MEP November 2024 Report

The MEP 'Golf' ranger team captured a herd of elephants catching some 'zzzzz' with their drone inside Nyakweri Forest.

GENERAL

On November 23, the 2024 UltraMARAthon took place with 325 runners joining the race for conservation and communities. MEP rangers claimed the relay first prize and our female team made their debut with a respectable time of 5 hours. Beyond competing, MEP helped with safety from the air and on the ground. An elephant sized thank you to all the participants, sponsors and volunteers that made this another successful race year. In its 5th year now, the UltraMARAthon, supports MEP's efforts in securing a future for elephants. So far, MEP has used the funds to equip our rangers with the latest skills, purchase of new uniforms, modern equipment, healthcare and training women in sustainable agricultural practices at the MEP coexistence farm project.

"We are proud to represent MEP as the first female ranger team to compete in the marathon." *Participant & Corporal MEP 'Bravo' ranger Team Purity Masuntu*

The third cohort comprising 20 rangers representing 18 conservancies or conservation organizations successfully completed their training at the MEP HQ in November. Thanks to the Basecamp Explorer Foundation – Kenya, MEP received support to enhance the skillsets of wildlife rangers throughout the Masai Mara and so far, we have trained 75 rangers across Mara conservancies. The free training covers a variety of disciplines and with the goal of transferring new skills to rangers that they can then transfer to their broader team.

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SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

On November 11, while on a routine patrol, the MEP 'mobile' ranger team spotted a bull elephant with an arrow wound in need of treatment. They joined Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Vet Dr. Njoroge with the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mobile Vet Unit and raced against the fading daylight to treat him. It was a team effort, but his treatment was successful, and he was on his way to recover during a hopefully quiet evening.

Also, in November, MEP rangers undertook a snake bites and handling training. Overseen by East African Reptiles-Taylor Ashe Antivenom Foundation, the training covered crucial snake related first aid practices and gave snake identification and removal tips. With 33 venomous snake species among Kenya's 140 types, the training rangers received is vital for staying safe in the field.

"Awareness saves lives. By learning to identify venomous and non-venomous snakes, MEP rangers protect themselves and the environment they serve. Knowledge is our first line of defense in the wild." *MEP Ranger Felix Yiaile*

On November 13, the MEP Coexistence team partnered with Women in the Wild and MEP rangers to officially launch the new MEP tree nursery. The team prepared seedling bags before visiting a nearby forest to collect seedlings from six different tree species. Once the seedlings have matured, they will be distributed to communities to provide solutions to restore important habitat in a sustainable way.

In late November, the MEP's 'Foxtrot' ranger team responded to a critical report from Ol Chorro Conservancy about a young female elephant injured by a spear. For two days, our team closely monitored her condition before calling in KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge from the SWT Mobile Vet Unit for treatment. Thanks to the combined efforts of our rangers, the MEP helicopter, and our partners, the elephant received care for her leg wound and is now on the path to recovery.

MEP rangers were also very busy in November responding to conflict, removing snares targeting

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bushmeat, and arresting habitat destruction suspects. Overall, in November, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested three ivory suspects and three habitat destruction suspects. They confiscated 32.3 kg of ivory and 4 kg of bushmeat and removed 49 snares. They also confiscated 521 posts, destroyed four charcoal kilns, and mitigated 18 conflict incidents. *In* November, MEP rangers covered a distance of 1,010 km on foot and 4,354.02 km in a vehicle in the GME

In November, MEP rangers participated in the inaugural two-day mental health awareness training, covering key topics such as mental health vs. mental illness, stress management, self-care strategies, and how to seek or provide support. The training aimed to reduce stigma, encourage open discussions, and promote well-being among staff. Many participants, new to mental health education, shared positive feedback and expressed interest in more such sessions. Key recommendations included integrating mental wellness training, counseling, and topics like resilience, work-life balance, trauma support, and team building into MEP's annual calendar. By prioritizing mental health, MEP is fostering a resilient, supportive, and mentally aware team ready to tackle conservation's unique challenges.

On November 14, MEP alongside KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge deployed a satellite collar on Edwin to allow MEP and the Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI) to track him 24/7 to increase his protection and gain a better understanding of his crop raiding behavior. Edwin was the first elephant to be recorded in our database of known individuals called ElephantBook. He was first sighted in February 2021 and is known for his massive tusks which has made him popular amongst locals and visitors alike.

