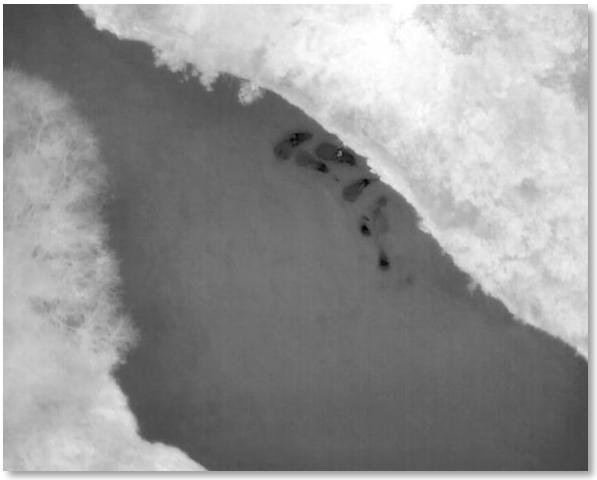
MEP May 2025 Report



A herd of nine elephants crossing the Mara River at night captured by MEP rangers using a thermal drone.

GENERAL

On Endangered Species Day, May 16, Mara Elephant Project (MEP) announced the expansion of its endangered species protection efforts by bringing the Bongo Surveillance Project (BSP) in-house to support its worthwhile mission, allowing the team to focus on growth and impact. BSP is the only dedicated wild mountain bongo antelope protection organization in the world. Listed as Critically Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, the mountain bongo is found only in Kenya and is on the verge of extinction in the wild due to poaching and habitat loss. BSP aims to secure a future for the last remaining mountain bongo antelope in the wild and engage the community to protect the forests where they live. Operationally, MEP and BSP rangers have led many successful joint patrols in the Mau Forest to increase protection for both elephants and mountain bongo. Given this connection, MEP is committed to supporting the BSP Trustees during this transformative time.

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SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

Earlier this year, MEP brought together wardens from 23 Mara conservancies to start coordinating conservation efforts throughout the ecosystem. This resulted in more open lines of communication which pinpointed an area in immediate need of more boots on the ground. Cue the MEP "Delta" ranger team. Taking 6 rangers from existing MEP teams and bringing them together to respond to human-elephant conflict incidents, this new team has already responded to mitigate 20 HEC incidents with help from a thermal drone.The team has also hosted several community meetings to spread the word that MEP rangers are in the area and ready to rapidly respond to protect both the community and wildlife.

MEP rangers on a joint patrol with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), intercepted a lorry packed with over 2,000 posts harvested from the endangered cedar tree species in the Loita Forest. The lorry was operating with concealed registration plates, leading rangers to believe the driver was trying to escape the hawk eyes. The posts were seized and vehicle impounded. MEP has been operating in the Loita Forest since 2019 and is expanding its efforts to help establish a long-term community-based forest protection thanks to support from the LGT Venture Philanthropy Foundation. It will take unwavering collaborative efforts to protect this important habitat.

Drones are a vital tool for MEP rangers to monitor their area of operation for any illegal activity. If illegal habitat destruction activities are detected by the drone, the ranger team records the coordinates and proceeds by vehicle or on foot to the site where they either seize or destroy the illegal goods. In May, the MEP "Bravo" ranger team found three kilns inside the Loita Forest thanks to their drone surveillance.

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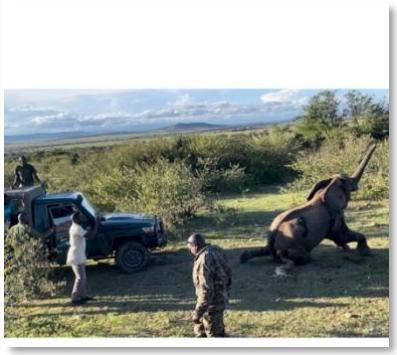
The MEP Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mau De-Snaring Units in collaboration with the Kenya Forest Service (KFS), KWS, and the local Emitik rangers, conducted joint patrols and in 6 weeks removed 102 deadly snares from Mau Forest in Kenya. That's over two snares a day! These traps, set by illegal bushmeat hunters, pose a serious threat to endangered species such as the mountain bongo antelope and elephants. MEP operates two full-time ranger units in the Mau Forest to patrol, protect, and preserve this crucial habitat



On May 14, the MEP mobile ranger team assisted our partner KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge from the SWT Mobile Vet Unit to treat a male juvenile elephant in Mara Ripoi Conservancy. MEP rangers noted the injury while aerially monitoring the herd with their drone. The elephant was treated for a spear wound on the left rump, and the prognosis is good. MEP rangers will keep monitoring the elephant as he recovers.

