MEP January 2026 Report

Mara Elephant Project (MEP) 'Delta' ranger team on a night drone Human Elephant Conflict Mitigation (HEC) response in January.

GENERAL

A camera-trap captured a photo of a young male Mountain Bongo Antelope (*Tragelaphus eurycerus isaaci)* in December 2025 in the Maasai Mau Forest. This is a breakthrough moment for the conservation of this critically endangered species and is the first confirmed camera-trap record of bongos in the Mau since 2018. This milestone underscores the importance of collaboration between the Mountain Bongo Project (MBP) and MEP, where shared expertise, long-term monitoring, and on-the-ground protection efforts converge to safeguard one of Kenya's most endangered species. MEP's 'Charlie' ranger team was recently deployed to the Maasai Mau to support MBP through joint patrols, monitoring, and real-time intelligence gathering, helping detect illegal activities in the forest. With fewer than 100 mountain bongos remaining in the wild, a confirmed presence like this is critical. This sighting will guide patrols, inform camera placement, and shape long-term conservation strategies to protect the last wild mountain bongo population.

SECURITY, ANTI-POACHING & CONFLICT

MEP's 'Charlie' ranger team successfully removed 57 wire and rope snares set in the Mau Forest for bushmeat poaching in January. Sadly, the team encountered a female bushbuck and duiker that had already died after being caught in one of the traps, underscoring the devastating impact of snaring. In addition to the snares, the team also recovered one spear during the patrol. The area has been identified as a high-risk zone, and regular patrols are conducted to deter illegal activities and protect wildlife. This operation

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reinforces the importance of sustained ranger patrols in combating poaching and safeguarding vulnerable species.

MEP continued its collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and WildLandscapes East Africa to support the protection of Kenya's last remaining wild roan antelope population. Once widespread, the species is now critically endangered, with only 25 individuals remaining in the wild, all confined to Ruma National Park. MEP supported the Kenya Roan Antelope Recovery Master Plan through structured drone surveys, building on its expertise in aerial monitoring. These surveys generated robust population estimates, mapped roan antelope distribution and habitat use, and documented predators and other potential threats across the park.

Drone monitoring also enabled rapid identification of sick or injured individuals for timely management interventions, while collecting habitat and vegetation data to better understand how roan antelope use the landscape. With support from the M-PESA Foundation, this partnership demonstrates how high-quality aerial data can strengthen decision-making, improve protection efforts, and support the long-term recovery of one of Kenya's most endangered antelope species.

Protecting rhinos in the Mara Triangle just got a high-tech boost. In January, MEP led a drone refresher training for nine rangers from the Mara Conservancy, focusing on practical, field-ready skills to monitor these endangered species more effectively. The training highlighted the use of the Matrice 4T thermal drone, one of three new drones the rangers will soon deploy. With thermal imaging and advanced aerial capabilities, these drones enable rangers to track rhinos across rugged terrain, even at night, providing faster response times and sharper insights into wildlife movement. Led by Expert Drones Africa (EDA) and supported by MEP Drone Instructors, the sessions combined hands-on flying with safety protocols and tactical strategies for wildlife protection. By merging technology with skilled on-the-ground teams, MEP is empowering rangers in the Mara to protect rhino and other key species more effectively than ever before. MEP is strengthening not only local capacity but also the long-term survival of wildlife across the Greater Mara Ecosystem.

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Promoting coexistence at MEP begins with understanding the Greater Mara Ecosystem as a dynamic, mixed-use landscape shared by wildlife, livestock, and Maasai communities. As grazing areas, settlements, and conservation zones shift seasonally, effective conservation depends on managing how both people and wildlife move across the land. Increasing livestock grazing pressure can reduce forage for elephants, degrade habitats, and restrict movement corridors, often pushing wildlife closer to farms and settlements and heightening the risk of human–elephant conflict.

To address this, MEP and EyeClimate have developed CattleMapper, a technology-driven tool that makes grazing pressure visible. Using drone imagery, CattleMapper rapidly maps livestock numbers, boma locations, and grazing patterns through an accessible, one-click platform. Tracking these trends over time enables proactive management of grazing pressure, early identification of potential conflict hotspots, and protection of critical elephant habitats while supporting sustainable Maasai livelihoods and the ecosystems they share.

In January, MEP rangers, alongside government partners, arrested 11 suspects for habitat destruction and removed 202 snares. They also confiscated 163 pieces of timber, 267 posts, and destroyed seven charcoal kilns. They also recorded 23 trees cut and mitigated 58 conflict incidents.

