MEP May 2021 Report

A baby elephant photographed by the MEP LTM Team in May.

GENERAL

I had the pleasure of joining Riz Jiwa and Wilson in the MEP leased helicopter to contribute to the aerial census of elephants and large mammals in the Mara Ecosystem conducted by Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). The Mara was the first area the census covered as part of a national census exercise which will take place over several months.

MEP CEO Marc Goss and Conservation Manager Wilson Sairowua with Riz counting elephants from the air.

So far May has gotten off to a very wet start in the Maasai Mara. Mara Elephant Project's rangers have been using their wet weather gear regularly as they respond to rising conflict with crops ripening bordering operational areas. It also makes traversing the Mara a very slow and frustrating task.

The increased rain however has really allowed the Mara to turn a vibrant green and MEP's long-term monitoring (LTM) team has been able to capture some amazing photos of wildlife enjoying the long grasses and an African grass owl in Mara North Conservancy while conducting their research in the field.

SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

On May 7, the MEP intelligence unit was involved in the arrest of one suspect in Busia in possession of two elephant tusks weighing 9 kg and one hippo tooth. KWS, working off of intelligence gathered by undercover MEP operatives, were able to arrest the Ugandan national who had brought the tusks over the border in order to sell them. The arrest and seizure made national news: Africa Science News and the Daily Monitor.

The KWS arrest on May 7 based on MEP intelligence.

On May 11, the MEP / Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mau De-Snaring Unit stationed in the Mau Forest arrested two suspects in possession of 128 cedar posts being transported via donkey out of the forest. Then, the very next day, they successfully arrested two additional suspects transporting 40 posts and found 38 trees that were in production. Later in the month, the MEP SWT Mau De-Snaring Unit "golf" team stationed in the Mau received information from an informer that people were going into the forest and carting out charcoal. MEP rangers set up an ambush later that night to catch the culprits; however, unable to find the charcoal production operation, they extended their patrol. This paid off when they came upon a poacher's campsite

and were able to confiscate bushmeat, snares and destroyed the poacher's camp so if the suspects returned, they were without their supplies.

The logging bust on May 11 in the Mau Forest. Later in the month, the May 24 nightly poacher's camp bust. MEP rangers while on patrol in the Mau removed 15 snares on May 29.

The MEP "Alpha" ranger unit stationed in the Nyakweri Forest is tasked with mitigating conflict between elephants residing in the forest, including collared elephant Fitz, and surrounding communities as well as combatting habitat destruction inside the forest. We wanted to show you just how close elephants come to harmful habitat destruction activities, like charcoal production. On May 25, the team photographed a herd of elephants inside the forest right next to an active kiln; a charcoal production site they were investigating and preparing to destroy. Elephants in the Mara are losing their habitats and MEP rangers are tasked with ensuring that it's protected in the short term all while our research department works to find long-term solutions so that people and wildlife can peacefully co-exist.

Fitz and his herd seen in the upper righthand corner next to an active kiln the MEP rangers destroyed. A kiln destroyed by MEP rangers in the Loita area on May 6. Rangers in Loita recovered 12 pieces of cedar and 18 pieces of timber on May 24.

Two bulls were inside an electric fence in Rekero area and successfully pushed to safety. Conflict mitigation done on May 4 by MEP rangers in the Mara moving elephants away from farms.

Overall, in May, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested four bushmeat poaching suspects, removed 24 snares and confiscated 6 kg of bushmeat. They destroyed eight kilns and recovered one power saw and 433 posts, 18 timbers and arrested 17 suspects for habitat destruction activities. There were 14 total conflict incidents during May that MEP rangers responded to for mitigation. In May, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,620.4 km on foot, 8,602.6 by car and 5,387.6 km on motorbike.

HELICOPTER

This month we flew a total of 22 hours during the aerial census and conducted the 50-hour maintenance work shortly afterwards.

Date	Time	Mission
03/05/2021	2.69	Mara Census
05/05/2021	2.08	Mara Census
06/05/2021	7.1	Mara Census
07/05/2021	6.27	Mara Census
08/05/2021	4.67	Mara Census ferry to Karen
10/05/2021	0.24	Ferry from Karen to Wilson
18/05/2021	1.76	MG Check ride
26/05/2021	0.98	Return Mara
27/05/2021	2.23	HEC Near Aitong County Security Committee meeting in Narok return Mara
28/05/2021	2.65	HEC in Transmara and looking for problem animal with KWS in Lemek

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Mara Elephant Project is participating in Vulcan's Conservation Technology Award, which will be granted to two conservation tech innovators in 2021. The grants are $15,000 each and Jake Wall - MEP's Director of Research & Conservation - will be sitting on the grant panel to review applications. We are really excited about this opportunity! MEP's Chairman Colin Church was well remembered in an article from The Telegraph published in May. MEP celebrated Mother's Day in the U.S. and Endangered Species Day abroad with our supporters. We also released our First Quarter 2021 Newsletter. MEP had some amazing entries in the May Greatest Maasai Mara photo competition. Thank you to Clair Nicol, Anne Garcia, Roisin Allen, Talib Almarri, Kathy Karn, Riz Jiwa, Fahad Alshammari, Tracy Miller, Thorsten Hanewald, Prakash Sujir and Mark Boyd for supporting MEP.

