



Monthly Aerial Report – March 2014

Summary:

March 2014 was another very busy month for the Tsavo Trust (TT) and its Super Cub aircraft, 5Y ACE. A total of 3,648 miles were flown during 51 hours, averaging 72 miles per hour of reconnaissance flight (17 flights) over the Tsavo Conservation Area (TCA). Most of these reconnaissance flights are carried out jointly with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) whereby one of their Officers or Rangers are in the TT's two seater aircraft as a Rear Seat Observer (RSO). In this way it means the observers are able to visually recognize current observations for immediate ground follow up as necessary.

Following the finding of a recent elephant carcass (natural death) with ivory intact on 9th March 2014 during a routine aerial recce, KWS & TT jointly recovered both tusks. Although these were not from any of Tsavo's known big "Tuskers", they were 32kg (70lbs) each tusk and represent those of an up-and-coming big "Tusker". Tsavo is one of the few Protected Areas left on the planet that can boast a very strong gene pool of such elephant.



March saw a total of 6 fresh (less than 3 weeks) and 5 recent (less than 1 year) elephant carcasses, totaling 11; this is up on recent months. 2 tusks were also recovered jointly by KWS/TT from a recent carcass having died naturally.

Large Elephant Monitoring Project:

A total of 6 of the very large individual bull elephant (SA1 (5 times), DI1 (2 times), DA1 (1 time), IR1 (1 time), WS1 (3 times) and SA2 (3 times) were observed in March and relevant details recorded in the TT database. Some other large up-and-coming bull elephants were also observed and over time will be positively identified and named.

The photo below shows 2 magnificent big Tsavo elephant bulls together, known as SA1 and DI1 taken on 18th March 2014.



Main areas covered within the TCA in March include:

Tsavo East NP – 9 flights that covered Galana River, Athi River, Voi River, Aruba, Satao, Power lines, Yatta Central, Sangayaya, Emusaya, Huri, Durusikale, Garasamuke, Bachuma, Maungu, Lugards, Tambanguji, Dika, Ndara, Dakota and Murondo (TENP Southern boundary), Kulalu Ranch/TENP boundary, east Manyani, Ashaka, Mudanda, Irima, Voi, Waduruma, Balguda, Mbololo lugga, TE IPZ, Maji ya Chumvi, Ngiluni, parts of Galana Ranch (Lalli Hills), Sala, the Tsavo Triangle, Kyulu, Mombasa Highway, and parts of some Taita Ranches including; Teita, Taru, Amaka, Kalonzo, Jogoo, Bura, Mbale, and Rukinga Ranch.

Tsavo West NP – 8 flights that covered TW Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ), Ngulia/Rhino Valley, Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, Kamboyo, Ndawe hill, Mombasa Highway between Mtito Andei and Tsavo River bridge, Murka, Maktau, TW Triangle, Tsavo River, Man Easters, Athi River, TW Maji ya Chumvi lugga, Mtito Lugga, Kyulu area, Ngulia East/West/South and North, Kinyek, Mungai Hill, Kamboyo, Kishushe and Taita Sanctuary.

Many other locations and areas are covered during reconnaissance flights and the above names are general locations and an indicator of the flight path covered. All flight paths are logged and recorded in the TT database records and all reces and observation details are relayed to KWS accordingly for necessary action.

Illegal Activities and Successes:

The TT was called upon by KWS on several occasions to assist with aerial back up following security/poaching incidents both within the Parks and in wildlife dispersal areas outside on the Ranches. Some successes took place in March as a result of joint KWS/TT efforts stemming from aerial reconnaissance flights.

Date	Incident
10/3/14	Following the finding of 2 elephant tusks from the air, joint KWS/TT ground follow up recovered both tusks
10/3/14	1 fresh and 1 recently used poachers shooting blinds observed from the air over separate waterholes; after relaying GPS Refs. KWS ground units destroyed the same
13/3/14	Following finding 2 live charcoal kilns in the Park, KWS ground team destroyed the kilns and laid ambush
13/3/14	Following finding 3 large cattle bomas (Maasai) with several hundred cattle inside the Park, KWS ground teams later arrested at least 5 men
13/3/14	Following KWS informer reports of elephant poaching, request for aerial coverage was carried out of the said area by KWS/TT. No signs observed
15/3/14	Following reports of gunshots in the TW R/S late on evening of 14/3/14, TT gave aerial coverage of the location. Later KWS ground units found a freshly poached rhino in dense bush
21/3/14	Following reports of an armed 5-man Somali poaching gang in the Teita Ranches, TT was requested to carry out joint KWS/TT recce of area. Several search points were GPS'd and relayed to KWS ground teams for action
23/3/14	Following on from 21/3/14 recce and fresh elephant poaching incident, aerial coverage in support of KWS ground units took place. The KWS teams successfully recovered 8 tusks following an armed contact with poachers after a grueling 15km plus ground follow up on foot
26/3/14	After reports of gun shots near Tsavo Bridge, TT gave aerial support to KWS to search the area jointly