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HELICOPTER

Apart from assisting our partners in the air with elephant treatments and collaring operations, the MEP helicopter remained a vital tool throughout the month of November helping to respond to the high number of human-elephant conflict incidents reported within the community areas surrounding the Masai Mara landscape.

DRONES FOR CONSERVATION
Special Projects Manager's Update

MEP drone pilots were actively engaged throughout November, utilizing drone technology to mitigate human-elephant conflict (HEC), monitor forests, and ensure the safety of elephants in the region. The 'Golf' team responded promptly to multiple HEC incidents in the Transmara region. Using drones, they successfully pushed elephants away from farms including collared elephant Fitz, minimizing crop damage and reducing conflict with local communities. The team collaborated closely with KWS in the area to push the herd back to Nyakweri.

The 'Alpha' team focused on dual objectives: monitoring the Mau Forest and addressing HEC. They conducted forest patrols to detect and prevent any illegal activities in the Mau. The 'Foxtrot' team played a critical role in responding to HEC incidents pushing elephants away from fenced community farms while the mobile team played an active role pushing elephants out of fences and monitored collared elephants Kiambi and Matali. The Loita team focused on forest monitoring and conservation efforts. They conducted extensive surveillance to detect illegal logging and encroachments. Drones continue to be an effective tool in our toolbox enabling MEP rangers to actively respond to the ever-increasing conflict in the ecosystem.

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COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Two members of the MEP herd were delighted to join Children in the Wilderness (CITW) for a kid's camp at Governors' Camp early November. Thirty students from Mara Rianda Primary School participated in two days of activities all centered around conservation. Joined by the Mara Predator Conservation Programme and Kenya Bird of Prey Trust, MEP highlighted the importance of species protection by challenging kids to get to know the wildlife they share a home with.

"We are nurturing the future generation of conservation leaders by taking students from grade six, seven, and eight and turning them into passionate young conservationists and change makers in their communities." *CITW Community Coordinator Sharon Muthoni*

MEP's Grants Manager Meshack Gaga participated in the 30th East Africa Resource Mobilization Workshop in late November. The annual event brought together NGOs, fundraising professionals, donors, and corporate stakeholders to explore emerging trends, challenges, and strategies in resource mobilization. The workshop was a valuable learning experience, and it equipped MEP with innovative approaches to secure sustainable funding and partnerships for impactful conservation initiatives.

Mara Elephant Project Trust in Kenya received $20,000 in donations in November. Thank you to Bush & Beyond Limited for their continued support. Mara Elephant Project USA received $322,104.23 in support of MEP's efforts. Thank you to William Boyle, Michael Reid, Paula Menne Quinn, Xiaohing Zhao, Cecelia Williams, Helen Andres, Rex Chamberlain, Bruce Mitteldorf, the estate of Surely Rawlings, Gail Gallerani, Carol Rishel, Nancy Spiegel, Jane Mclagan, Glenn Ellwood Cook, Lorne & Fran Duthie, Cherokee Shearer Foundation, The Coville-Triest Family Foundation, Blue Moon Giving Fund, James, Robin & Kara Leckinger, Sharon Miles, Ian Scofield, Linda Mayer, Sue Dobie, Burton Eno, Suzanne Knecht, Joann Ferguson, Richard Friedberg, Rita Cone, Andrea Gruber, Andrew Adams, Debra Stonecipher, Peter Abbrecht, Elise Kline, Patricia Smith, Margaret Goodman, and Panna Doshi for your support.

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RESEARCH & CONSERVATION
Deputy Director's Update

In November, the department continued to work with conservancies in the landscape as part of the USAID/MMWCA Conservation of Maasai Mara Landscape (CMML) project. The team visited Mara Siana, Mara Ripoi, Nashulai, and Olchoro conservancies. These visits facilitated evaluations of ongoing EarthRanger application setups, configuration processes, and planning for upcoming activities.

The team set up EarthRanger instances for six conservancies, configured their systems, and had their staff trained on wildlife monitoring and data collection. The team also assisted in the collaring of "Edwin," an elephant in Mara North Conservancy, further cementing our efforts to monitor elephant movements and mitigate human-wildlife conflicts proactively. Looking ahead, the team is focused on advancing EarthRanger implementations, executing aerial surveys, fostering research collaborations, and enhancing community engagement to drive conservation outcomes across.