On May 28, the MEP 'Delta' ranger team received an intelligence report about a person in possession of elephant tusks. The team joined Enoonkishu Conservancy rangers and KWS to arrest the culprit in possession of 3.5 kg of illegal ivory. The tusks were handed over to KWS officials, and the suspect was handed over to the authorities.

Also, in May, MEP rangers in partnership with Mara North Conservancy rangers and KWS rescued a 2-month-old calf after the lone calf was found in the conservancy and the mother deceased from natural causes. The calf was kept overnight until the SWT fixed wing arrived to transfer it to their orphanage in Nairobi. The calf is now under their expert care and there's hope for its future survival.

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Overall, in May, MEP rangers alongside government partners arrested one ivory suspect, and nine habitat destruction suspects. They confiscated 3.5 kg of ivory and removed 54 snares. They also recovered 3,158 posts, destroyed 18 charcoal kilns, 45 charcoal sacks and mitigated 52 human-elephant conflict incidents. In May, MEP rangers patrolled 11,954.79 km in their vehicles and 1,327.85 km on foot in GME.

HELICOPTER

In May, MEP rangers and Naboisho Conservancy rangers assisted KWS Vet Dr. Ashif during a treatment operation of a sub adult bull. The elephant was monitored by a drone while MEP rangers were on patrol and they noticed his wound. The MEP helicopter was in the air to assist with darting and separating the injured elephant from the rest of the herd. The elephant was treated for an arrow wound and the prognosis is good. MEP rangers are monitoring him as he recovers.

The MEP helicopter was also in action in Nyakweri Forest in May to assist our partner KWS Vet Dr. Njoroge from the SWT Mobile Vet Unit to treat a female elephant for three arrow wounds. The prognosis is good, and the MEP 'Golf' ranger team will continue monitoring her as she recovers.

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DRONES FOR CONSERVATION
Special Projects Manager's Update

The MEP drone patrol teams have been actively conducting aerial patrols, human-elephant conflict (HEC) mitigation and elephant monitoring operations across the Mara landscape. In the whole month of May, the ranger teams deployed drones to mitigate 10 total HEC incidents. The 'Foxtrot' ranger team conducted aerial patrols and monitoring exercises in the Olokeri and Oliopa areas. They responded to HEC incidents in the Kirok area and carried out monitoring of a sick bull elephant at Endoinyo Erinka. The 'Delta' ranger team was engaged in both day and night HEC mitigation efforts in the Munyas and Emarti areas. Additionally, they monitored elephants in Nonkishu Conservancy, Olchoro Conservancy, and the Kirok area.

The 'Golf' ranger team conducted HEC mitigation operations in Pusanki, Oloisukut, and Olosheti areas during both day and night. They monitored elephants in Olpejoto, Nkinye, and Isoketi, including a sick female elephant until she was treated and recovered. The 'Lima' ranger team situated in Mosiro, carried out monitoring operations in Emurutoto (three separate occasions) and the Irmasaaek area. Notably, no human-elephant conflict incidents were reported in these areas during their patrols. The mobile ranger team responded to HEC incidents in settlement areas including Nkoilale, Ripoi, Kishermoruak, and Shankalera. They monitored elephants, including the collared individuals Kiambi and Polaris, in Ol-Kinyei, Naboisho, and Ripoi conservancies, and the Olkarar area.

The drone proved to be an invaluable tool when rangers positively monitored injured elephants, used the drone camera to take pictures of the injury and share it with KWS vet to prepare for treatment. The drone was also vital when separating an injured elephant from its herd before darting and treatment. This was the case during one of the ranger patrols when they identified an injured elephant in Naboisho and Ol-Kinyei conservancies, deployed the drone to assist in their treatment by keeping herds away from the treatment area, and continued monitoring them as they recovered.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

In May, MEP released the first quarter newsletter, MEP Matters, which you can read here.