Poachers' hides/blinds/platforms/camps:

Table showing fresh and recent poachers blinds/hides/platforms:

Date	No.	Fresh Hide/Blind/platform	Recent Hide/Blind/platform	Fresh Poacher camp
10/3/14	2	1	1	-
Total	2	1	1	Nil

Elephant Carcasses Observed:

Table showing fresh and recent elephant carcasses observed for March 2014:

Date	No.	Fresh Carcass	Recent Carcass	Cause of Death
9/3/14	1	1 very fresh	-	Poached, gun shot wounds, 2 days old
9/3/14	1	-	1	Natural, both tusks recovered by joint KWS/TT (32kg each)
14/3/14	1	-	1	Unconfirmed, approx. 3 months
24/3/14	3	3 very fresh	-	All poached, gun shot wounds, Somali gang
24/3/14	1	1 very fresh	-	Poached, gun shot wounds, same Somali gang
24/3/14	1	1	-	Poached, poisoned arrow, 2 tusks recovered by KWS on 12/3/14
26/3/14	3	-	3	Believed poached as they were together
February Total	11	6	5	9 poached, 1 natural, 1 unconfirmed

Somali livestock herders within the Teita Ranches (Amaka, Teita and Taru Ranches especially) continue to masquerade as cattle herders but often poach elephant via the use of illegal firearms as has been clearly shown in March.

Photo below shows 3 freshly poached elephants, having been shot by a 5-man gang on Amaka Ranch on evening of 21st March 2014. Later KWS ground teams, following an armed contact with the poachers, successfully recovered 8 tusks after many kilometers of tracking.



Bush meat poaching: None observed from the air, but there is no doubt that this takes place heavily in certain areas and more ground teams are needed to combat this regular occurrence within the TCA.

Livestock: Major incursions of livestock entering the Protected Areas are a very real and current challenge in efforts to protect the TCA habitat. Often livestock herders are also poachers (recent elephant poaching incidents both on the Ranches and within the Parks clearly prove this fact). Illegal livestock encroachment in the Parks still remains the biggest threat to the Protected Areas. The hardest hit areas include the southern and southeastern parts of TWNP around Lake Jipe and the Ziwani River (Masai cattle) but also TENP and the areas around Ndiandaza along the flood plain of the Tiva River and around Emusaya, Huri and Koitu with Orma cattle encroaching deep into TENP and to water on the Galana River. Livestock encroachment coming from towns and villages along the Mombasa Highway are also a persistent problem and these areas include Bachuma and Maungu in particular. Worryingly Somali herders herd much of this livestock and it is no surprise that in these locations elephants are poached.

Charcoal burning and logging are also persistent in many locations along boundaries that have small-scale farmlands abutting the Park such as along the Athi River in Gazi area (chronic), Mtito lugga (north boundary of the Tsavo Triangle), east of Bachuma (Murondo and Dakota area) and Maungu into TENP as well as many surrounding wildlife habitats bordering onto the TCA such as Kulalu ranch and Dakota Ranch to the south of TENP.

Photo below shows large scale commercial charcoaling taking place on a daily basis in many areas that border onto the Parks; in this case just 1 charcoal site with over 40 bags of charcoal on Kulalu Ranch, 26th March 2014.



Other notable remarks/observations in include:

1. In line with the TT's large "Tusker" project, 6 known individual bulls were observed.
2. Close observations of large "Tusker" SA1 were carried out using expertise from TCA KWS Vet Unit/TT/DSWT following some injuries to this elephant (thought to be a poisoned arrow wound) on 8/3/14. Initially there was belief that immobilization and treatment was necessary but after hours of close observation, the inherent risk of immobilization outweighed human intervention and since then SA1 has made a recovery.
3. Continued aerial support to KWS with regards to rhino security both in TENP and TWNP with coverage of the rhino holding areas and rapid response as and when requested.
4. 2 tusks recovered jointly KWS/TT on 10/3/14. Total for the year so far is 8 tusks.
5. 9 critically endangered Hirola seen west of Satao, TENP on 7/3/14 and 4 Grevy's Zebra on Teita ranch on 24/3/14.
6. 1 collared bull elephant (18/3/14) and 1 collared cow elephant (17/3/14) observed with relevant information relayed to KWS Research Departments, TCA.
7. During a routine reconnaissance flight on 18/3/14 and 26/3/14 over 1,000 elephants were observed in many different herds on each flight within TENP.
8. Predators observed from the air (not including spotted hyena) and other unusual wildlife sightings: 2 Cheetah (13/3/14, TWNP), 2 Cheetah (26/3/14, TENP) & 1 lion (9/3/14, TENP).

Photo below of a young lion feeding on a fresh elephant carcass in TENP on 9th March 2014.



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