A May entry in the GMM competition by Roisin Allen.

The Sidekick Foundation, Inc.® received $70,399.20 from 215 donations in May supporting Mara Elephant Project. We had three birthday fundraisers on Facebook, thank you to Peter, Nuno and Danielle for raising $848.53 for MEP. We continue to receive our direct mail monthly transfer of $41,200 from the donors based on the success of that campaign. Thank you to Ana Ines Goni Boracco for her support of the MEP experimental farm set to be launched later this year. Also thank you to Keith & Corinne Bentley, Gary & Mary Pinkus, Michael Burke, Jonathan Coe, Julius Cain, Richard Kuenne, Jane Wylie, Donna Barlow, William Filsinger (Shannon Alayne Mathews Trust), Barbara Finck, Sandra Muscillo, Debra Shearer (Cherokee Shearer Foundation), Helena Van Dierendonck and Lois Vaughan for your support of MEP in May. MEP Trust in Kenya received a disbursement from the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust per the grant agreement and had two donations, one over $5,000 total from donors through Benevity and over $500 from Föreningen Försvara Elefanterna. Finally, in May, launched our 10th (Kumi) Anniversary Campaign and sent information packets to loyal donors who has helped support MEP's success over the last 10 years. As this milestone quickly approaches in September, we are asking MEP champions to donate to strengthen, build and grow our decade of success.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Director's Update

MEP was able to financially support (with a donation of fuel and helicopter hours) and participate in the Kenya Wildlife Service Mara 2021 aerial census. The event was launched by Patrick Omondi and very well-coordinated and handled by our colleague and local area scientist - Stephen Ndambuki. Wilson Sairowua acted as a rear-seat observer while Marc acted as the front-seat observer and Riz Jiwa piloted the helicopter. MEP were assigned three census blocks including the Nyakweri forest which was included for the first time as part of the survey. The KWS Mara total count is typically run in the wet season before the arrival of the migrant wildebeest, zebra and gazelle that occurs beginning in late-July/early-August. David Kimanzi (MEP's Data & Reporting Manager) helped the GIS team with collating and compiling the count data, and Sarafina Sironka helped with transcribing count dictations. We don't have results yet, but MEP has committed to supporting KWS with finalizing and publishing the final report.

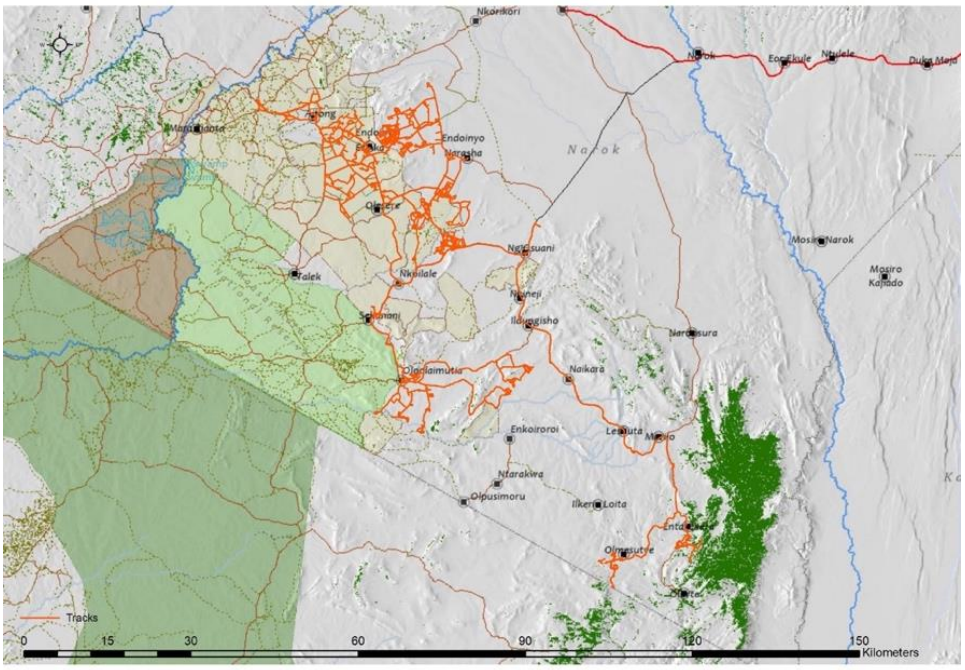
Our LTM team has been making great strides in documenting and identifying individuals throughout Mara North and Lemek Conservancies. In May, the team recorded a big bull on Lemek Conservancy we've nicknamed 'Vincent'. We believe he would be a good candidate for fitting with a collar given the number of wounds we observed on him that suggest that he's a crop-raider. Our request to KWS for deploying a further 25 collars across the GME has now been approved and we are starting to look for new candidates in addition to the collars that need replacing on currently tracked individuals.