Long Term Monitoring (LTM) Team

During the month of November, the team conducted six sightings of 48 elephants and 12 Distance Surveys. The sightings included two cow/calf sightings and four bachelor herd sightings. The first two sightings involved 13 cows, 18 sub-adults, and 10 calves. The four bachelor herds included eight bulls, including collared bulls Edwin, Kevin, and Fred. The team also observed two new calves and two new female elephants. However, it was noted there was a decline in the elephant population in the Mara Triangle, which may have been influenced by the presence of wildebeests. The team assisted with three treatments: one sub-adult, Cow 13, and Bull 141. Additionally, the team participated in the collaring of two bulls, Edwin and Kevin, who are already listed in the ElephantBook as individual 1 and Individual 948 respectively.

Also, in November, the team hosted five members of the O'Laughlin family for the MEP LTM experience. They also assisted in treating three individuals; two of them are identified in ElephantBook, individuals 13 and 141 respectively. Lastly, the team underwent occupational first aid and mental health training. The trainings equipped them with basic knowledge of handling emergencies while in the field and tackling mental health issues, especially those pertaining to work.

A member of the LTM team showcasing MEP's ElephantBook database.

Data and Reporting Team

The distance counts activity was conducted in three conservancies: Enarau, Pardamat, and Naboisho. A number of transects were covered during the exercise, which took place from the 4th to the 15th. Currently, the collected data is undergoing a thorough cleaning process to ensure accuracy and reliability for subsequent analysis.

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On November 14, MEP's Data and Reporting Manager attended the 3rd edition of the Global Data Science & Artificial Intelligence Summit at Strathmore University whose theme was Unlocking the power of big data and AI to shape the future of conservation through innovation. Visionaries and experts from various fields took on various panels and topics including predicting and mitigating climate change impacts, leveraging big data to track carbon emission reductions and offsets, and enabling transparent carbon credit systems to revolutionize sustainable agriculture.

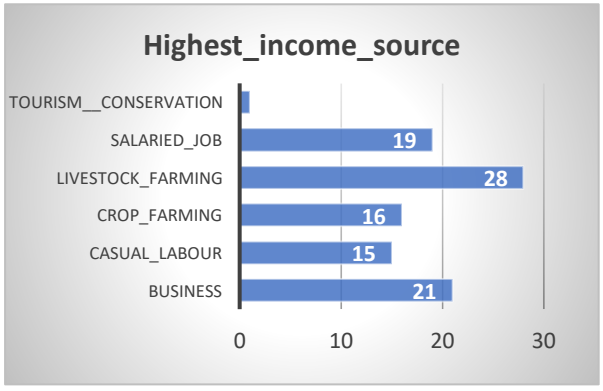
"Let's focus on creating models and applications that not only incorporate AI capabilities but also address critical challenges in our ecosystem. At the Mara Elephant Project, we adopt a data-driven decision-making approach to mitigate habitat loss in the Greater Mara Ecosystem. " *MEP Data & Reporting Manager Francis Odero*

MEP Co-Existence Farm

General Update

The month of November brought significant rainfall towards the end, beneficial for both our operations and local ecosystems. Our team actively participated in various training sessions organized by the MEP Human Resources office, including Mental Health, First Aid, Hostile Environment Awareness, Snake Handling, and HR for non-HR personnel. We celebrated National Tree Growing Day by partnering with Women in the Wild and a local organization in the Emarti area. This collaboration involved training sessions on nursery management and the launch of our own tree seedling nursery. The seedlings will be distributed to communities and schools to enhance habitat protection and community awareness in 2025.

The MEP Education Program is poised for expansion in 2025. A dedicated team is currently planning activities to foster the next generation of conservationists, empower communities, and raise awareness about wildlife conservation within our key operational areas. Our farm yielded a successful harvest of 12 kg of chili peppers. Other crops, including lavender, rosemary, tea tree, and citriodora, are thriving post-rainfall. Notably, zero crop raiding incidents were observed, even with hippopotamus activity in close proximity to the plots.



