MEP August 2024 Report

World Elephant Day Founder Patricia Sims with members of the MEP team during collared elephant Fred's treatment in August.

GENERAL

Forests are home to a variety of plants and animals, including elephants, and habitat destruction like illegal charcoal production threatens their very existence. Mara Elephant Project alongside Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), Kenya Forest Service (KFS), and the Narok County Government (NCG) is committed to increasing the protection of three key forests in the Mara by combatting these illegal activities. In August alone, MEP conducted joint operations with the NGC Forest Rapid Response Unit and seized 63 bags, arrested 21 suspects transporting them, and recovered 2,302 illegal posts adding to their 2024 impact. Joining partners to strengthen law enforcement and provide alternative livelihoods for communities bordering forests is key to effective protection efforts.

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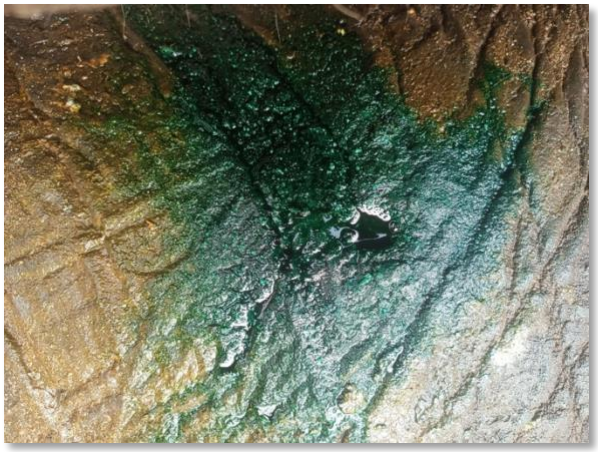
SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

While on patrol in August, the MEP "Golf" ranger team monitored collared elephant Fred with an open wound on his left hind limb. Deploying a drone, they were able to capture detailed photographs of the wound to send to KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge from the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mobile Vet Unit. MEP immediately joined forces in the air and on the ground to treat him and his movements will continue to be monitored 24/7 by KWS, the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI), and MEP as he heals.

The MEP long-term monitoring (LTM) team on a routine monitoring exercise spotted a bull elephant with a wound on his front right limb. MEP quickly called in KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge from the SWT Mobile Vet Unit for treatment and assisted his team on the ground. The bull was successfully treated for an arrow wound and the LTM team was able to get detailed identification photos to include him in the MEP database of known elephants, ElephantBook, as #1212.



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Overall, in August, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested 40 habitat destruction suspects and removed 22 snares. They also confiscated 440 pieces of timber and 2,302 posts, destroyed 40 charcoal kilns, and mitigated 51 conflict incidents. In August, MEP rangers covered a distance of 945.1 km on foot and 7,091.14 km by car in the GME.

HELICOPTER

Since 2015, MEP has operated the only helicopter dedicated to wildlife in the Mara. Often piloted by CEO Marc Goss, the MEP Robinson Helicopter is a vital tool used for reconnaissance, wildlife monitoring, conflict mitigation, elephant collaring and vet operations, and community emergency response. Thanks to Robinson's support, Marc Goss attended a 4-day Pilots' Safety Course at their headquarters in California, his first in the States.

"It was great to be at Robinson. As they like to say, MEP's Robinson empowers us to tackle a tough job, and their support of the helicopter and training demonstrates a deep commitment to pilots' safety." – Mara Elephant Project CEO, Marc Goss

DRONES FOR CONSERVATION

Special Projects Manager's Update

August has been a particularly busy month for the team, with extensive efforts dedicated to addressing human-elephant conflict within the Mara. The majority of these conflicts have been concentrated in Transmara, where elephants have been increasingly moving towards farmland. MEP drone pilots have been actively engaged, responding swiftly to incidents and pushing the elephants back to safer areas.

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The "Golf" team has maintained its focus on a specific herd near Partakila. This herd, which moved from the Mara Triangle, has been frequenting visiting farms at night. The team has been able to successfully push the elephants back to the Mara Triangle, reducing the damage caused to the farms. In Kericho, our team has been working to manage two bull elephants that have been encroaching on maize farms to push these elephants back into the Kericho Mau Forest. The Loita ranger teams have reported a decrease in elephant-related conflicts this month. Their focus has shifted to monitoring the Loita Forest, looking for any signs of habitat destruction. The use of drones has proven to be an invaluable tool for surveying areas of the forest that are difficult to access on foot, allowing for more effective monitoring and response.