MEP also started planning for the 2025 edition of the UltraMARAthon ahead of hosting a launch event on July 9 at the Museums of Kenya Grounds, in Nairobi. Registration for the marathon opens July 1.

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The Fran Duthie African Elephant Conservation Scholarship supports Kenyan students pursuing a career in conservation. Currently, MEP is hosting Mary Wangari from Kenyatta University, one of the scholars at MEP headquarters, for her one-month internship. So far, she has been having a hands-on learning experience with the MEP conservation education team. Mary has participated in a tree planting exercise during a recent education event, attended an elephant monitoring activity, and visited the MEP coexistence farm. "My internship with the Mara Elephant Project has been an inspiring journey, teaching me practical conservation skills, deepening my passion for protecting elephants, and showing me the power of community in creating a future where people and wildlife can thrive together," says Mary.

The second phase of the MEP Training of Trainers (ToT) program, supported by the Basecamp Explorer Foundation – Kenya is currently underway. 30 rangers from 16 conservancies across the Mara landscape reported on May 25 at the MEP HQ, where they will be spending the next three weeks undergoing the second phase of the training, which is mostly teach-back sessions with the rangers practically taking over these sessions and facilitating the training amongst themselves.

Mara Elephant Project received $27,943 in donations in May. Thank you to Governors Camp, Savannah Tracking Limited, Emboo Camp, Cottars Safaris, Kunal Sagar, and the Angama Foundation for your support. We also received support for the Loita Forest Protection project from the Leslie L. Alexander Foundation and Fran and Lorne Duthie made their annual contribution toward the scholarship named in her honor.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH

In early May, MEP hosted a group of five guests from the King Salman Royal Nature Reserve in Saudi Arabia. They visited MEP to learn more about our use of the EarthRanger software as well as evaluating various analytical approached to data visualization. The group had been accompanied by our partner, Henrik Rasmussen from Savannah Tracking Limited.

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MEP attended the Validation of Management Plan for Ol-Kinyei Conservancy at the Loita Plains Hotel. The meeting was convened by the Management of the conservancy, led by their Director Dr. Mohanjeet Brar. 30 community members who are landowners were present. They set the roadmap for governance, income diversification, conservation of biodiversity, and livelihoods enhancement. MEP also got an opportunity to share about our HEC operations, Innovation, and Partnerships with other stakeholders in the Mara landscape.

Also, in May, MEP attended a collaring talk convened by the Mara Predator Conservation Program at the Governors Camp. The talks were led by Niels Morgensen, their CEO, and the key highlights were on lion data, movement, real-time tracking, and movements across the Mara landscape. The sessions underpinned MEP's commitment and the importance of using the latest collar technologies in GPS technology to track elephants in real time to increase their protection, understand their movements and ecosystem connectivity across the Mara Landscape.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) Team

The MEP LTM team conducted elephant population assessments, recording a total of 19 elephant sightings comprising 21 bulls, 43 cows, 32 sub-adult and 19 calves. Among these, the team identified six new individuals, all of which were bulls belonging to the Fitz herd. Notably, they successfully tracked two collared elephants: Fitz, who was observed in the Mara North Conservancy, and Kevin, who was sighted with a broken tip on the left tusk within the Masai Mara National Reserve alongside another bull, Individual 221. A promising trend observed in May was the high birth rate, with a significant number of calves recorded across the monitored areas.

To further enhance MEP's monitoring capabilities, the team dedicated efforts towards the development of the automated elephant identification model. This involved data cleaning and the retrieval of treatment and collaring images from identified individuals list. The ongoing monthly distance surveys and dung

