MEP February 2025 Report

Individual 139 among a herd of elephants captured grazing peacefully at the MEP HQ in February.

GENERAL

February 2025 was an eventful month, as the 4th cohort of rangers participated in the Training of Trainers (ToT) program and successfully completed their three weeks of training at the Mara Elephant Project (MEP) Ranger Education Campus. Twenty-eight (28) rangers representing 22 conservancies across the Mara landscape undertook both theory and practical lessons aimed at enhancing their skillsets in their daily operations.

This training, supported by the Basecamp Explorer Foundation–Kenya, saw the rangers undergo various tactical and life skills training. These rangers join their fellow 90 Mara rangers already trained to lead on the frontlines of conservation, elevating the overall level of skills for Mara rangers.

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SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

During a coordinated joint operation with Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) rangers, MEP rangers successfully ambushed and seized 1,500 illegally logged red cedar posts concealed in a thicket.

The rangers were responding based on intelligence from informants in Osarara, Naikara Ward. This discovery is part of a troubling trend—throughout 2024, MEP rangers, working alongside government partners, seized nearly 7,500 illegally harvested posts, averaging more than 20 per day. These efforts are a crucial deterrent against deforestation, which poses a direct threat to the Greater Mara Ecosystem and the humans and wildlife that depend on it.

While on routine patrol in Ol Kinyei Conservancy, MEP rangers observed an injured female elephant with a young calf by her side. They called in KWS Vet Dr. Michael Njoroge from the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mobile Vet Unit and together with Ol Kinyei Conservancy rangers, they assisted with the treatment. Ground crews kept the calf away while the team worked on treating her spear wound. Once treated, the team watched as she was reunited with her calf. A testament enough for our continued collaborative efforts to protect elephants, MEP rangers continue to monitor her during their daily patrols to ensure a full recovery.

Also, in February, MEP rangers, in collaboration with KWS Vet Dr. Michael Njoroge from the SWT Mara Mobile Vet Unit, responded to two critical cases of elephant injuries caused by arrows. A bull elephant and a sub-adult were successfully treated, with a promising prognosis for both. MEP rangers will continue to monitor them closely to ensure a full recovery.

The Elephant Conservation Organization (ECO) officially launched a vet unit in partnership with the Tanzania National Parks Authority (TANAPA) and Six Rivers Africa in Tanzania near Mkomazi National Park. Replicating the MEP Method into ecologically significant landscapes which contribute to the protection of elephants and their habitats is a key objective for the organization, and MEP is doing this in Tanzania by supporting ECO's efforts to treat injured wildlife.

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Members of the ECO team were invited to attend the official launch on February 18 alongside partners all presided over by District Commissioner Kasilda Mgeni. The event was a great show of collaboration and enthusiasm for the equipment, technology and training being provided to support the vet unit, which will play a crucial role in safeguarding Tanzania's wildlife and supporting TANAPA's conservation efforts.

A fire broke out at a local shopping center near MEP HQ in February. The fully trained MEP rangers rapidly responded to administer first aid and fight the fire. After some time, the fire was successfully extinguished, but more than 30 businesses were destroyed affecting an estimated 200 people's livelihoods. Our rangers jumped in to help the business owners salvage their property and start the slow clean up and re-building process. While wildlife might be in our mission, it's not our entire focus.

Overall, in February, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested 16 habitat destruction suspects and removed 114 snares. They also confiscated 120 pieces of timber, 4,860 posts, and nine trees and destroyed 20 charcoal kilns and 27 charcoal sacks and mitigated 18 human-elephant conflict incidents. In February, MEP rangers covered a distance 1,887.1 km on foot and 12,158 km in their vehicle in the GME.