HELICOPTER

A bull elephant in Shompole was spotted by guests at Shompole Wilderness Camp with an active wound on its front right leg in January. The sighting was immediately reported to the camp owner, who contacted MEP to coordinate a veterinary intervention. Due to the dense terrain, thick with trees and bushes, the operation required aerial support. MEP rapidly responded with our helicopter, and upon examination, the depth and

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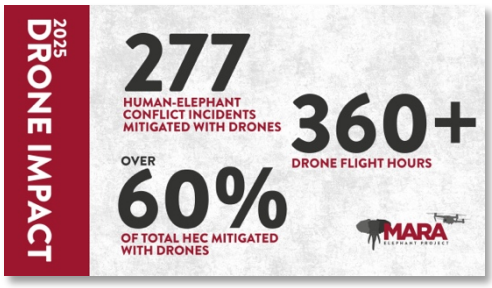
shape of the wound indicated it was most likely caused by an arrow. Working closely with KWS Vet Dr. Titus Kaitho from the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust (SWT) Mobile Vet Unit, Shompole Wilderness Camp, and the South Rift Association of Landowners (SORALO), the elephant was successfully treated. On-the-ground monitoring efforts are ongoing.

Drones for conservation



In 2025, Mara Elephant Project's drones flew more than 360 hours, helping mitigate 277 HEC incidents. That accounts for over 60% of the over 450 total HEC incidents our ranger teams mitigated last year. These numbers represent real moments where technology helped guide elephants away from farms, reduce crop damage, and keep both people and wildlife safe. By pairing advanced drones equipped with thermal and high-resolution imaging with trained pilots who are rapid response rangers, MEP can see farther, respond faster, and intervene more effectively when conflict arises.

In January 2026, MEP operations teams continued extensive drone operations across Marmanet Forest (Baringo), Mau Forest, Loita, and the Maasai Mara ecosystem. Drones remained a critical tool, enhancing accuracy, enabling rapid response, and supporting cost-effective day- and night-field operations.

A total of 54 incidents were mitigated by drones in January, with 73.8 flight hours logged. The ranger teams reported wildlife sightings and monitoring, HEC mitigation, cattle counts, wildlife counts, and forest surveillance targeting illegal logging and charcoal burning.

MEP rangers responded rapidly to an escalating human-elephant conflict involving Edwin, a collared bull elephant, and cattle grazing nearby, posing a serious risk to the community. Deploying a drone, the MEP drone pilot guided Edwin away from the community and back to safety with minimal fence damage and no loss of life. It took the MEP rangers 30 minutes from response to successful mitigation, underscoring the importance of tools such as drones and satellite collars for proactive intervention.

A timely alert from our elephant tracking system triggered a rapid response to a human-elephant conflict situation. The alert indicated that Fitz, a collared bull known for regularly moving into community farms at night and retreating into forested areas during the day, was in a maize farm. Upon arrival, MEP's "Golf" ranger team found Fitz among six other bulls actively feeding on crops, posing a serious risk to both livelihoods and safety.

Using real-time movement data and drone technology, the rangers were able to rapidly respond and safely move the elephants out of the maize farm and guide them toward a safer area in the

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forest. The operation was successfully completed without injury or escalation. This intervention demonstrates how conservation technology plays a vital role in proactive HEC mitigation.

MEP was closely monitoring an elephant family after the birth of a newborn calf. The herd had moved into a tea tree plantation just yards from where people were actively harvesting, creating a dangerous situation for both elephants and workers. Using drones, our team gently guided the mother, her newborn, and the rest of the herd away from the plantation and back towards safety. Elephant families protect their young just like human families do, and coexistence means keeping everyone safe.

On January 27, MEP's 'Delta' ranger team responded to a report of elephants moving toward community settlements and farmland within Enoonkishu Conservancy.

Nighttime patrols are a critical part of MEP's work, allowing rangers to detect and address potential human–elephant conflict before it escalates. Upon locating the herd, the team confirmed the presence of a young calf, estimated to be around a month old, which required the operation to be handled with heightened care. To manage the situation safely in low-visibility conditions, rangers deployed a thermal drone to track the herd and guide them away from settlement areas. This early intervention reduced the risk of crop damage and ensured the elephants were safely guided back into the conservancy. The operation concluded without incident, underscoring the importance of rapid nighttime response and informed, quick decision-making to protect both elephants and the communities living alongside them.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

MEP released the 2025 Quarter Four Newsletter in January. Key highlights included record-setting drone-led human-elephant conflict mitigation and snare removal, alongside a continued commitment to training, forest preservation, and community engagement. Read more on this link.