The social survey results helped us understand the socio-economic status of the community we are working with. While the community grows crops, they are mainly livestock keepers and herders. A majority of the interviewed population are youthful, making our work easier as they understand the different dynamics of conservation and coexistence due to their higher literacy levels. Through the survey, it was determined that elephants only presented 13% of wildlife

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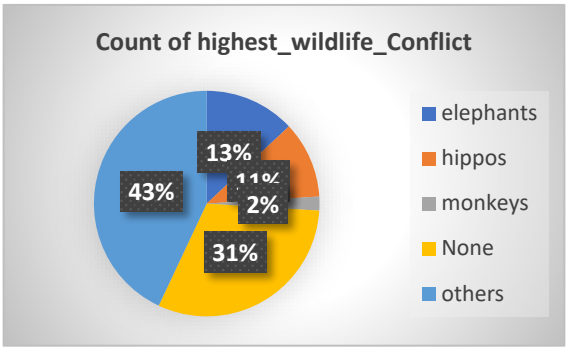
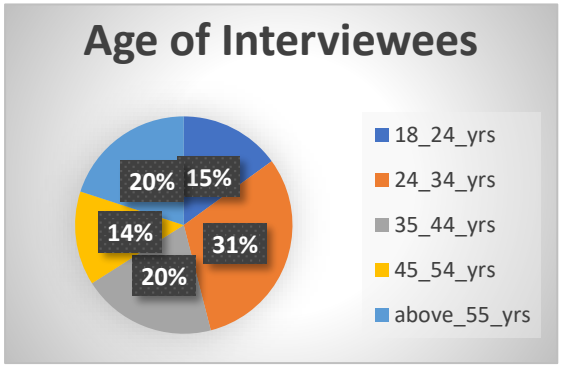
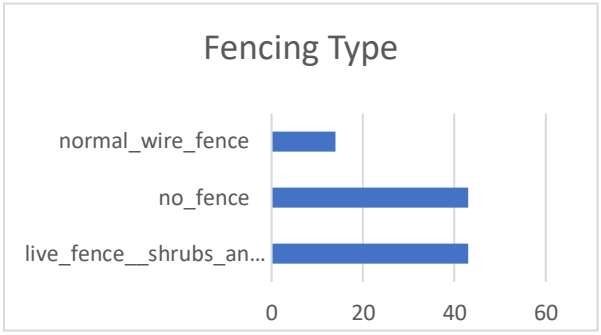
conflicts while other animals were the most dominant. The community members are not very keen on fencing as over 80% of them are either using shrubs for fencing or have not fenced their lands at all, making wildlife raiding easy, especially for elephants.







Climate Report

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

Date	Rain gauge 2 (200m2)
2024_11_14	4
2024_11_21	29
2024_11_22	19
2024_11_23	15
2024_11_24	25
2024_11_26	4
2024_11_29	35
2024_11_30	15

Collared elephants Kiambi, Fred, Matali and Fitz sighted by MEP rangers in the month of November.

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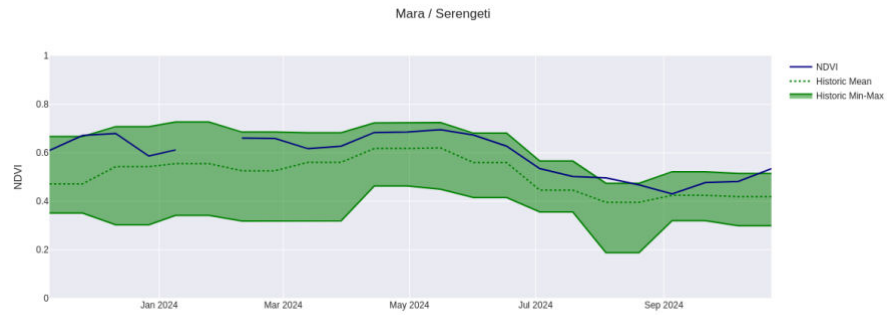
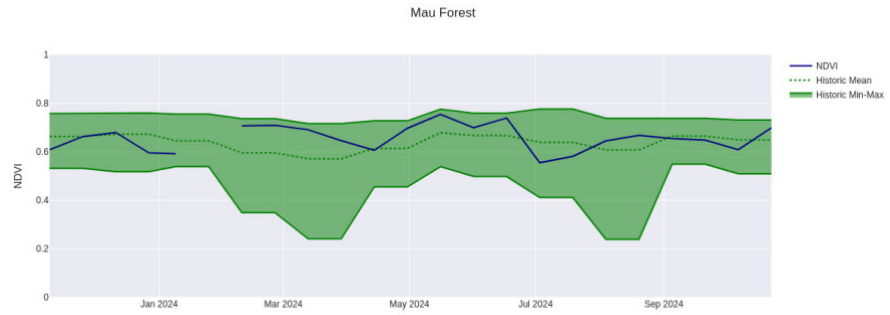
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

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.