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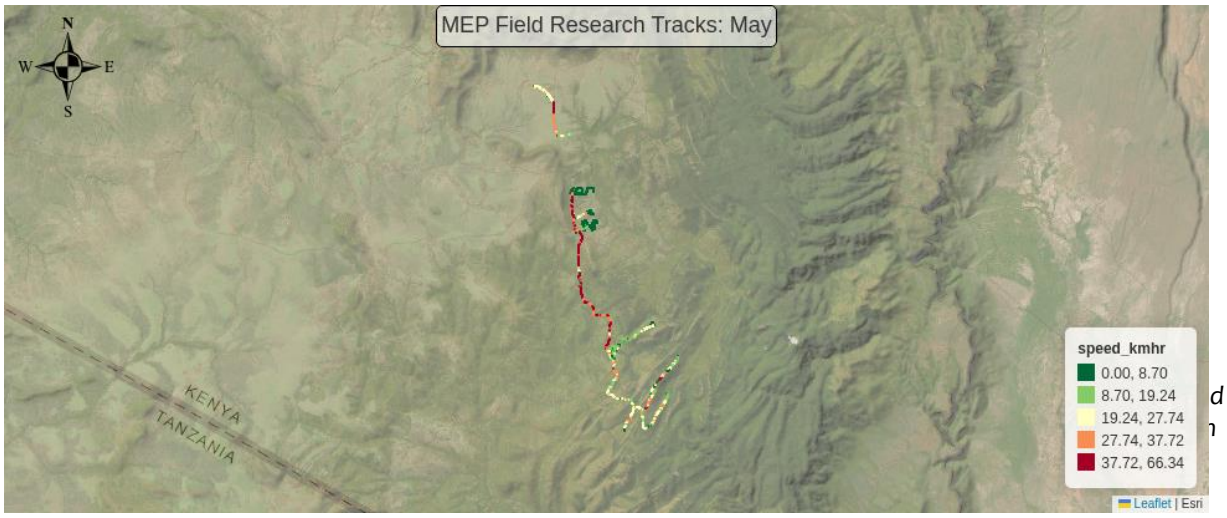
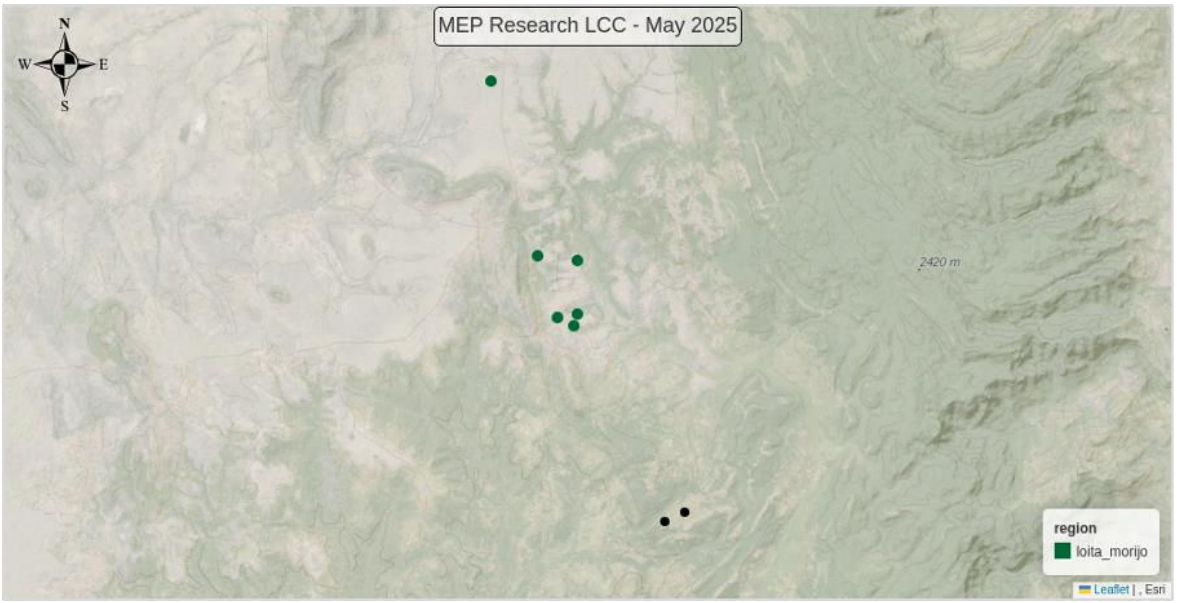
sampling revealed that the Mara Triangle and Mara North Conservancy continue to support a higher density of elephants compared to the Lemek-Olchoro transects, underscoring the importance of these regions and informing habitat use.

