MEP June 2024 Report

Snapshot from the field in June of MEP rangers monitoring elephants to check for injuries and note their locations and herd size.

GENERAL

Mara Elephant Project received support from the Basecamp Explorer Foundation – Kenya (BCEF-K) to enhance the skillsets of wildlife rangers throughout the Mara. The free training courses will cover a variety of disciplines and benefit a total of 125 rangers from 24 conservancies to transfer these new skills to their broader team, elevating the overall impact of wildlife rangers across the Mara. The first group of 29 completed their training in June which featured Drone training, Search and Rescue (SAR), Water Borne Assisted Recovery Hands-On Guidance (WARTHOG), EarthRanger, Patrols and Ambushes, Communications, and Human Resources among others.

BCEF-K CEO Nick Trent stopped by to see the (SAR and WARTHOG training firsthand. While it seems far-fetched that a rescue operation would take place in water in the Mara, In May, MEP relied on our SAR training to respond to the Mara floods and rangers often operate near lakes

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E-MAIL: info@maraelephantproject.org · www.maraelephantproject.org

and rivers. The training covered waterborne recovery and safety and the SAR equipment was put to use at the Mara River Lodge. Nick Trent had this to say afterward;

"I was fortunate enough to attend the first cohort water training – WART-HOG – this last Sunday in the Mara. Many things impressed me, starting with the bush camp that MEP has established for this training. Simple, clean, and functional – this camp is an example of how ranger training should be accommodated– with classroom, dining, and boarding for the ranger students, split into male and female accommodation, all canvas. On visiting the practical pool session, I was most impressed by the fact that MEP has been able to gather male and female rangers for 22 conservancies to train together. This alone is a huge achievement, and the camaraderie that this will create amongst conservancies is priceless. Joe the instructor, and India assisting in the pool, and all the MEP senior management present showed what high quality this ToT training is delivering. In the short time that I was observing rangers swim for the first time, the progress was already apparent, and the professionalism by which the training was being delivered was commendable. I look forward to following the future phases of this program and watching the rangers from across the Mara become trainers in multiple skills that they can then go back and share on their home conservancies." – *Nick Trent*

MEP is proud to have a partner dedicated to meeting the needs of the modern wildlife ranger and we are looking forward to training the second cohort of rangers starting mid-July.

SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

Mara Elephant Project rangers partner with their counterparts working in conservancies, and land designated for wildlife, to conduct joint anti-poaching patrols, assess human-elephant conflict, and promote coexistence with bordering communities. In June, the MEP "Foxtrot" ranger team equipped with a drone partnered with four separate conservancies to provide additional capacity, especially in the air, for increased impact. MEP's drone operations not only benefit the elephants we protect but also the partners we're proud to protect them with.

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MEP community rangers are ambassadors not just for the organization, but the wildlife and wild spaces they protect. As a result of recent flooding in the Mara, many roads and bridges were impassable disrupting people's commutes to school, work, and home. MEP rangers have been there to help promote the connection between conservation and community.

Habitat loss is one of the threats facing elephants today. Fueled by the increased demand for hardwoods, posts, cultivatable land, and charcoal, MEP rangers alongside government partners deter habitat destruction and restore areas already lost. Their restoration efforts are bolstered by long-time partner Seedballs Kenya, an organization that provides seedballs, an Indigenous tree seedling covered in a nutrient ball, to distribute on degraded land. Once watered by nature, these seeds take root and grow, restoring the once-barren landscape. Seedballs Kenya Co-Founder Teddy Kinyanjui recently joined the MEP Advisory Committee and stopped by headquarters in June with four donated seedball bags containing acacia and African olive tree seedlings ready for distribution.

Also, in June, The MEP mobile ranger team received a report from Naboisho Conservancy rangers that a bull elephant was limping. After monitoring him, they called in Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Vet Dr. Njoroge from the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mobile Vet Unit for treatment. MEP provided both ground and aerial support while Dr. Njoroge treated him for an infected arrow wound on his hip. MEP rangers will continue monitoring him as he recovers.

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MEP rangers conduct daily patrols to monitor elephants in their area of operation. Their monitoring efforts help them to observe elephant location and behavior to more effectively mitigate conflict and report any suspected injuries for treatment. Just as their name suggests, the MEP mobile ranger team is deployed where they are needed most, and while on their patrol in June, they monitored this herd of 18.

