

BIG TUSKER MONTHLY

May 2014

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a culture of conservation





TSAVO TRUST BIG TUSKER PROJECT

The TSAVO TRUST 'Big Tusker Project' works to provide extra protection for Tsavo's elephants, with special emphasis on the region's iconic 100-pounder tuskers - bull elephants bearing ivory weighing in excess of 100lbs (45kg) per side. Devastated by poaching fueled by an illegal international ivory trade and by sport hunting in other parts of Africa, the Tsavo region in southern Kenya hosts the planet's last viable gene pool of these magnificent giants among giants.



Decades of conservation service to Tsavo:
our Super Cub aircraft 5Y-ACE, donated to
TSAVO TRUST by Stuart Herd.



**Project leader: TSAVO TRUST Co-founder &
Chief Conservation Officer, Richard Moller**

**TSAVO TRUST's Big Tusker Project works alongside
and in support of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)
in southern Kenya's Tsavo National Parks.**

**We work in partnership with Save The Elephants
and other donors who make this project possible,
including many generous individual supporters.**

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Photographed on 6th May 2014, this is a new tusker for our database: coded BU1, he is a breeding bull who continues to pass on his big-ivory genes, ensuring that Tsavo will retain a population of great tuskers long into the future, as long as our elephant herds are given adequate protection.

This aerial photograph does not do justice to the size of BU1's tusks, but we will attempt to photograph him from the ground at a later date. In the meantime, we assure you, he is definitely one of the elite amongst Tsavo's up-and-coming big tuskers.



MAY 2014 STATS

No. of hours flown	47.5	• Flights carried out with a KWS officer or ranger as rear seat observer, for immediate reporting to ground units for action. • All flights low level • Strong south-easterly winds have begun, as normal for this time of year
Miles covered	3,428	
Average speed	72mph	
No. of big tuskers seen	10 bulls + 1 cow	Including 2 bulls new to our database
No. of elephant carcasses recorded	22	3 natural deaths; 19 poached, including 13 on Teita Ranches
Ivory recovered jointly by KWS/ TSAVO TRUST	8 tusks	2 fresh, 4 recent, 2 very old - all natural deaths

MAY 2014: Big Tusker Project Overview

Certain areas of Tsavo received heavy rains in May, turning the barren semi-desert into a carpet of green grass, shrubs and flowers. Not surprisingly, these lush oases attracted the elephants in huge numbers, creating a security challenge of immense proportions for the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and their partners, including TSAVO TRUST in its elephant monitoring and anti-poaching support role.

The TSAVO TRUST aerial monitoring aircraft spotted over 1,000 elephants in one area on three separate days. With these elephant herds massing right up against the National Park boundary and persistent wildlife security vulnerabilities on the neighbouring ranches, particularly with the ongoing problem of elephant poachers masquerading as cattle herders, it was a tragic inevitability that poaching would take its toll this month.

TSAVO TRUST worked hard to support KWS's wildlife security efforts, focusing not only on elephants but also on Tsavo's rhino populations. Twelve large 'tuskers' were observed this month, including two new bull elephants and one cow that were added to our database. 8 ivory tusks were recovered from dead elephants, bringing the total this year to 18 tusks, denying poachers their grisly prize. In happier news, among other notable wildlife observations, TSAVO TRUST reported sightings of Tsavo's most endangered mammal, the Hirola (also known as the Hunter's antelope) and the rarely seen Grevy's Zebra.



Above: Flight paths for May 2014 shown in red, totaling 3,428 miles. The green area denotes the Tsavo National Parks.

Below: Hirola in Tsavo East National Park.





MAY 2014: Big tusker observations

Some of the big tuskers were among the 1,500 elephants converging in a single rain-soaked area of Tsavo East National Park during May. Due to this high concentration of elephants, 90% of our month's aerial monitoring flights focused in this area. Throughout the month, there was grave concern on the part of both the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and TSAVO TRUST regarding the safety of such large numbers of elephant converging near the National Park boundary in an area that is a historical and current poaching 'hotspot'. Extra ground units were mobilized and aerial monitoring stepped up. However, the area is huge and largely without roads, making the job of trying to secure all these elephants extremely challenging.

Eleven very big tuskers were observed during the month (some multiple times - see table opposite), including one cow and two bulls new to our database. Two up-and-coming large bulls were also identified that, if they remain safe from poachers, will become the hundred pounder tuskers of the future – at least one of these two is a breeding bull, actively passing on his genes to the next generation.