A capacity-building session led by the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Officer was conducted to strengthen evidence-based programming, accountability, and ethical practice. The training enhanced staff understanding of core M&E principles and their integration across all stages of project implementation. Standardized M&E tools were also developed, including informed consent forms, attendance lists, and activity-tracking systems, to ensure consistent, ethical data collection and reporting. The session emphasized improved documentation, compliance with Kenyan data protection and research ethics laws, and the safeguarding of participants' rights, confidentiality, and data integrity.

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During the reporting period, MEP hosted the newly appointed KWS leadership to strengthen collaboration and align operational and administrative processes for elephant conservation in the Mara. The meeting, held at MEP headquarters, brought together MEP Deputy CEO Meshack Gaga and team with KWS Assistant Director Eric Adudo and Warden Stephen Kuseren

Discussions clarified KWS procedures for elephant collaring, confirming that Human–Wildlife Conflict mitigation collaring and routine collar replacements are processed directly by KWS, streamlining the approval process. MEP will submit its annual collaring report and current applications to the new KWS leadership to ensure continuity and shared understanding. The meeting also explored enhanced implementation of the Greater Mara Monitoring Framework (GMMF) and potential joint training initiatives. Overall, the engagement reaffirmed a strong partnership and a shared commitment to coordinated, effective conservation action across the Mara ecosystem.

Within the reporting period, the MEP team met representatives from the Narok County Government Department of Environment, Water, Energy, Natural Resources, and Climate Change for a consultative meeting on wildlife conservation and sustainable forest management. Key proposals included enhanced Mau forest monitoring, community engagement and sensitization, deployment of community-based scouts, construction of permanent ranger bases for the MEP Mau teams, and creation of a research center to support conservation research. MEP also addressed challenges such as bushmeat poaching, illegal logging, and minimizing human distrubance to protect the Mountain Bongo's natural habitat.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH

In January, the MEP and MBP team, together with our Government Partners KWS, Kenya Forest Service (KFS), and representatives of the County Government of Narok, held a community meeting at Mau Forest in the Osanaangururi area. The teams engaged with the 100 community members gathered, and the conversations mostly centered on Mau Forest Protection, Illegal logging in the forest, and community engagement. Key priorities highlighted included road improvements, local employment opportunities, the development of a community dispensary,

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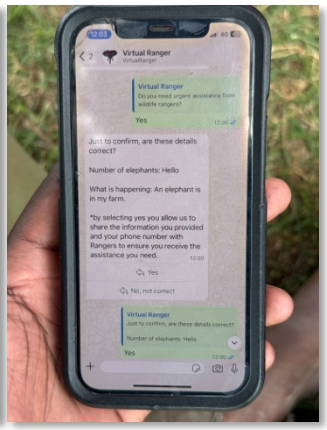
and the provision of water tanks for schools. MEP & MBP will continue working together to increase forest protection, Mountain Bongo population, and improve community livelihoods.

Dibblex Lesalon, MEP's Community Engagement & Outreach Coordinator delivering a conservation talk to students from Durham International School in January.



Strengthening coexistence between people and elephants starts with clear communication and trusted local leadership. MEP trained over 50 community members this January, including rangers from Loita Hills Conservancy, on Virtual Ranger, MEP's human–elephant conflict reporting tools, and mitigation toolkit.

This training is part of MEP's Lead Reporter model, which focuses on equipping young people from high-conflict areas with the skills to report incidents accurately and for MEP rangers to respond effectively. At least 20 trained lead reporters will train others in their communities, expanding local capacity to manage conflict before it escalates. These types of training reinforce the value of digital tools in improving response times, coordination, and community engagement. Follow-up sessions are planned for March as MEP continues rolling out Virtual Ranger to strengthen coexistence across the landscape.

RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) Team

In January, the team conducted a two-week field operation in the Mara Triangle. The team conducted the plotting stage for camera trap deployment along the Kenya–Serengeti border and other two in the Nyakweri-Kimintet area. These cameras are now recording the movements of elephants and other wildlife, providing insights to help understand elephant movement patterns and ranges.