Overall, in June, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested seven habitat destruction suspects. They confiscated 4 kg of bushmeat and removed 175 snares, the highest in 2024 so far. They also confiscated 11 pieces of timber, and eight posts, destroyed 38 charcoal kilns, and mitigated 25 conflict incidents. In June, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,224.12 km on foot and 1,919.86 km by car in the GME.

HELICOPTER

On June 12, The MEP helicopter provided aerial support while our partner KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge from the SWT treated a bull elephant for an infected arrow wound on his hip in Naboisho Conservancy. MEP rangers will continue monitoring him as he recovers

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Since 2011, the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI), KWS, and MEP have collared over 80 individual elephants to track their movements in real-time. In June, the MEP helicopter was used in three recollaring operations. Originally collared in 2013, the large bull Polaris was re-collared this month with assistance from KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge. Additionally, Siham, Dicki, and Dr. Omondi were also recollared to continue their 24/7 tracking. Female elephants Dicki, in the Mwaluganje Elephant Sanctuary, and Siham, in the Kenya Triangle Ranch, and bull elephant Dr. Omondi, in Taita Conservancy, move between Kenya and Tanzania, traversing areas linking Tsavo Park and the Taita ranches. Their collars allow ground teams to respond and better inform land use planning. A special thank you to Rob Walker for donating the flying hours for these collar operations. They are all sporting the latest Savannah Tracking collar models, and their real-time movements will be used to keep them safe for another three years.

MEP CEO Marc Goss aerially monitored collared elephant Tino, an elephant recently translocated by KWS to Tsavo, and noted that both he and his collar were in good condition. Real-time tracking enables MEP and partners to monitor individual elephants on the ground and in the air to increase their safety.

In the month of June, the MEP helicopter was used to move crop-raiding elephants from a maize farm and also conduct aerial reconnaissance. As the National Wildlife Census kicked off in June, the helicopter was also used to do the wildlife counts in the Greater Mara Ecosystem. The MEP helicopter covered 1,548 square kilometers in this effort covering three blocks.

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DRONES FOR CONSERVATION
Special Projects Manager's Update

MEP drone pilots have been actively responding to various cases of human-elephant conflict (HEC) in the Mara. In June, four bull elephants moved from the Mara to the Mau Forest, crossing farms and settlements. The "Foxtrot" and HQ ranger teams successfully monitored the bulls as they made their way to the Mau Forest. Unfortunately, two of the bulls returned close to the forest and were caught in Mulot Town for the entire day. We deployed drones and the helicopter to keep the community away and waited until nightfall to move the elephants to safety.

The HQ team has been working tirelessly, responding to nighttime HEC incidents around Pardamat Conservation Area (PCA) and the greater Mara. One notable incident occurred in Naisuya, Mau, where three bulls were stuck on a maize farm. The team successfully managed to push them back to the Mau Forest. Additionally, the HQ team monitored collared elephant Ivy, whose collar stopped reporting for two days. Using a thermal drone, we were able to locate the herd in Ol Chorro Conservancy and establish that she was in good health.

The "Golf" team in Transmara continues to monitor Fitz and his herd. This large herd has been visiting farms at night, but with the assistance of the thermal drone, the team has been able to move the herd back to the Nyakweri Forest. The team also monitored Fred along the Mara River after receiving a low-speed alert from his collar and found him to be in good health. The "Lima" team in Mosiro has been actively monitoring a herd of over 70 elephants in the Rift Valley. The team also visited Shompole to monitor all collared elephants in the area. The mobile team, based in Ol-Kinyei Conservancy and spending a week in the Mau Forest, has been monitoring the big bulls including collared elephants Kiambi and Polaris in Ol-Kinyei Conservancy. Overall, drones continue to be a vital tool in mitigating conflict and monitoring elephants in the Mara.

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COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

In June, MEP celebrated World Female Ranger Week, a time set aside to highlight the important conservation work undertaken by women on the frontlines of conservation. MEP also celebrated Kenya's Independence Day and World Environment Day highlighting MEP's Data Driven conservation approaches.

MEP is joining the 2024 Tusk Wildlife Ranger Challenge. Launched in 2020, the challenge is an annual celebration of solidarity, connection, and camaraderie for rangers. Racing across Africa's protected areas, wildlife rangers unite around a common goal, to raise vital funds for frontline conservation efforts. MEP's two teams of rangers Stanley, Cosmas, Eric, Geoffrey, Fancy, Charity, Sylvia, and Gloria will join their comrades starting tomorrow for bi-weekly challenges all leading up to the big race on September 21.