The cattle count project in the Mara is now underway. In August alone, we successfully photographed 23 bomas across Mara North Conservancy. Our target is to cover a total of 35 bomas by the end of September. We have also conducted drone training for 14 individuals from the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, Natural State, and Big Life Foundation.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

In August, MEP celebrated World Elephant Day and thanks to your support, we raised $50,000 in a weekend to support MEP's conservation drone program thanks to support from the Matt and Mari Foundation. In 2024, MEP needs to add 11 thermal drones to our air wing and train 30 rangers to operate them. That would enable all nine MEP ranger teams to operate two drones, day and night, and 60% of our rangers would obtain their remote pilot's license. MEP released the second quarter newsletter, MEP Matters, in August and you can read it here.

On August 11, MEP CEO and Executive Director joined stakeholders at a World Elephant Day by the Sea event in North Haven, Maine. Hosted by Rob Walker, Vicki and Doug Lamont, Ned and Ann Lamont, and with support from MEP Advisory Committee member David Stulb, they were overwhelmed with the friendly welcome they received on the island. Thank you to their hosts and to everyone who attended and supported MEP.

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Also, in August, MEP announced our partnership with Silent Donor, the largest anonymous donation platform in the US. The MEP donate page on Silent Donor gives people and companies the ability to support elephant conservation with full anonymity. To make an anonymous donation, visit here.

Mara Elephant Project Trust in Kenya received $58,144 in donations in August. Thank you to the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, Governors Camp Collection, Davey Grete Marie, and Foreningen Forsvara Elefanterna for your support. Mara Elephant Project USA received $264,793.78 in support of MEP's efforts. Thank you to M.A. Rogers, Donald and Chacea Sundman, Pamela Lunny, Matt & Mari O'Connell, Barbara Sauby, Randall & Ellen Lunn, David & Vicki Kellams, the Hinze Family Fund, Jan Bell, Payson and Kim Coleman, Kay Oliver Hodnett, the Niraj Bhatia Foundation, Carl Haefling, John Feldman, Marco Marienberg, Eileen Lengyel, Leann Henning, Margaret McCormick, Mary Barber, Charles Bradford, the Susan and Ford Schuman Foundation, T. Drulias, Carolyn Shine, Corrine Coon, Fran Smith, Allan Montgomery, Jack Tarver, Richard Litkenhaus, Katharine Morgan, Gus Constantin, and Barbara Davis for your support.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Deputy Director's Update

During the month, I led a series of significant activities aimed at advancing collaboration, conservation, and capacity building. Training discussion sessions for rangers in Nyakweri led by the pangolin team, while communication with conservancies was initiated for the EarthRanger (ER) rollout, including sharing a needs assessment link and planning conservancy visits.

Additionally, facilitation for Eugene, Francis, and Sarafina's participation in the RCMRD International Conference 2024 was done. I also engaged in a NASA Ecological Conservation-Mara meeting.

Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) Team

In August, the team was busy with various activities, such as collecting data, treating elephants, giving presentations, and field work. Also, in August, the team recorded 16 elephant sightings, including 6 bulls, 5 cow/calf, and 3 mixed groups. A total of 106 individual elephants were counted. Two bulls, Fred and Individual 1212, received treatment during the month. Additionally, the team documented the arrival of two new bulls and one new female, contributing valuable information to their ongoing elephant monitoring efforts.

Individual 888 sighted in Ol-Kinyei Conservancy by the LTM team.