Data and Reporting Team



Geospatial Mapping

This month, twelve grids were visited and completed, and Field Assistant Milton Kiok marked a significant number of roads and physical features. He was also able to map 7.97 km of fences and 8 LCC points. The head of LandDX Data Eugene Kuloba, summarised this month's data as depicted in the image below:



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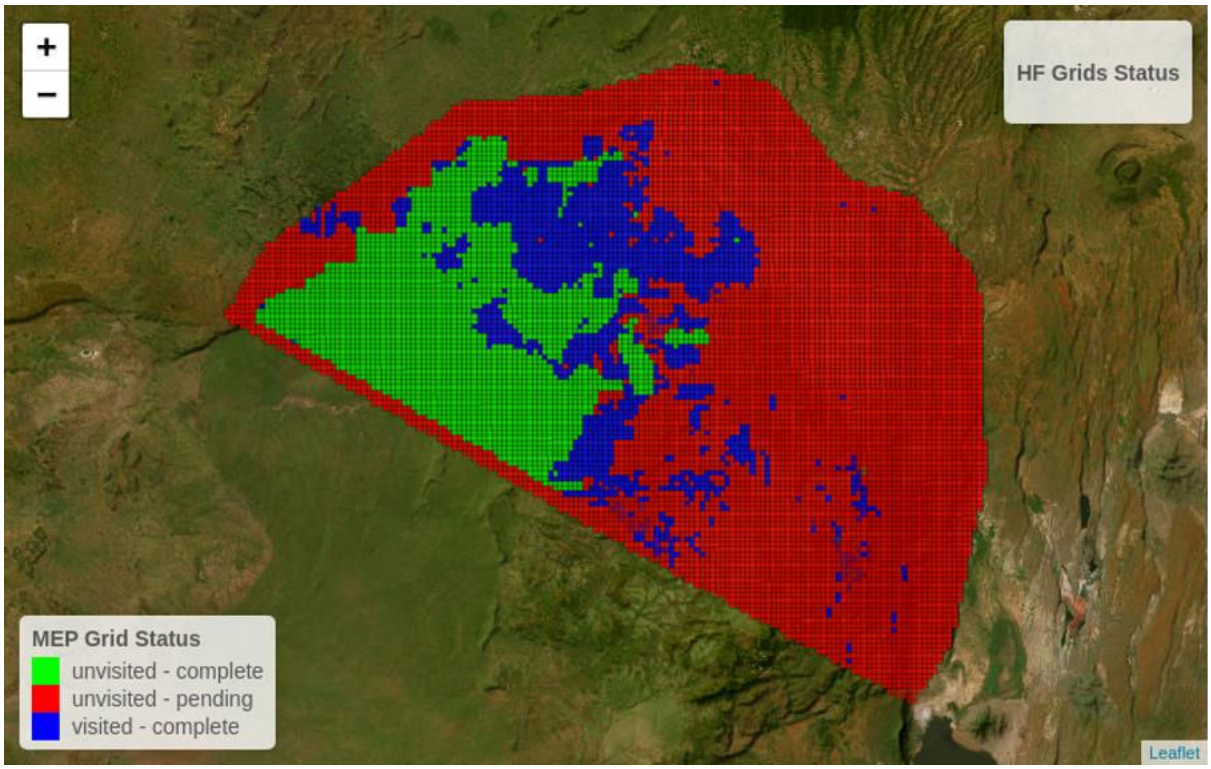

Seven grids were visited and completed in the month of May.

MEP Coexistence Farm

General Update

May was an exceptionally active month, marked by significant advancements in our coexistence, community development, and educational programs. The team hosted a diverse group of local and international visitors within the month. Conservancy managers from Naretoi and Oloisukut conservancies paid a courtesy visit to study our non-palatable crop cultivation and women's empowerment projects, expressing keen interest in replicating these successful models. Additionally, the team welcomed Eric and Jamie, veterinarians representing the Elephant Conservation Organization (ECO), taking them through MEP's coexistence farm model, elephant friendly kitchen garden, medicinal plants and essential oils project.

The team officially launched MEP's out-grower planting program, starting with rosemary cultivation. Two dedicated women's groups Naropil and Olosesia, made of 45 ladies, collectively planted 20,000 rosemary seedlings across two acres. This initiative is crucial for promoting human-wildlife coexistence by providing crops that are not predated by elephants, while at the same time enhancing local livelihoods in areas highly impacted by crop raiding. The team also organized a training session for a group of 10 women, providing them with seedlings for their own kitchen gardens.