Mara Elephant Project Trust in Kenya received $13,660 in donations in June. Thank you to Kampur Travel Diaries, Karen Blixen Camp Trust, Foreningen Forsvara Elefanterna, Liz Harper Travel, and Abercrombie & Kent for your continued support. Mara Elephant Project USA received $228,016.43 in support of MEP's efforts. Thank you to Lisa Konieczka, Leslie L. Alexander Foundation, Susan Parks, JBMA Foundation, Beate Assmuth-Ong, the Rachel Simon Fund Advisors, Robert A Martin & Lana R Martin, Margaretta Taylor, Aleta Warren, JoAnne Rutigliano, Capt. Henry S. and Marion B Reinke, Mr. and Mrs. Paul Lerwick, Smiler Fund for Nature & Science, Lindsay McCay, Erin Connolly, Ginni Keith, Pamela Day, Caroline Kuzia, Sandra Murray, Susan Peluso, Patricia Perfect, Douglas Philip, Michael Romersa, Raoul Chacon, Sally Davidson, Shirley Dilger, Louise McGregor, Robin Poppe, and Molly Bundy-Toral for your support.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Deputy Director's Update

The month of June has been remarkably productive for our team, involving a diverse range of activities. Our efforts have included thorough data cleaning, comprehensive recording of elephant sightings as part of our ongoing data collection initiatives, detailed mapping of roads and physical features, school education programs, and the facilitation of multiple training sessions.

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Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) Team

The MEP long-term monitoring (LTM) team has been busy collecting data and participating in the school education programs, hosting two in June. Through their efforts, the LTM team experienced seven group sightings with a total number of 54 individuals, which contributed 15 cows, 16 bulls, 14 sub-adults, and 9 calves, of which 5 bulls and 4 cows were new individuals. Six bulls and 8 cows were re-identified in the Greater Mara Ecosystem. The team also participated in the Training of Trainers (TOT) course where they took the trainees through the Elephant Book Software, how they use it, and its importance. They also joined the MEP Coexistence team for a World Environment Day activity where they helped with setting up a kitchen garden alongside partners Women in the Wild. Below is a representation of the sighting activities and distant surveys carried out by the team throughout the month.

Data and Reporting Team

The data and reporting team, led by Francis Odero, played a major role in the Training of Trainers (TOT) Course. During the course, they trained the trainees on how to use the EarthRanger software application and its benefits. To make the training exercises more effective, the team developed exercises and real-life scenarios that simplified the learning process.

In addition to their training responsibilities, the team also continued with their regular activities, such as data entry, data cleaning, and data analysis using Ecoscope, a data analysis tool, among other tasks. One significant achievement of the team was the development of a script that automates data analysis, ensuring prompt, accurate, and efficient results.