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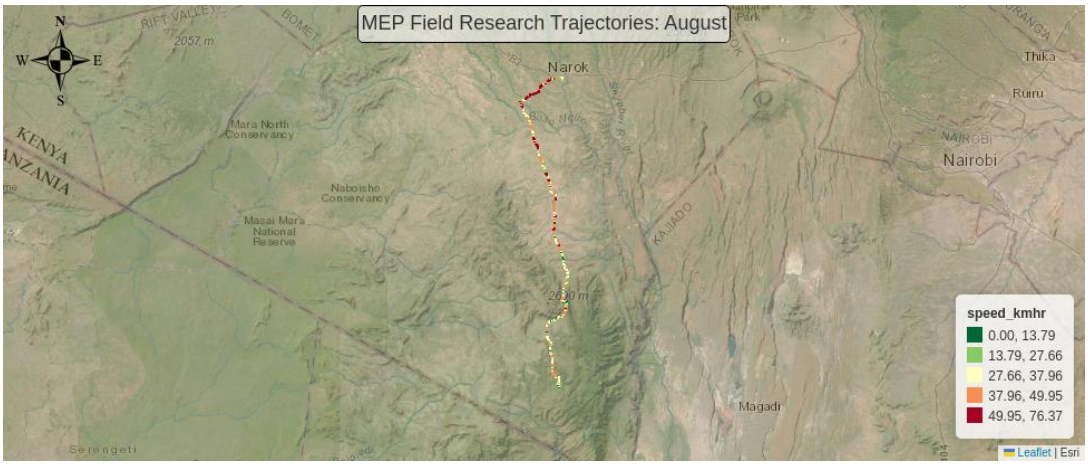
The LTM team also hosted three groups of visitors, including a group from Naserian Camp, World Elephant Day Founder Patricia Sims, and MEP donors Tim and Lindy. Towards the end of August, the team camped in Isateen Conservancy, extending their field operations and enhancing their ability to track and protect elephant populations in the area. These efforts underpin the team's commitment to conservation and the continued success of their monitoring program.

Data and Reporting Team

A significant event this month was the EarthRanger training rollout meeting in partnership with the Maasai Mara Wildlife Conservancies Association in Talek, where the team welcomed rangers and managers from different conservancies in Mara and delivered several presentations demonstrating the benefits and usage of the EarthRanger, among other topics.

Geospatial Mapping

This month, a total number of 4 grids were visited and completed and a significant number of roads and physical features were marked by Field Assistant Milton. The head of Geospatial Data Eugene Kuloba summarized this month's data as depicted in the image below.



Movements of MEP's one field assistant in August. All of our field assistants are working on mapping fences, roads, and landcover ground-truthing points using motorbikes and our TerraChart app. They covered a total of 3,698 km and recorded 5.6 km of fences and 0 LCC points in August.

MEP Co-Existence Farm

General Update

The Coexistence Project area experienced low rainfall in the month of August, despite that, elephants and hippos crossed through the farm as they predated the maize on neighboring farms. The five crops which are non-palatable to wildlife and are currently in our demo farms, have not been predated on and, wildlife footsteps are seen around the planted area and only while crossing through the plots. Also, we are excited to have received the last batch of lavender seedlings from Nairobi and we have completed the planting of the five crops in a circle at the farm.

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We received six guests from Osero camp, Nelson Kirokor from Nkoilale Community Development Foundation, Stefan, Brigitte and Reiner from Friend of the Maasai, Fred from Lemek Isinya Conservancy, and Joseph from Laikipia Permaculture Centre, who were interested in our coexistence project and were happy to learn more ways of enlightening communities living with wildlife and that can be replicated in other parts of the country to improve their livelihoods. We also received a team from Laikipia, Faith Riunga from SAM Elimu and Purity Kinoti from The Lewa Conservancy working on conservation education. We exchanged ideas on how to improve conservation school education and promote young ambassadors into the next conservationists.

The Coexistence Project has started one of its important phases of data analysis after three years of collecting predation, economic, and social survey data. The next three months will be devoted by the farm manager learning data analysis under Professor Susanne Vogal who is helping MEP in data analysis and presenting the final reports of the project.

Figure 1,2,3 Citriodora, Tea tree, and Chili crop plots doing well.