HELICOPTER

The MEP helicopter remains a valuable tool during collaring operations. In February, a female elephant in a herd of 120 was identified in the Mosiro area as an ideal collaring candidate based on the levels of human-elephant conflict in the area. In response, on February 14, KWS, Wildlife Research and Training Institute (WRTI) and MEP deployed the helicopter alongside KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge and successfully collared the new female, aptly named Roho, which is Swahili for 'heart'. Her real-time movement data will enable MEP rangers and partners to

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develop more impactful HEC mitigation efforts by gaining a better understanding of how the mega-herd is using this complex space.

DRONES FOR CONSERVATION
Special Projects Manager's Update

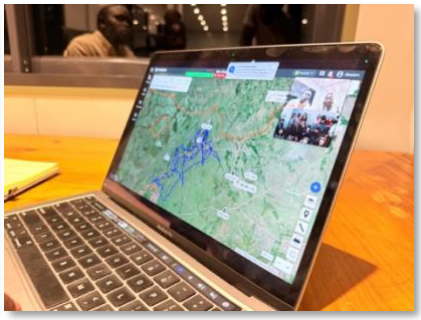
The "Golf" ranger team herding Fitz away from fences in Nyakweri.

In February, MEP drone pilots responded to escalating human-elephant conflict incidents and unfortunately tensions were high as three people were reportedly killed by elephants. The MEP rapid response ranger team responded to seven incidents of elephants breaking electric fences in community farms near Aitong. Additionally, they monitored a recently treated elephant in Mara North until its recovery.

The "Golf" ranger team in February focused their drone patrols in the Partakila and Punsaki areas where cases of HEC were rampant. The team also deployed their drone to assist KWS and Oloisukut Conservancy rangers to locate a carcass of a lion that had been poisoned in the area. On a positive note, the "Bravo", "Echo" and "Kilo" ranger teams encountered fewer HEC incidents in February. Their primary focus shifted to monitoring the Loita Forest for signs of habitat destruction, particularly illegal logging and charcoal production. The use of drones has been instrumental in surveying areas that are difficult to access on foot, providing the team with crucial insights into the state of the forest and allowing for early detection of potential threats.

Both the "Alpha" and "Charlie" ranger teams in the Mau Forest focused their efforts on monitoring the forest and responding to move elephants out of bordering maize and tea farms. The "Lima" team in Mosiro were busy conducting aerial monitoring along the Rift Valley and visiting the collared elephants nearby. The team has also been helping children get to school by monitoring the herd of elephants along their school path. They also moved a herd of around 100 elephants out of a settlement.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING



In February, MEP launched the new Valentine's Day exclusive merchandise to support our efforts. MEP also released the fourth quarter 2024 Newsletter which you can find here. In February, MEP hosted its first virtual classroom experience and connected with 32 students from Texas, USA, engaging them in MEP's elephant conservation efforts. The team, Dibblex Lesalon and Sylvia Ondabu interacted with the children

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and answered their questions during the session. It was a great way to connect young minds with conservationists to encourage stewardship of our planet. Watch how the first session unfolded here and sign up for your very own session today.

MEP Ambassador Jeffrey Wu taking photographs with MEP team.

MEP also welcomed a visit from renowned wildlife photographer Jeffry Wu, a MEP ambassador, who joined MEP in the Mara to capture our drone pilots in action. Through photography, Jeffrey demonstrates his passion for wildlife conservation.

In February, Mara Elephant Project Trust in Kenya received $250,651 in donations. Key donors were Robert Muthomi, Toni Hollencamp, and the East African Experience Company. Mara Elephant Project USA received $168,033.65 in support of MEP's conservation efforts. Thank you to key donors Deborah Grove, Ilse Erickson, Paul Kantor, Peter Van Bemmel, Bonnie Grizzard, Ginni Keith, Darwin Stuart, Ellen Knell, Sharon Lee Butcher, Elizabeth Beamon, Wendy Cerva, James Kiing, Elizabeth Peyton, Patricia McBryde, Marilyn Soule, Carol Nailen, Beth Ryan, Richard Leirer, Janice Juraska, John and Marie Oswald, Michael Johnson, Marianna Mancini, Joseph Davison, Angama Mara, Rita Cone, Mary Ann Evans, Shannon Filsinger, Richard Friedberg, Alfrieda Gabiou, Kenneth Garr, Carolyn Hanson, Lilian Kraemer, Mariana Laufer, Elizabeth Parker, Rosemary Rhinehardt, Deryl Santousuosso, Richard Schechter, Peter Sherrod and Frances Stevenson for your support.

COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

On February 11, MEP's Community Engagement & Outreach Coordinator Dibblex Lesalon was invited to House in the Wild to share about MEP's elephant conservation activities to a group of students from Pembroke House School. The students' knowledge of elephants and their behavior was mesmerising as they asked and answered questions in a thoughtful way. MEP is proud to host such sessions on conservation education, especially for the younger generation.

MEP hosted four members from Aero Smart Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) at our headquarters in February. During the visit, they conducted exclusive live demonstrations of the DJI Matrice 4T and Matrice 4E. As thought leaders in using drone technology for conservation, MEP rangers were handed a comprehensive illustration of the full features and capabilities of this drone including powerful zoom, AI-powered object tracking, advanced flight route planning, an ultra-powerful speaker for clear communication and thermal imaging ideal for human-elephant conflict mitigation, elephant monitoring and search and rescue operations.

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MEP rangers and Aero Smart UAV team from Dubai at MEP HQ providing a drone showcase on the new DJI Mavic Matrice 4 series.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Deputy Director's Update

In February, the Deputy Director of Research & Conservation (DDRC) Peter Lokitela continued to strengthen broader stakeholder relations and involvement. He led meaningful discussions with Conservation International and One Mara Carbon. On February 14, Peter joined MEP's Community Engagement and Outreach Coordinator for a joint presentation to guests at Angama Mara.

Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) Team

In February, the LTM team recorded a total of 23 elephant sightings, comprising 16 bulls, 80 cows, 73 sub-adults, and 15 calves. Additionally, the team enrolled three new individuals into the ElephantBook database, including a collared subject, IRI 2023 6554, a transboundary elephant sighted in Olderkesi Conservancy.

The team conducted a 10-day camping expedition in Olderkesi Conservancy, with visits to surrounding areas, including the Masai Mara National Reserve (MMNR); the Sand River area (bordering Serengeti National Park and the Loliondo community in Tanzania). The team observed aggression among elephants in the region, which they speculated stems from high levels of human-wildlife conflict, particularly due to maize farming activities encroaching on elephant habitats. Notably, the team

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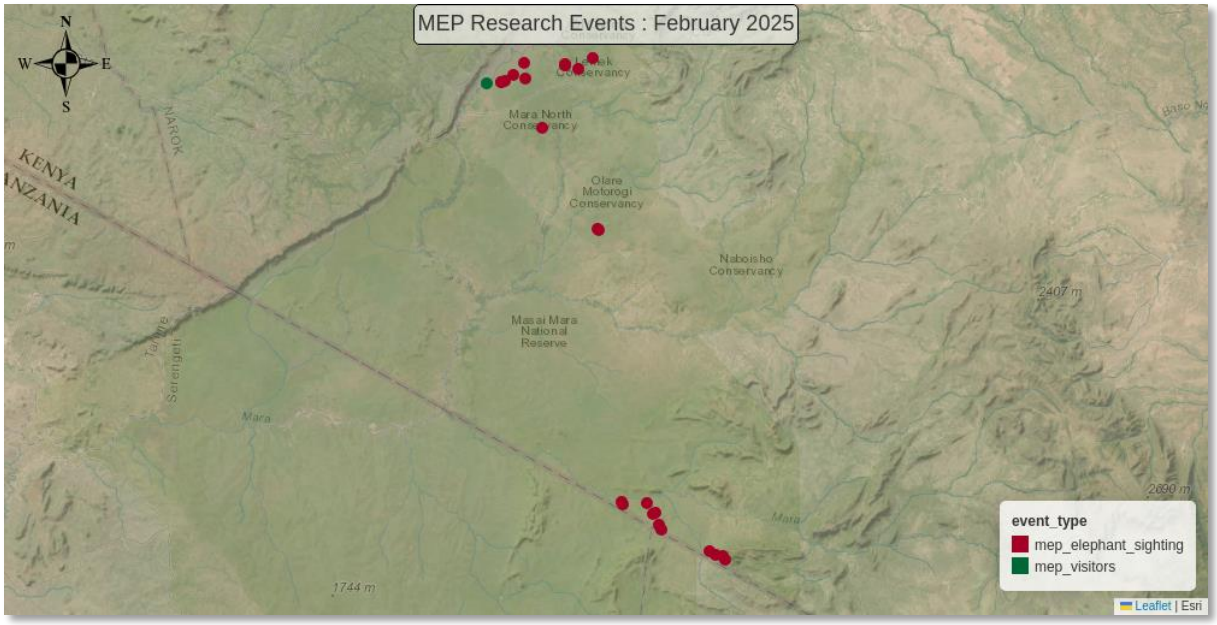
sighted a unique cow elephant with a distinctive half-trunk feature. Fostering collaboration with WRTI, the team carried out the second dung sampling activity in February. A total of 20 samples were collected, 10 from elephants and 10 from cattle, within neighboring conservancies. This activity contributes to ongoing research aimed at understanding ecosystem dynamics and human- wildlife interactions.



The Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) team sighting events in the month of February.

Data and Reporting Team

A specialized training session on EarthRanger was conducted for the Six Rivers Africa and African People & Wildlife teams in February to enhance their ability to use the system for daily operations. The training included data entry, incident reporting, and advanced analytics to improve decision-making for wildlife protection. The team was guided through real-world scenarios to ensure a practical understanding and application of the platform. By the end of the training, participants had gained the necessary skills to integrate EarthRanger into their conservation workflow, strengthening cross-border monitoring efforts in the Mkomazi area in Tanzania.

The LTM team, on their part, underwent training on collaring to build their expertise in tracking and data collection for conservation. The training focused on proper collar deployment techniques, data retrieval processes, and troubleshooting common technical issues. Practical sessions included hands-on experience with collaring equipment and simulations of emergency response situations. This training ensured that the team was well-prepared to handle collaring operations efficiently, contributing to long-term data collection for elephant movement studies.

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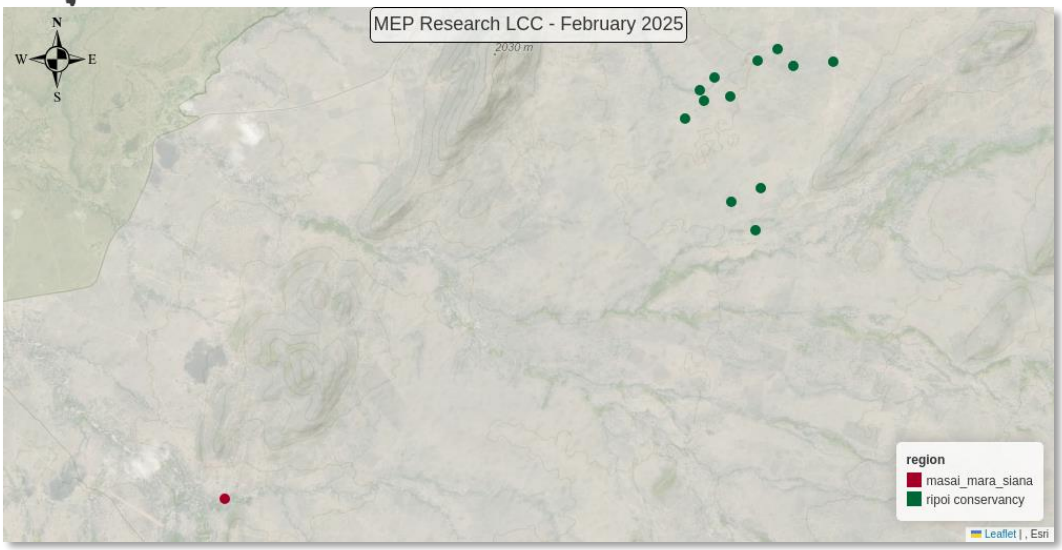
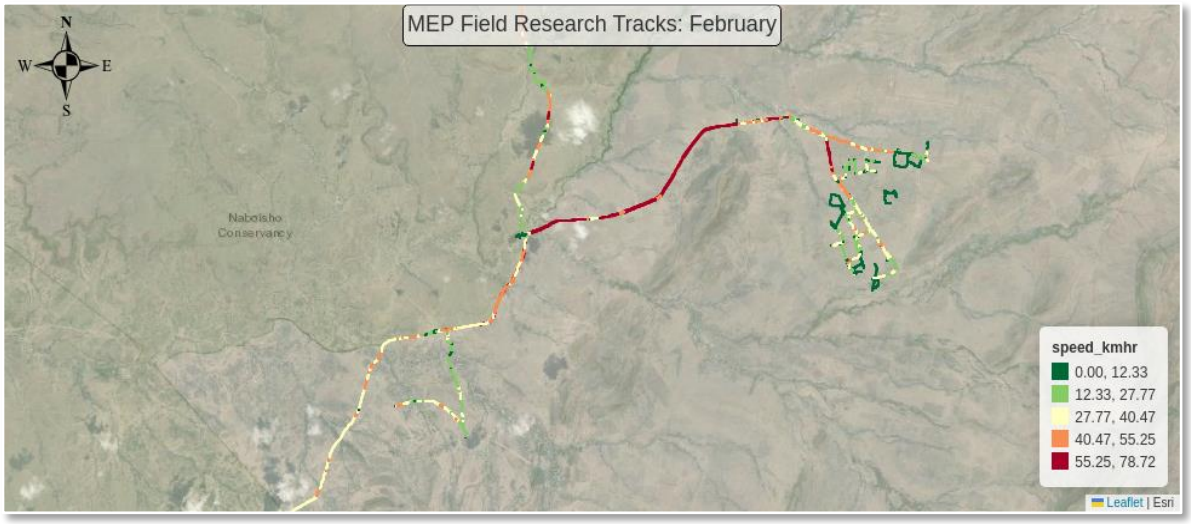


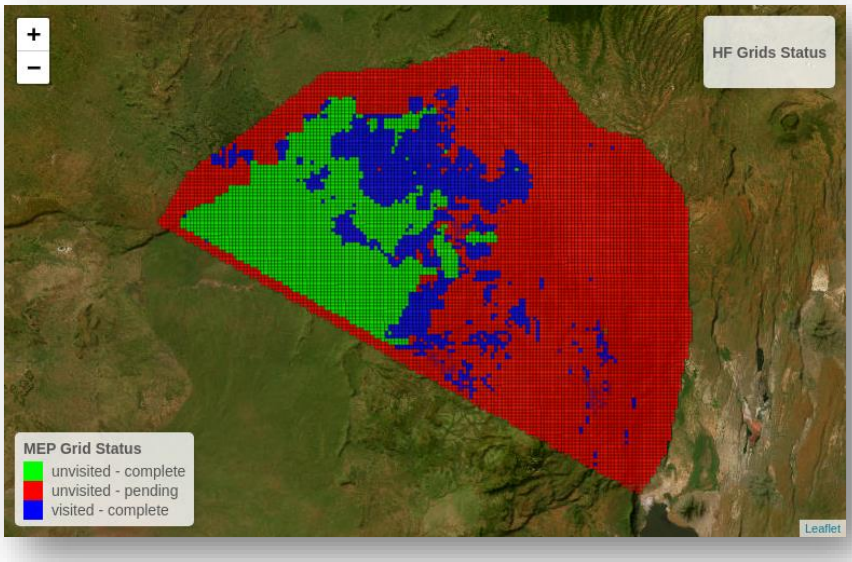
LCC points were mapped throughout the month across two conservancies (Mara Siana & Mara Ripoi).