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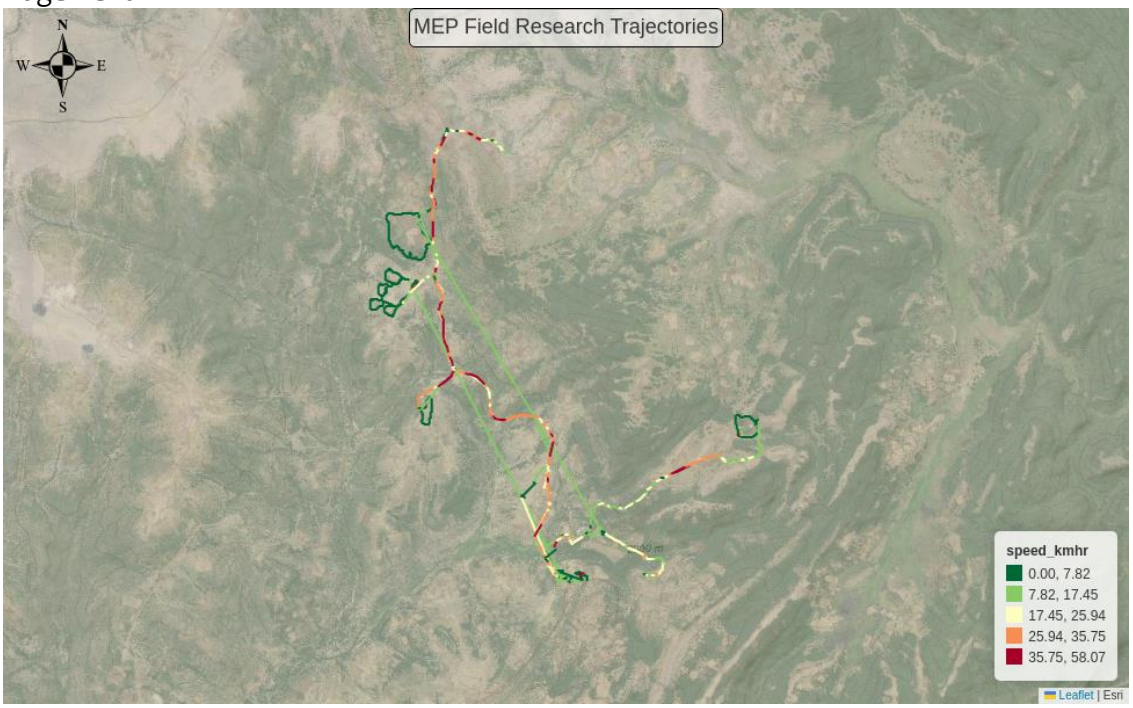
MEP's Data and Reporting Manager Francis Odero also attended the Ecoscope User conference in June. Together with Dr. Jake Wall, they presented a comprehensive overview of the application's historical development, achievement milestones, current advancements, and plans. Key technological developments include AI models designed to classify and predict behavioral changes over time, enhancing real-time decision-making. The EarthRanger web application also features 3D visualization, animations, and time series sky changes. Additionally, the Ecoscope platform has introduced new features such as orchestration to automate results generation using Airflow, an AI-driven task scheduling platform. Ecoscope's user-friendly interface is designed for visualizing and generating reports, providing reliable insights on tracks and their metadata. Other critical areas discussed included conservation data management, data-driven decision-making, Big Data's three Vs (velocity, volume, and variety), acoustic monitoring, GMMF indicators, and functional, structural, and fitness systems. Ecoscope's enhancements are tailored for rangers, security and operations teams, scientists, and support partners ensuring a comprehensive approach to conservation and resource management.



Movements of MEP's one field assistant in June. 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 62.96 Km and recorded 22.017 km of fences and 0 LCC points in June.

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MEP Co-Existence Farm
General Update

The month of June started on a high note, we celebrated the Word Environmental Day at Enkipai Primary School thanks to support from Kampur Travel Diaries, where we planted 200 trees and set up our second conservation school kitchen garden. The students and the teachers were very excited and worked as they looked forward to eating the fruits of their labor in the coming months.

In the women's kitchen garden training series, we trained a total of 79 women in two villages, Ormeoshi and Ntulele villages in June, for the first time two men joined the training at Ntulele village. After setting up a kitchen garden at the nearby school Enkipai Primary the ladies showed lots of gratitude to MEP through bringing development to their doorstep and empowering them and their children. One lady who received seedlings from Kirok Village training, a month prior testified that today she is feeding her family and selling the surplus vegetables, she encouraged the other women that the training they are receiving is very important and should apply when they get to their homes. We received the long-waited seedlings, three out of five seedlings were received in the month of June, the three crops, chili, tea tree, and rosemary have already been planted and were heavily watered for the last two weeks to ensure proper germination and success, we are hoping to get the rest of the seedlings in the coming month to start proper data recording and management.

The economic study set off and was completed with the help of a master's student India Tylor, who will be taking the study as her thesis, we were able to interview a total of 78 participants including, 11 maize farmers from Transmara, 37 unpalatable crops farmers (Tea tree, rosemary, chili, citriodora, and lavender), 16 Processors, and 14 Retailers companies. The information gathered will help MEP understand the economic viability of the non-palatable crops compared to maize and help us educate the farmers and further understand coexistence.

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Figure 1,2, and 3: Chili, Rosemary, and Tea tree recently planted at the farm.

Climate Report

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

No rainfall was recorded in the month of June

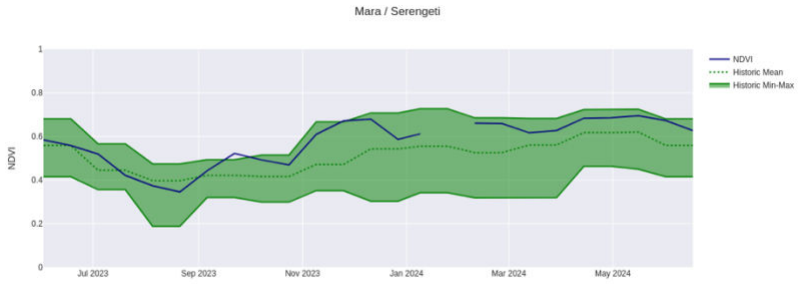
Tracking Manager Report

Collared elephants David, Kiambi and Tino all monitored by MEP rangers in the month of June.