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Education

The conservation education program saw extensive activity and vital partnerships throughout May. Early in the month, the team convened with key conservation education partners, including Enoonkishu group of conservancies, Women in the Wild, and Mara Predator Conservation Program, at the farm. The meeting was instrumental in mapping out strategies for MEP's education program in Transmara, fostering shared insights and leveraging collaborative opportunities. The team also started the month by planting 200 indigenous trees in Lemek Primary School together with 60 students and their teachers from the environmental club.

The team conducted a career day at Loita High School, engaging 64 students alongside MEP rangers operating in Loita Forest. The students formed three groups to discuss various career paths in conservation and other fields, emphasizing the critical role of the Loita Forest ecosystem and the students' responsibility as its ambassadors. Students posed insightful questions, particularly about elephant protection and how conservation information can reach their parents, which our skilled team effectively addressed. The second Career Day was held at Olchekut Supat High School, an alma mater for several MEP workers. The team engaged 57 Form Two and Form Four students on diverse career opportunities and the importance of positive values ending the day by planting an additional 20 indigenous trees.

In May, the team established a kitchen garden at Ngosuany Primary School with 60 students, planting 2,400 vegetable seedlings to improve school nutrition. World Biodiversity Day was celebrated at Naisoya and Osonkoroi Primary Schools. At Naisoya, 119 students planted 100 fruit tree seedlings, highlighting biodiversity and food security. At Osonkoroi, 150 students planted 500 indigenous trees to create a forest garden. The community, near the Mau Forest and affected by human-elephant conflict, welcomed the focus on habitat and wildlife protection.

Later in May, the team visited Oldorko and Naningoi Primary Schools, distributing 170 reusable sanitary towels donated by Kampur Travel Diaries and 550 biodegradable pads. As part of Menstrual Hygiene Month, 270 learners were educated on eco-friendly menstruation, proper disposal, and reducing stigma, promoting both environmental sustainability and student well-being.

Climate Report

MEP's Co-Existence Farm Rainfall Recording May 2025

Date	Rain gauge [200m2]
05/05/2025	4.6
08/05/2025	16
10/05/2025	2
12/05/2025	17.5
24/05/2025	10

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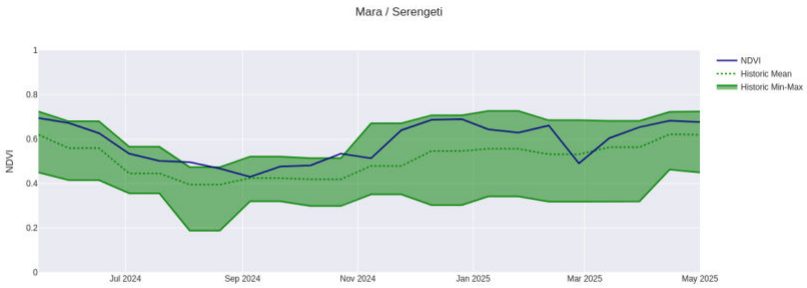
Tracking Manager Report

Collared elephants Kevin, Fitz, and Polaris monitored by MEP rangers and researchers in the month of May.

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)