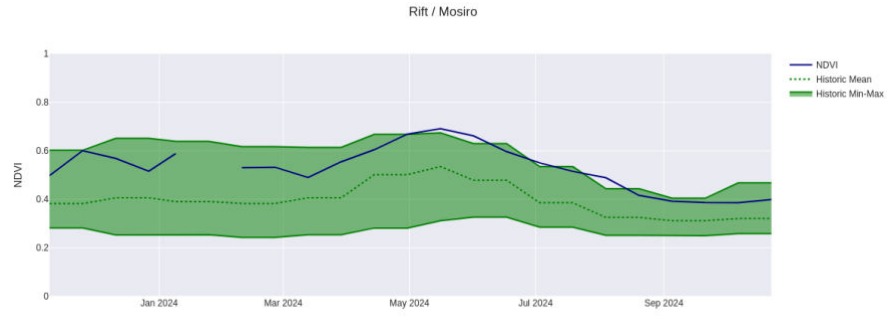
Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



Mau Forest



Rift Valley / Mosiro



Marmanet Forest

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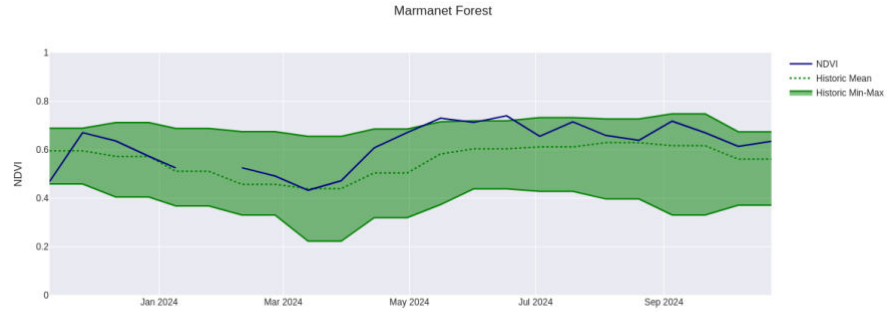
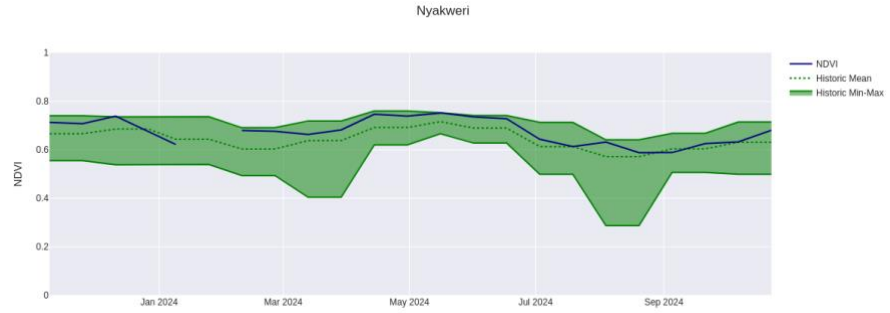
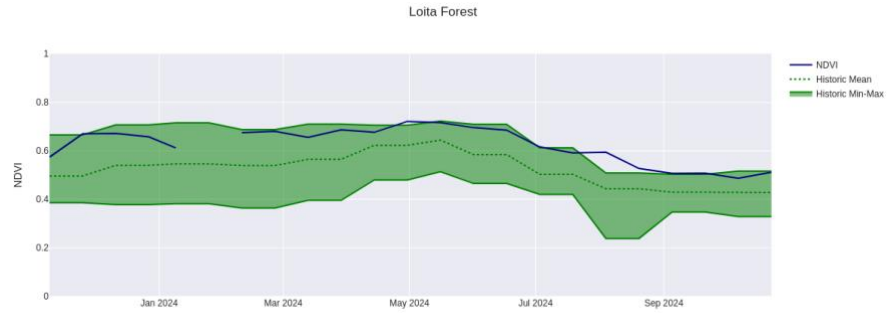


Nyakweri Forest



Loita Forest



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