Movements of MEP's one field assistant in February. Our field assistant is working on mapping fences, roads, and landcover ground-truthing points using motorbikes and our TerraChart app. He covered a total of 2500 km and recorded 22.75 km of fences and 13 LCC points in February.

Geospatial Mapping

In February, twenty grids were visited and completed, and Field Assistant Milton Kiok marked a significant number of roads and physical features. 22.75 km of fences and 13 LCC points were also mapped.



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MEP Co-Existence Farm

General Update

Despite a dry February, the Coexistence Farm team made significant progress. The team began by clearing weeds which will support the growth stimulated by the previous month's rainfall. The team harvested 980 kg of rosemary and delivered it to the Kutoka Ardhini factory, following a site visit by the company's Mara Region Agronomist Vincent Biwott, who also informed the team that the demo farm rosemary was well maintained and has registered the highest oil extraction which is testament to MEP efforts towards human-elephant coexistence strategies. The team received Julian Easton, the CEO of Mara Hills Conservancies, accompanied by Deputy Director Peter Lokitela and Community Engagement and Outreach Coordinator Dibblex Lesalon. They visited the farm and are working out a collaboration where the MEP Coexistence Project will empower women from the conservancies through coexistence approaches.

The MEP education program main supporters, Kamal Shah and Purvi Shah from Kampur Travel Diaries visited the projects of Emarti and Enkipaai primary schools, where kitchen gardens and trees were put planted as part of education program, they were accompanied by Jane Nashipae, the head of Women in the Wild who we have worked alongside in the school programs. They were impressed and are looking forward to working with MEP in 2025.

Also, in February, the team received 10,000 planting bags for the tree nursery bed, bolstering MEP's propagation capacity. The farm team visited Kileleoni Hills and Lemek Conservancy to collect seedlings that will be planted in the tree nursery and distributed in schools and communities. A meeting was held for the out-grower's farmers on the farm to share knowledge and best practices. The 2025 school conservation education program kicked off with a visit to six schools in the Mara and Transmara Clusters. During the visit, a total of 120 trees were planted in all the schools. A total of 265 students in the six schools undertook an assessment test. Results from these tests showed that the importance of trees should be emphasized since a high number of students indicated that they did not find a problem in cutting trees for charcoal and timber.

Climate Report

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MEP's Co-Existence Farm Rainfall Recording February 2025

date	Rain gauge [200m2]
01-02-2025	17
04-02-2025	11

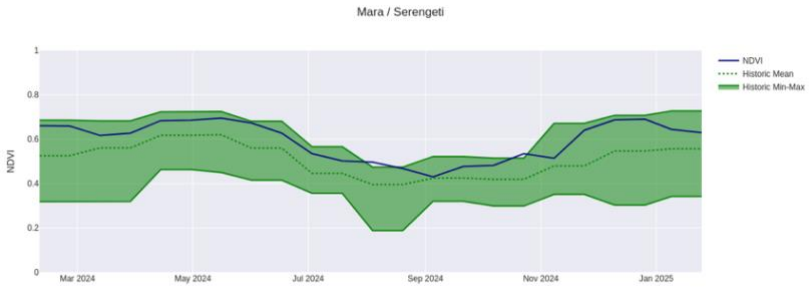
Tracking Manager Report

Collared elephants; Edwin, Lempiris and Maxine all monitored by MEP rangers in the month of February.

