations, which includes over $50,000 for our Giving Tuesday campaign alone in support of the new Loita ranger team. The campaign kicked off on December 1 and by the time we were saying goodbye to 2020, we had this team almost fully funded going into 2021. This support means these rangers will be increasing protection in this critical area of the Mara into 2021 and we can't wait to update you on their impact this time next year. A huge thank you to Lori Price for donating $20,000 towards these ranger's efforts; we'd also like to thank Elephanatics and their loyal supporter base for giving to this team, founder Fran and Lorne Duthie donated personally $5,000 towards these efforts. Creatura Wildlife Projects gave $9,000 to support the new Loita team, which was made possible by artist Mark Ryden. We had one foundation renew their annual grant of $27,500 in December as did Nicholas Lapham for $10,000 and we also received an additional $25,000 grant from the Leslie Alexander Foundation, which has been a loyal MEP supporter in 2020. MEP also received our yearly $100,000 support from Oak Foundation and donations of $5,000 from Dawn Schiff and Ellen Asplundh.

In December, we had three Facebook fundraisers in support of Mara Elephant Project. Thank you to Lori, Nick and Danielle for running holiday giving campaigns in support of our efforts. We also learned we were awarded a grant by Eden Wildlife Trust in 2021. MEP also received two donations of seed balls from Seedballs Kenya from Spirit Foundation and Klaus Wachsmuth for a total of 110 kg of seed balls to distribute in the Mara. SAWA Activewear has been a supporter of Mara Elephant Project since their inception in 2018 and thanks to their efforts in 2020, MEP just received $882 from SAWA to support our core operations into 2021. Mara Elephant Project also received a donation of $691 from Foreningen Forsvara Elefanterna, a long-time supporter of MEP. On December 1, members of the Mara Elephant Project team joined others virtually to celebrate another successful year of the Greatest Maasai Mara photo competition. The 10 finalists for the grand prize were honored including three entries that benefitted Mara Elephant Project: Graeme Purdy in October, William Fortescue in August and Graham Wood in May. Congratulations to the winning photographer Paolo Torchio and thank you to the Angama Foundation for supporting Mara Elephant Project with a check for $5,164 raised in 2020.

The 2020 winning shot in the GMM competition.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Director's Update:

We had a relatively quiet month during December, and I took some leave right after slogging through 12 kilometers during the MARAthon on Dec 12: further than I've run in a long, long time.

A post-race photo with the MEP rangers.

The Mara has stayed wet and we experienced almost daily rain. We were expecting to see some of the collared elephants like Ivy descend into crop-raiding but the crop growing pattern has been very different this year and elephants are not following typical movements. Harriett streaked down to Tanzania and returned which is interesting given her previous months of relative residency over a small area. As mentioned in the helicopter report, the herd that included both Napoleon and Hannibal needed intervention by MEP and KWS to move them away from the community. Additionally, Fitz continues to keep rangers busy in the Nyakweri Forest as he and his herd have been moving into farms at night and using the forest for cover during the day.

Collared elephant Fitz always keeping MEP rangers busy.

We mapped a further 260 kilometers of fence in December but are still a long way off from mapping all fences.

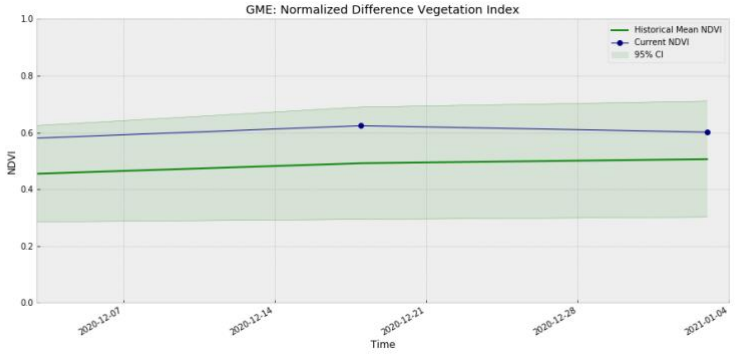
Year	Month	Electric	Other	Wire	De-fenced	Total (kms)
2019	November	48.27	-	18.35		66.62
2019	December	81	-	59		140
2020	January	111.16	4.64	124.71		240.51
2020	February	101.62	1.17	33.99		136.78
2020	March	48.59	0.14	59.76		108.49
2020	April	19.78	0	10.38		30.16
2020	May	24.75	1.88	41.18		67.81
2020	June	15.19	1.48	107.88		124.55
2020	July	37	-	52.76		89.76
2020	August	60.12	7.52	40.08		107.72
2020	September	126.95	7.15	221.44	15.18	370.72
2020	October	109.05	10.57	218.99	1.78	340.39
2020	November	101.2	24.52	153.12	13.88	292.72
2020	December	62.99	9	190		261.99
	Total (kms)	**947.67**	**68.07**	**1331.64**	**30.84**	**2378.22**