Another major focus in January was monitoring Kevin, the collared elephant, in the Serengeti Ecosystem. Observing Kevin's movements provides critical insights into his range, habitat utilisation, and behavioural patterns

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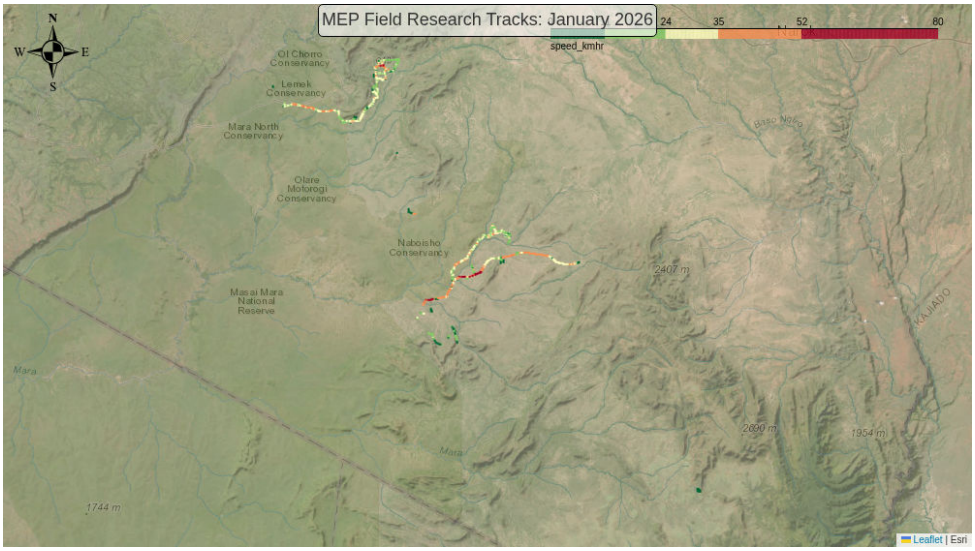
Overall, the team recorded 30 elephant sightings during the month, documenting each observation carefully, including herd composition, behavior, and location. In total, 294 individual elephants were observed. This included 49 bulls, 84 cows, 42 calves, and 114 sub-adults. All these records are currently being entered and processed in ElephantBook and will undergo further analysis to generate insights to guide future conservation planning and decision-making.

The Team setting up camera traps along the Kenya-Serengeti border in January.

Also in January, the team conducted presentations for Kicheche Mara North visitors at MEP HQ and visited Asilia Naboisho Camp**,** where we delivered a visitor presentation and shared the LTM Experience. These sessions highlighted our elephant monitoring program, the key challenges facing elephant populations, and how visitors can actively support conservation initiatives. Both engagements provided important platforms to raise awareness and foster participation in wildlife protection efforts.

Data and Reporting Team

The team summarized the tracks covered by two field assistants as shown in the map below



Movements of MEP's two field assistant in January. 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 416.72 km and recorded 12.04 km of fences and 11 LCC points in January.