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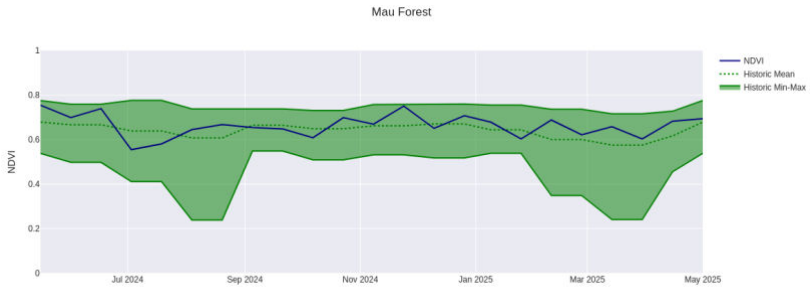
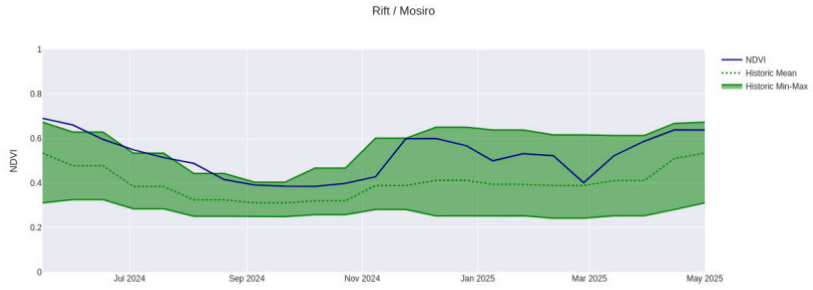
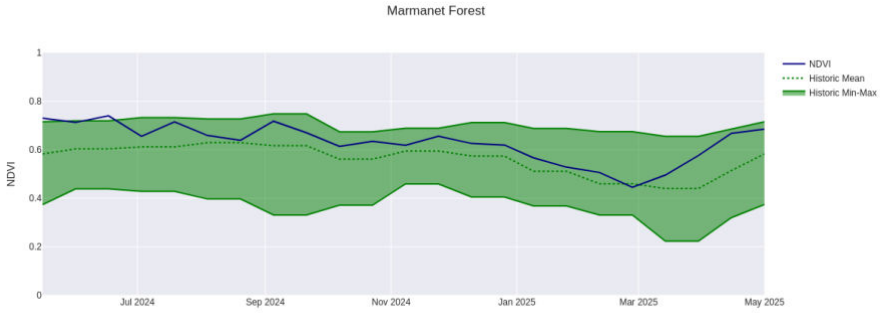
Mau Forest



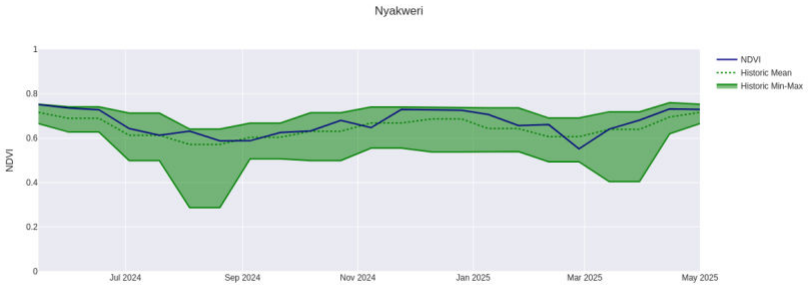
Rift Valley /Mosiro



Marmanet Forest



Nyakweri Forest



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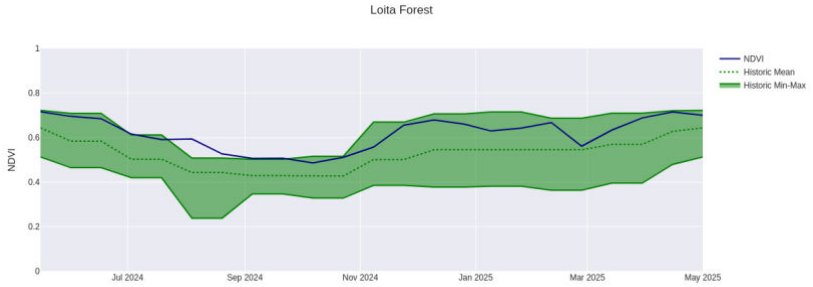
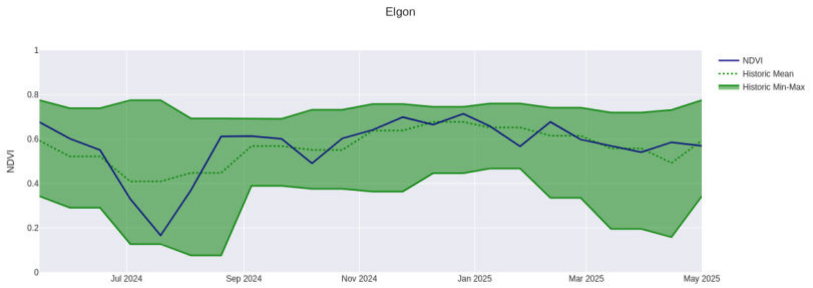
Loita Forest



Elgon



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