One of the MEP Research Field Assistants ready to go out for the day on the motorbike.

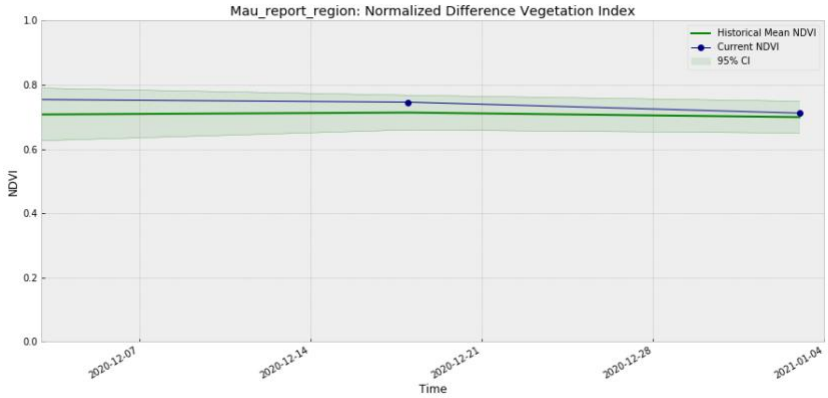
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a measure of plant photosynthetic activity. Higher NDVI indicates the plant is greener. The blue 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.

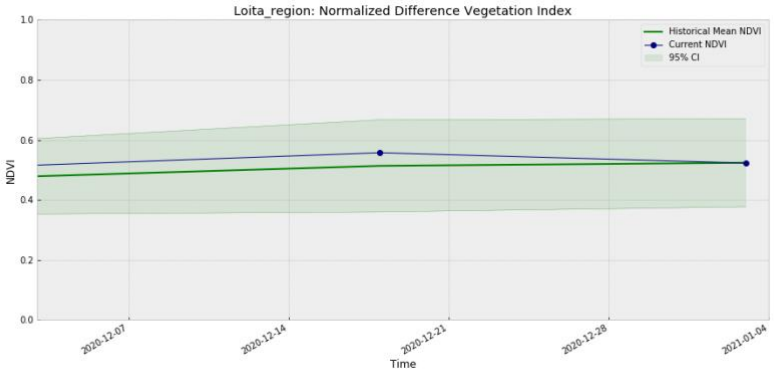
Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