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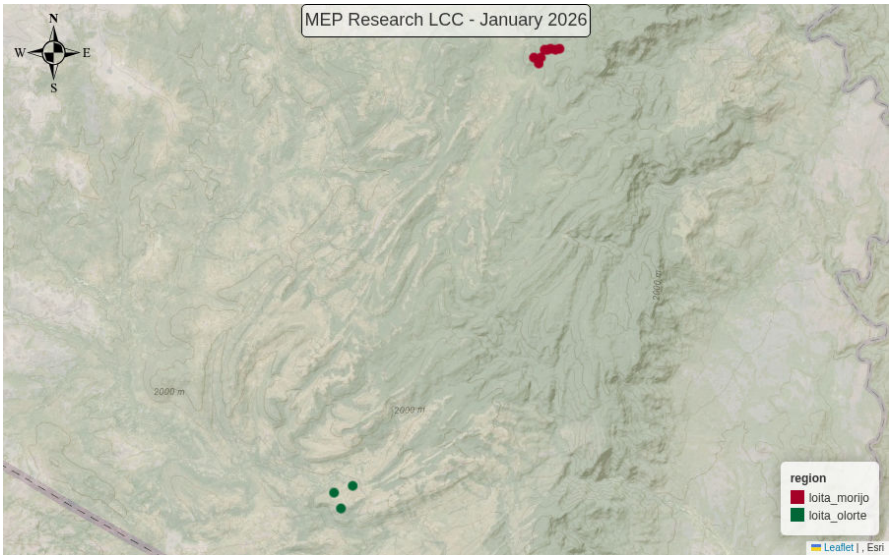
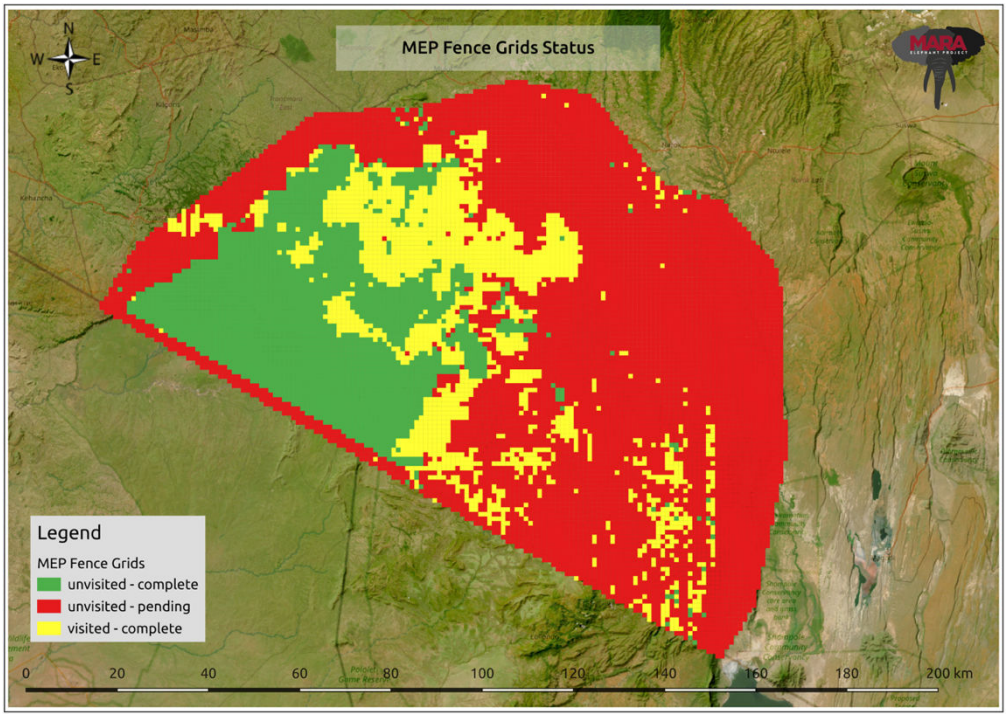


8 LCC points were collected in Loita Morijo and 3 LCC points in Loita Olorte the month of January.

Geospatial Mapping

In January, MEP's field assistants visited a total of 121 grids. (98- Visited Complete, 23- Unvisited Complete). They mapped a significant number of roads and physical features. Also, 16 land parcels across the Loita region were visited. The LandDX team summarized this month's data as depicted in the image below.



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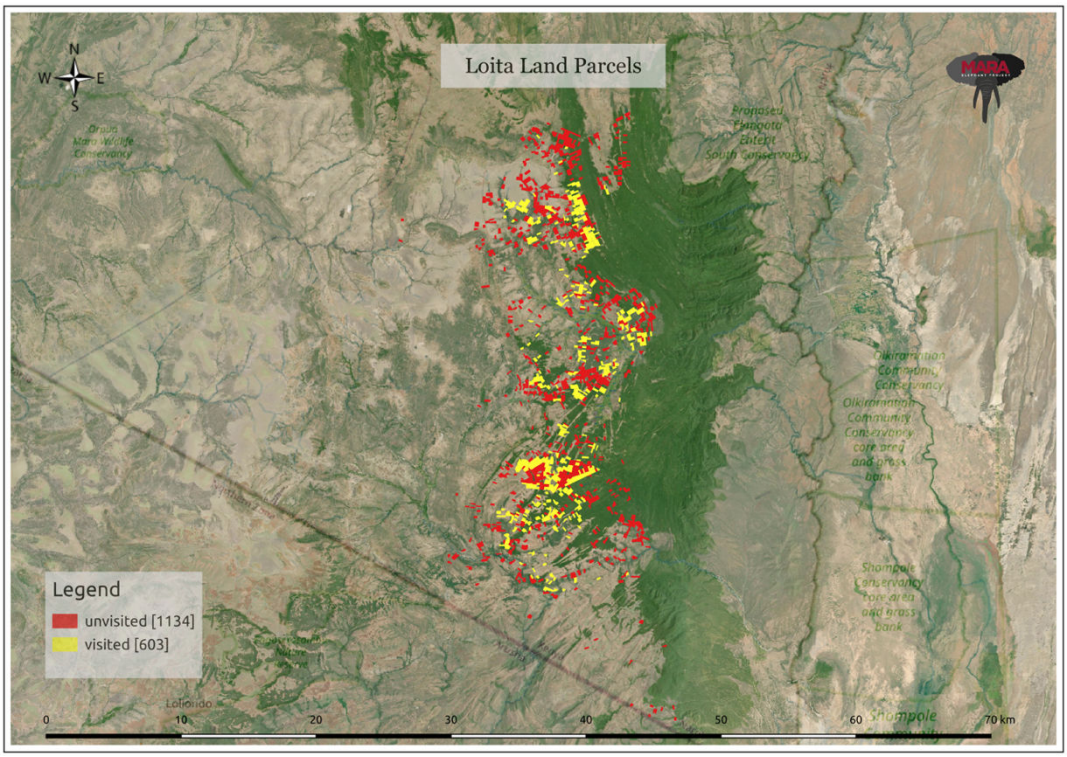
MEP Loita Land Parcel Map