The elephant 'Vincent' photographed in Lemek by the MEP LTM team.

Photos captured by MEP's LTM team of a breeding elephant in May.

The GIS team catalogued a further 360 km of fencing in May. We've benefited from an overhaul of our 'Njia' mapping application that is being improved by a volunteer developer.

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
2021	January	87.9	19.4	121.09	5.2	233.59
2021	February	79.2	22.9	175	-	277.1
2021	March	20.3	7.4	147.92	8.6	184.22
2021	April	80.2	31.05	96.4	2.3	209.95
2021	May	40.3	23.6	296.5		360.4
	Total (kms)	**1,255.57**	**172.52**	**2,168.55**	**46.94**	**3,643.48**



Movements (orange tracks) of MEP's three field assistants during May. All of our field assistants are working on mapping fences, roads and landcover ground-truthing points using motorbikes and our Njia app. They recorded km 360.4 of fences and 346 LCC points in May.

Tracking Manager's Update

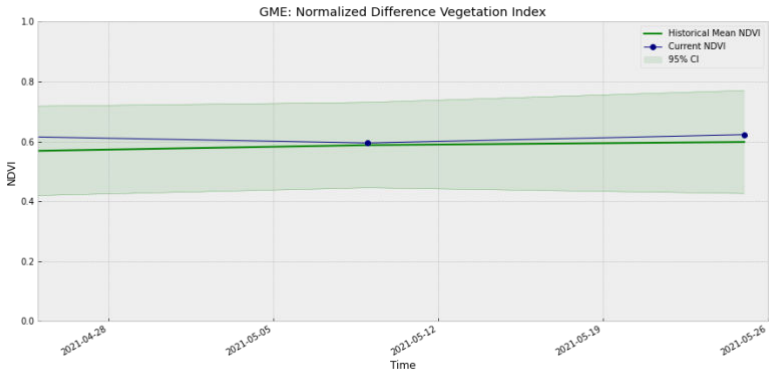
Fitz has been in his usual range in Nyakweri Forest with sporadic crop-raids into the neighboring farms. Alpha team had to chase him out of maize farms around the Olkireruki area towards the end of May. Harriet began the month on the Tanzanian side and in the first week she streaked towards Kenya. On crossing the border, she encountered dense settlement around Olpusimoru, and she had to retreat a little into Tanzania to circumvent the settlements. She managed to go through a less settled area between Olderkesi and Olpusimoru, streaking through Oluai and eventually got to her core area for the month in Enkoiroroi near Sand River. She spent three weeks there before streaking back to Tanzania through a less settled region between Olabura and Ilkerin Loita. Clara left Olarro at the start of the month and headed towards Loita hills, to the west of Naroosura. She has been in these hills for the rest of May, with her two attempts to move further east cut short after encountering human settlements.

Fitz photographed inside the forest.

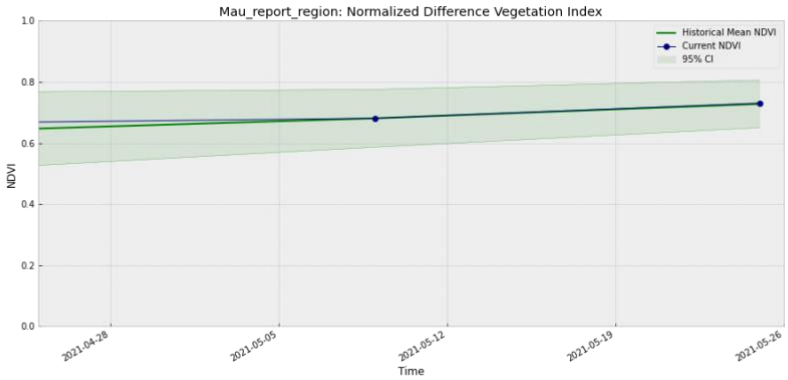
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

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.