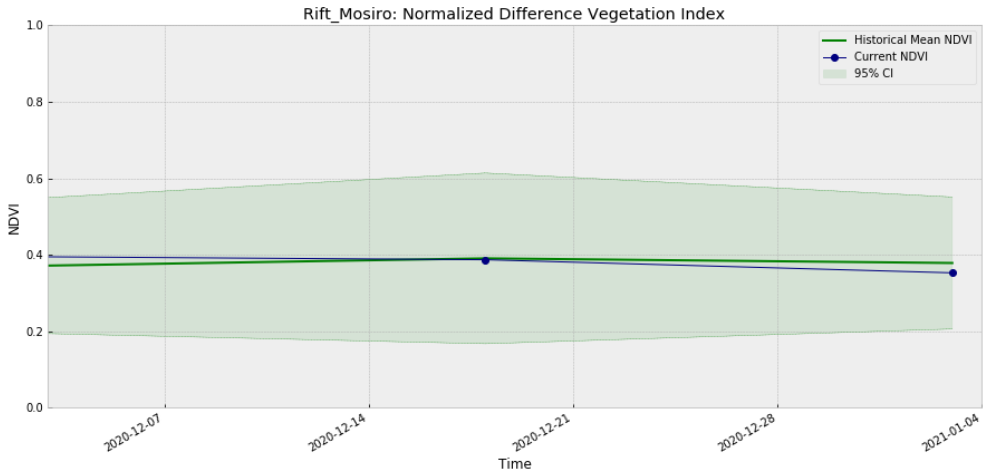
Mau Forest



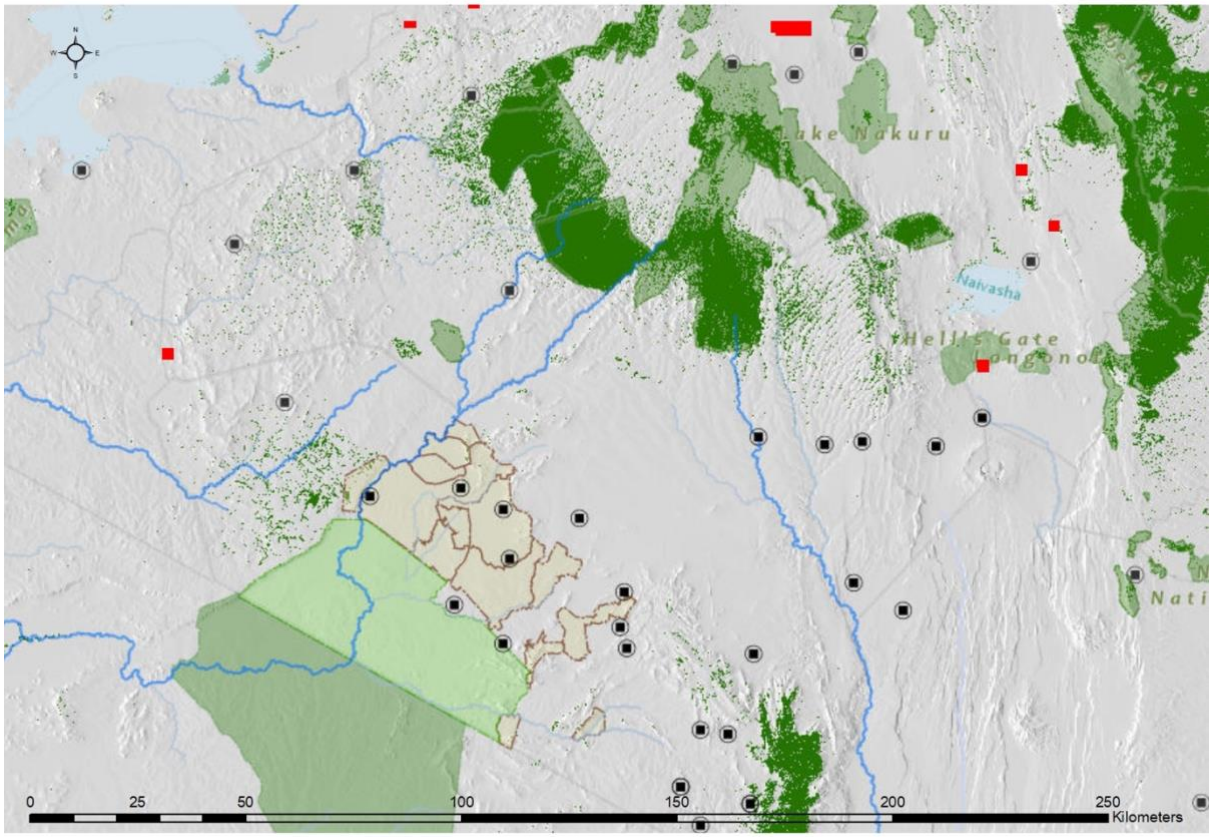
Loita



Rift Valley



ENVIRONMENT: Burn/Fire Areas



Red blocks indicate burn areas as measured by NASA's FIRMS dataset during the period December 1, 2020 – January 1, 2021. Accessed through Google Earth Engine.