MEP Coexistence Farm

General Update

The research team convened for two days during the month to align individual objectives with their respective job descriptions and strengthen preparedness for implementation of the 2026 work plan. The sessions focused on strengthening data analysis capacity, identifying priority research topics for internal reporting, and developing a standardized template to guide monthly reporting of insights and recommendations.

The Coexistence Project team conducted follow-up meetings with out-grower groups, visiting all farms established in 2025 and engaging two new groups in preparation for the 2026 farming season. Overall, the farms were in good condition. One farm required weeding, which was collectively carried out after the meeting, underscoring the importance of proper farm management practices to improve yields.

An additional meeting was held at the end of the month, with representatives of all the eight groups, a total of 46 women participated in the meetings. The new groups expressed interest in joining the program, while the existing groups shared their experiences and benefits to date. Discussions were held to document key challenges and agree on the way forward for both new and existing groups.

A consultative meeting was held with representatives from TechnoServe and GIZ, who are working toward building a competitive, inclusive, and sustainable essential oils sector that

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supports job creation, export growth, and improved livelihoods, particularly for smallholder farmers, women, and youth. Under their Tier 2 support model (Ecosystem MSMEs), they plan to provide group-based technical and business acceleration training to strengthen the broader ecosystem. This will include capacity building for MEP staff and out-grower teams to enhance market readiness and financial management.

The team continued maintenance of the kitchen garden, harvesting a total of 45 kg of vegetables, which were supplied to the MEP headquarters kitchen. Additionally, 43 kg of chili was harvested and processed into chili powder.

Under the Education Program, the team worked closely with the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) department to conduct impact assessments. Activities included Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with parents, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with teachers, and a school-level impact assessment in one school within each of the four key MEP operational regions. In addition, baseline surveys were conducted in seven new schools, with analysis and compilation of results scheduled for completion by the end of the month. MEP has supported 16 schools since the project's inception in 2024. With the enrollment of seven additional schools in 2026, the total number of supported schools now stands at 24.

Climate Report

MEP's Co-Existence Farm Rainfall Recording January 2026

Date	Rain gauge 2 (200m2)
2026_01_14	12

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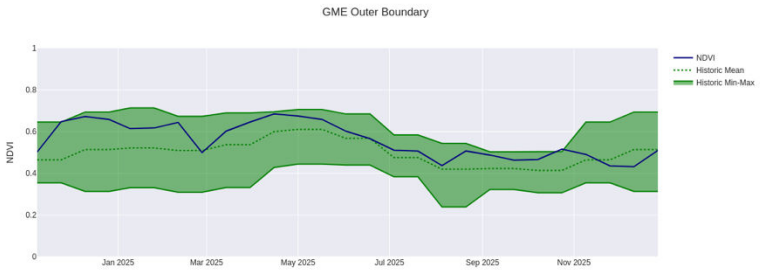
Collared elephants Fitz, Polaris, Lolotoo, and Kevin all monitored by MEP rangers and researchers in January.