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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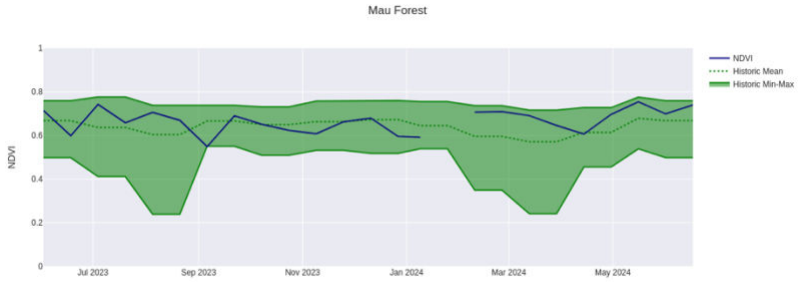
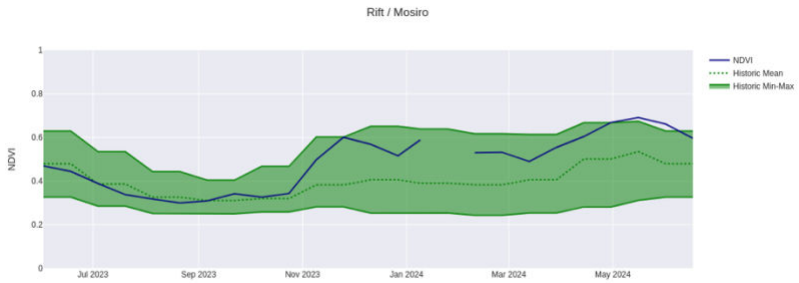
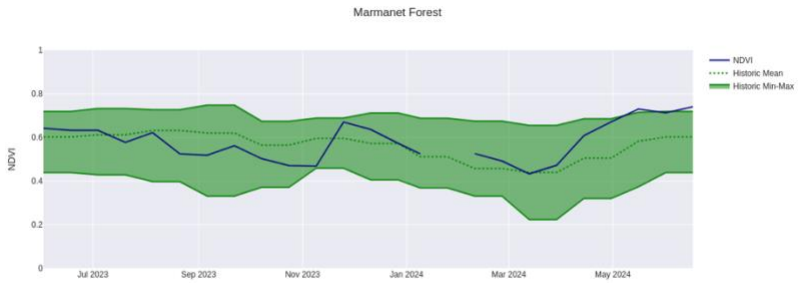


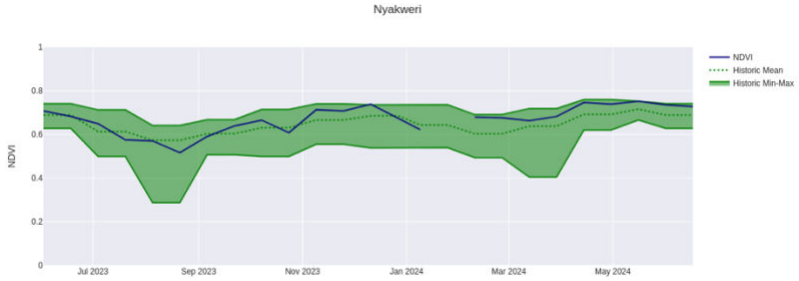
Rift Valley / Mosiro



Marmanet Forest



Nyakweri Forest



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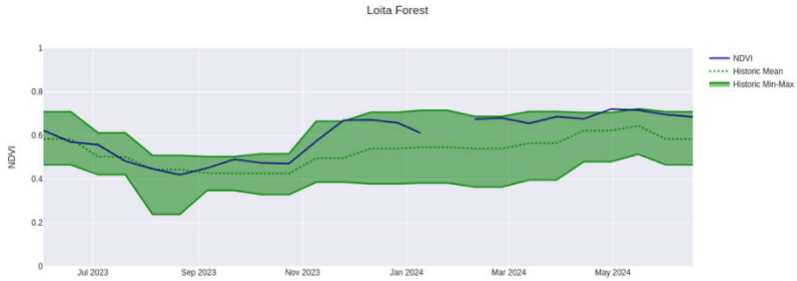
Loita Forest



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