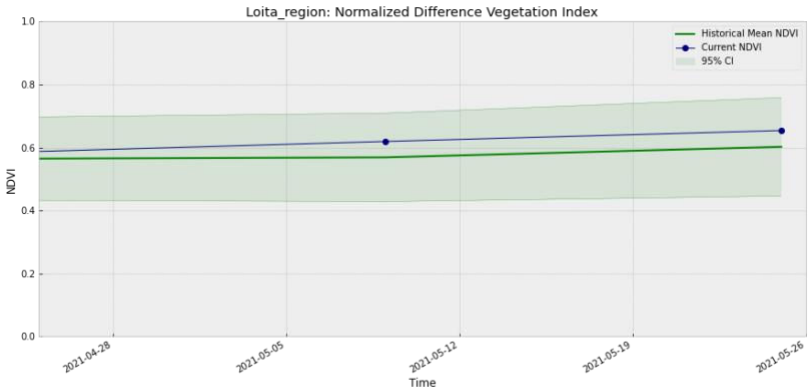
Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



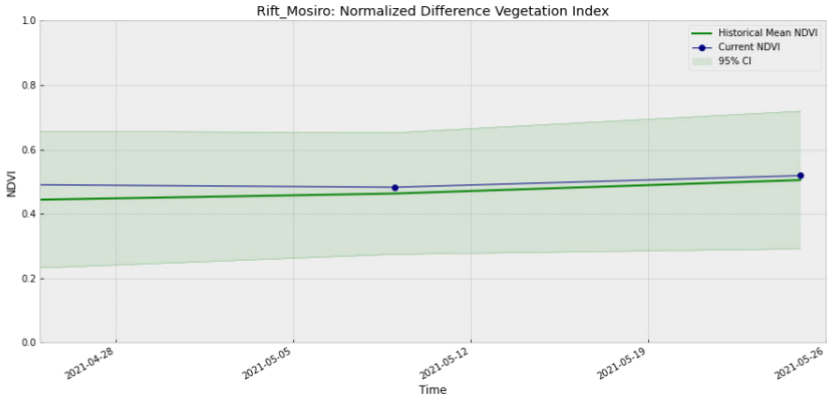
Mau Forest



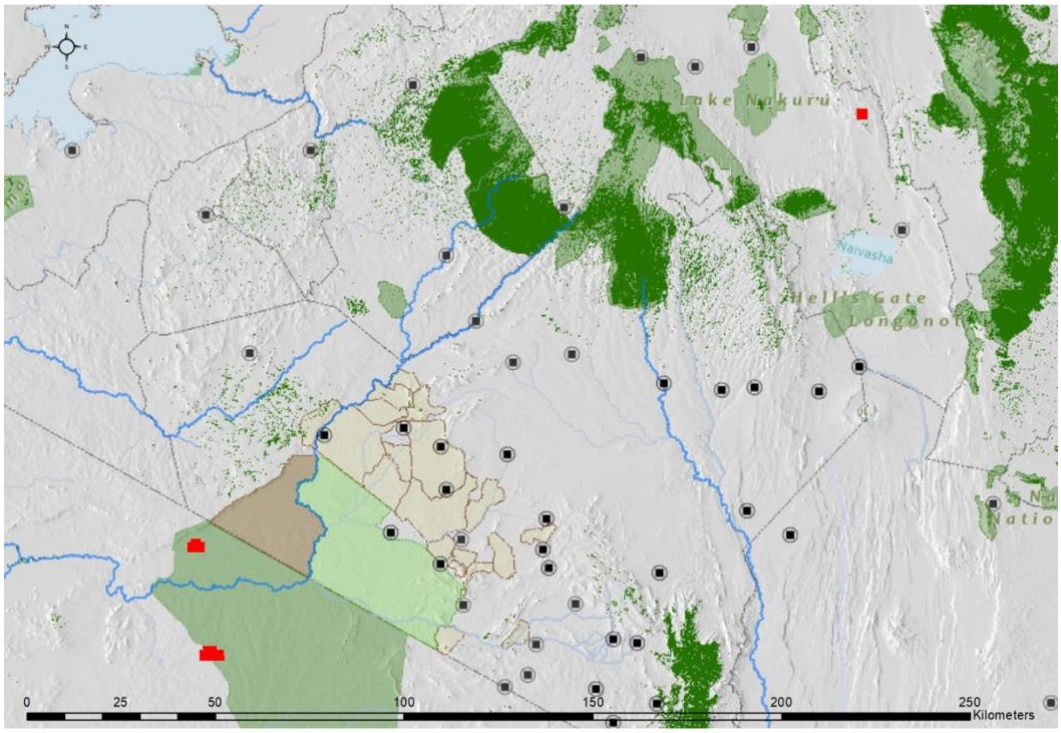
Loita



Rift Valley



ENVIRONMENT: Burn/Fire Areas



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