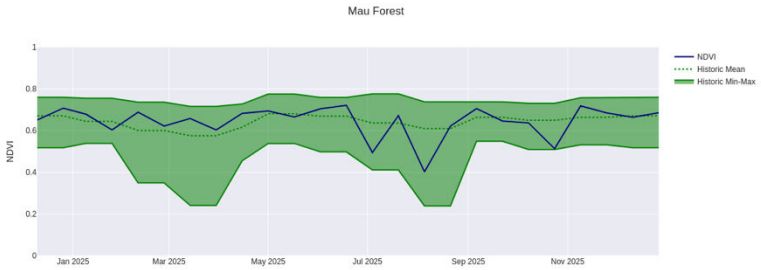
ENVIRONMENT: NDVI

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.

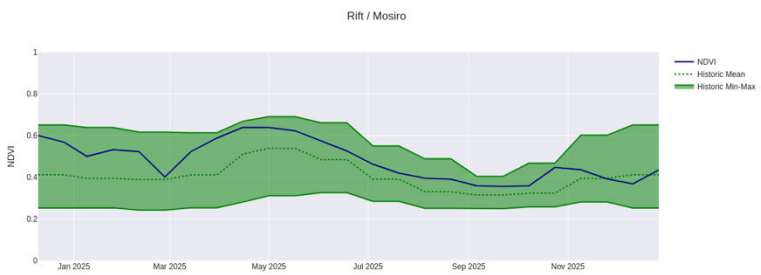
Greater Mara Ecosystem (GME)



Mau



Rift Valley /Mosiro



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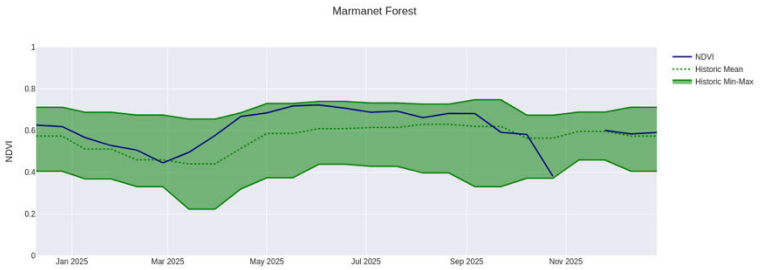
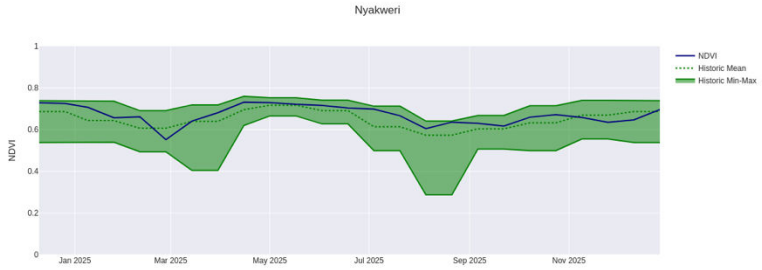
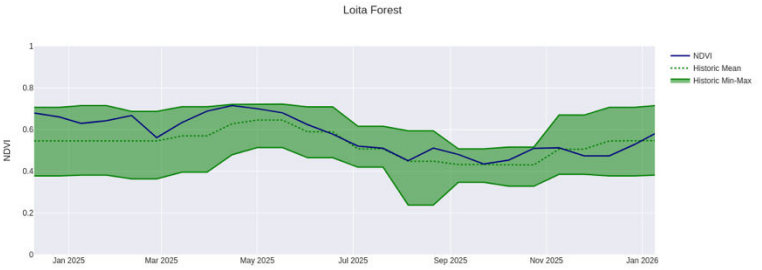
Marmanet Forest



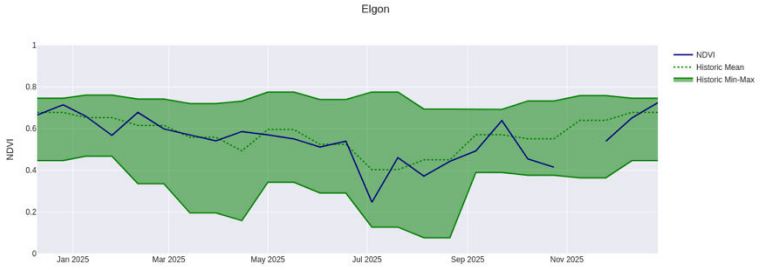
Nyakweri Forest



Loita Forest



Elgon



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