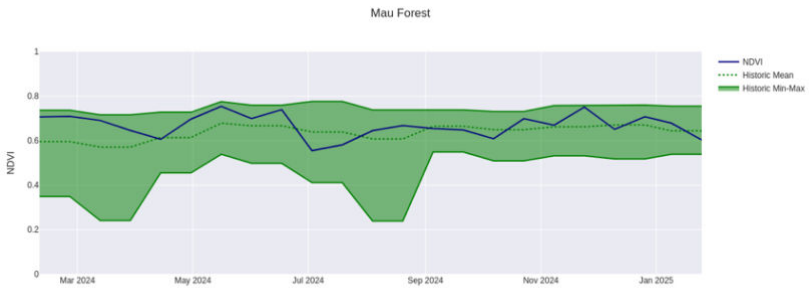
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

The 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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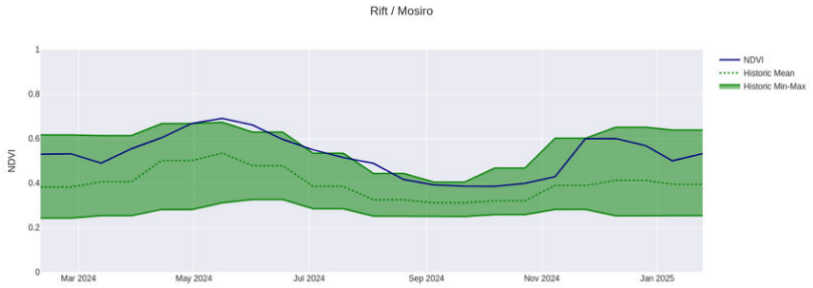
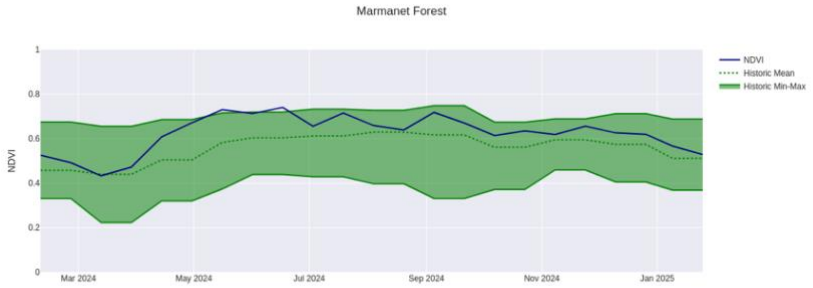
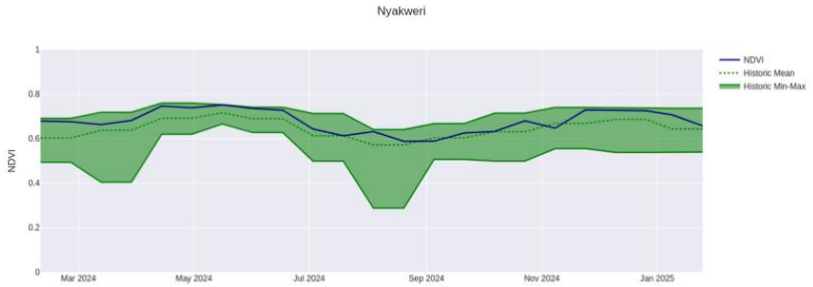
Rift Valley / Mosiro



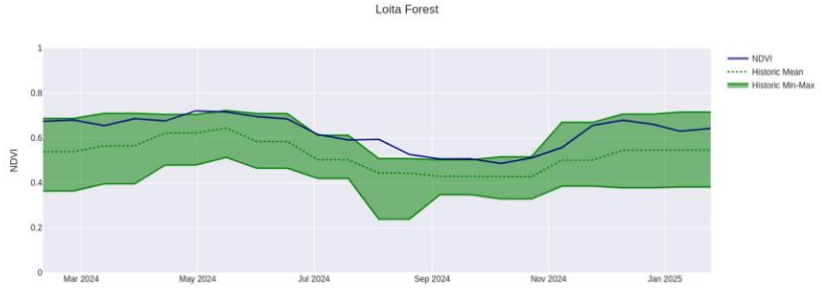
Marmanet Forest



Nyakweri Forest



Loita Forest



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