Climate Report

Table 2: 1 MEP's Experimental Farm Rainfall Recording August 2024

Date	Rain gauge 2 (200m2)
2024_08_11	9
2024_08_11	4
2024_08_14	21
2024_08_27	2.5
2024_08_28	5.5

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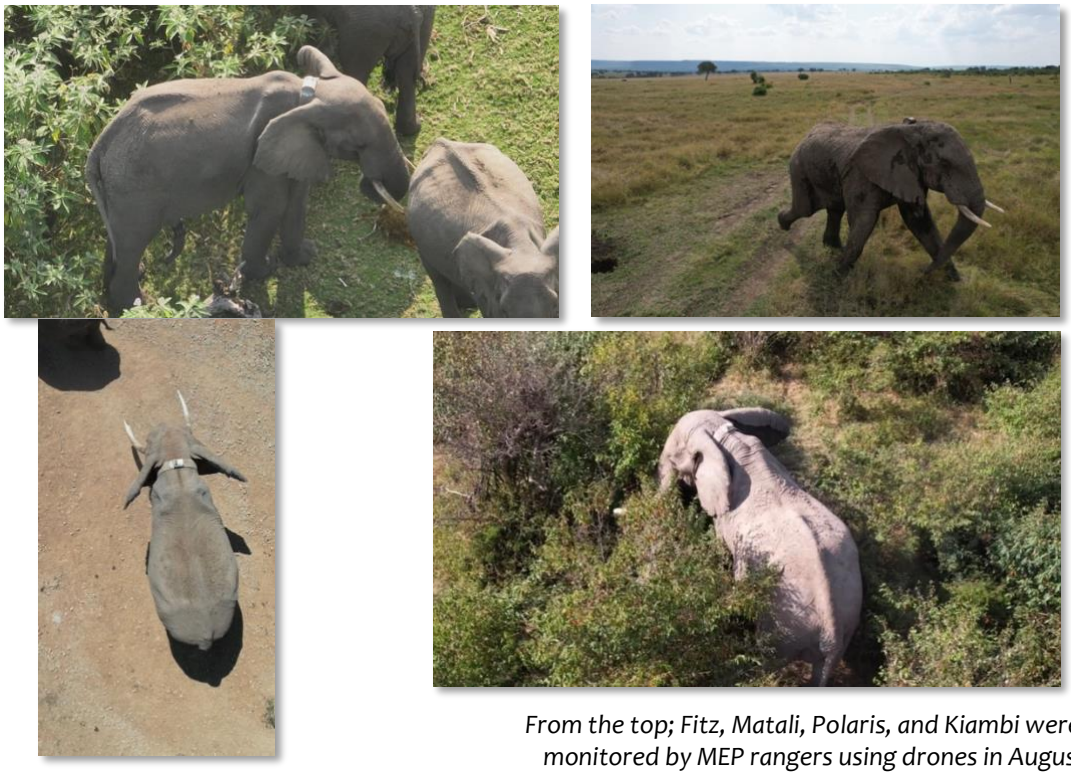
Tracking Manager Report

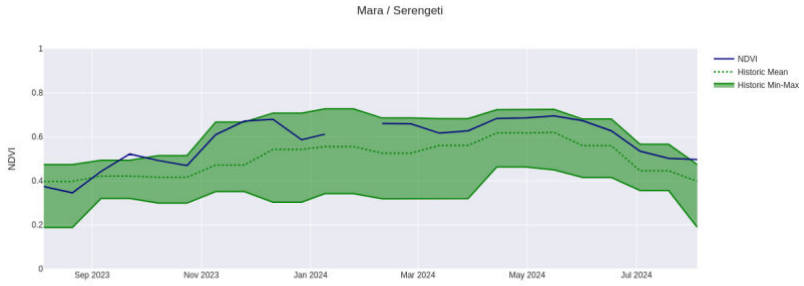


From the top; Fitz, Matali, Polaris, and Kiambi were all monitored by MEP rangers using drones in August.

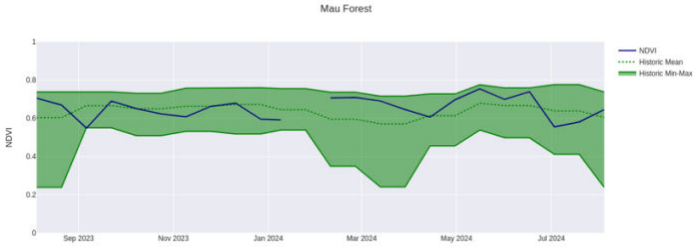
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is a measure of plant photosynthetic activity. Higher NDVI indicates the plant is greener. The blue trend line shows the current value while the green shaded area shows the min-max range of values centered around the green trend line from values measured back to February 2000.

Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



Mau Forest



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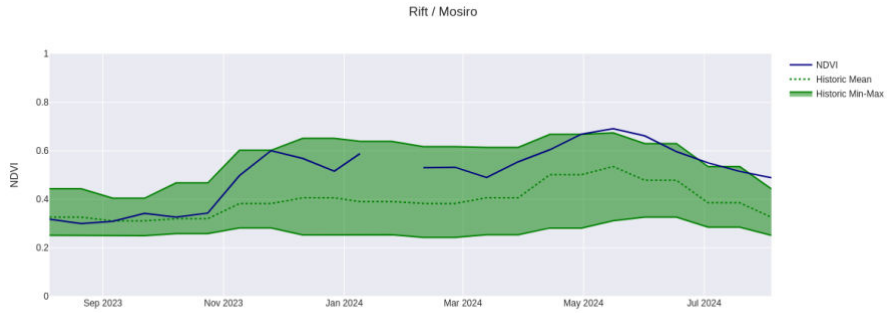
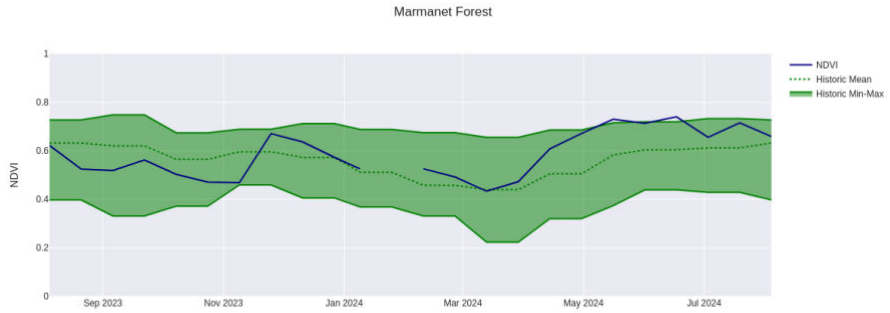
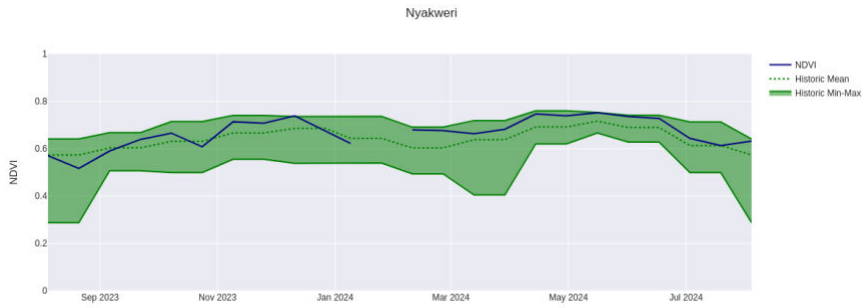
Rift Valley / Mosiro



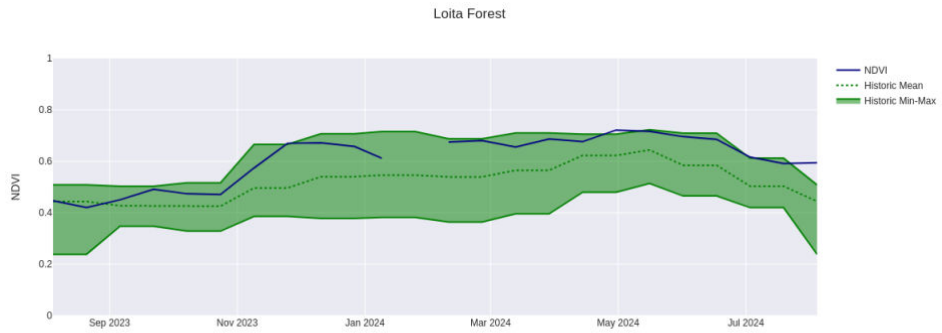
Marmanet Forest



Nyakweri Forest



Loita Forest



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