Tsavo Tuskers code named SA1 and AR1
(Photo from March 2014)

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BACK ISSUES

TUSKER CODE NAME	NUMBER OF TIMES SEEN DURING MONTH
AR1	   
DA1	   
DI1	     
F-VPL	
IR1	
KA2	
KM1	
SA1	        
SA2	  
SA80	   
WS1	   

Tsavo Tusker code named SA2 (Photo from February 2014)



Joint response to illegal activities

With the human population surrounding the Tsavo Conservation Area constantly expanding, it is inevitable that pressure continues to build relentlessly on the National Park from illegal encroachment and activities conducted along and inside its boundaries. Tsavo is a massive area; the available personnel and equipment are simply not enough to combat the many challenges faced. As a conservation partner of the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS), the national wildlife authority responsible for the security and management of Kenya's national parks, TSAVO TRUST assists wherever possible to bolster KWS's anti-poaching efforts. During May, TSAVO TRUST supported KWS on several occasions with aerial back-up following security / poaching incidents both within the National Park and outside in the wildlife dispersal areas on the outlying ranches.

[Left from top] 24th May 2014: An elephant dead from natural causes; a joint KWS/TSAVO TRUST operation to recover the ivory and deny opportunistic poachers an easy prize; two tusks from another natural death also spotted from the air and recovered on 24th May.

This table shows some of the accomplishments achieved in May through KWS/ TSAVO TRUST operations resulting from our aerial monitoring flights.

Date	Incident
2/5/14	Several live charcoal kilns (28) observed and reported on Tsavo East/Community boundary plus 2 live charcoalers' camps and 1 poachers' camp (believed to be bush meat poachers as well)
3/5/14	2 live charcoal kilns reported and KWS ground team deployed
10/5/14	Aerial coverage of Tsavo East boundary with 4 freshly poached elephant carcasses observed. KWS ground units later arrested 3 poisoned arrow poachers connected to this incident
10/5/14	Whilst on an aerial recce, 2 water jerry cans were spotted under a bush. Immediate KWS ground follow up recovered the 2 cans plus a stash of recent food stuffs (1 month old)
11/5/14	Several charcoalers' camps outside of Park; KWS ground teams deployed to check on bush meat and poisoned arrow poaching, following recent elephant poachings
16/5/14	2 live charcoal kilns and livestock sighted inside the Park, KWS ground team deployment arrested 3 men
19/5/14	Aerial recce following freshly poached elephant via gun-shot
23/5/14	Finding of a fresh bull elephant carcass observed from air with ivory intact; two tusks later recovered by joint KWS/TSAVO TRUST ground team; cause of death natural
24/5/14	1 recent elephant carcass with ivory intact found during aerial recce. Joint KWS/TSAVO TRUST ground team recovered both tusks; cause of death natural
24/5/14	2 very old elephant tusks spotted from the air and later recovered by ground team. These were estimated to be at least 10 years old.
31/5/14	Aerial recce of Tsavo West Rhino Sanctuary and Intensive Protection Zones (IPZ) areas.





Killed by poisoned arrow, this elephant's tusks were hacked out and the carcass partially covered with cut bushes by the poachers, in order to conceal it and prevent its detection by aerial patrols and vultures whose descent from the skies can give away the carcass position. The resulting delay in detection allows the poachers time to escape with their ill-gotten booty.

Combating elephant poaching remains a huge challenge requiring more support

Tsavo's elephant populations, the KWS rangers tasked to protect them and the TSAVO TRUST personnel working in their support continue to face ruthless adversaries, both inside the Tsavo National Parks and beyond in the wildlife dispersal areas on the outlying ranches.

Contrary to popular opinion that poisoned bow and arrow poaching is a thing of the past, this method of killing elephants continues to present a very real threat, its advantage to the poacher being that it is a silent method, and therefore difficult for the rangers to detect. Conversely, the automatic weapons favoured by Somali gangs can kill many elephants in one go.

Somali poachers on the Teita Ranches bordering the National Park continue to masquerade as cattle herders but all too often also kill elephants using illegal firearms, as has been repeatedly witnessed in recent months, including 13 elephants being shot on these ranches in

May alone. This poaching 'hotspot' continues to be a thorn in Tsavo's side and although much time, effort and resources are focused there, the challenges are complex and daunting. A combined and concerted effort is essential if the current threat is to be contained before the insecurity and poaching situation escalate further.

This table shows the number of poachers' shooting hides, blinds and platforms detected, reported and dismantled during May 2014 thanks to joint KWS/TSAVO TRUST operations, as well as the number of poachers' camps found.

Date	No.	Poachers' Hide/Blind/Platform	Poachers' Camp
2/5/14	1	-	1
11/5/14	1	1	-
31/5/14	2	2 (old)	-
Total	4	3	1

Beyond elephant poaching: other illegal natural resource use challenges

Bush meat poaching

It is known that many of the charcoalers carrying out their illegal activities on the border of the Tsavo Park, especially in certain notorious known areas, are also bushmeat poachers. (Bush meat is the meat of wild animals killed for food. Contrary to popular opinion, the killing of wild animals for meat is not simply a subsistence activity but more often is a well organized criminal commercial trade, which accounts for the death of countless wild animals.) Efforts by KWS ground units in Tsavo have recently worked to combat this problem, with positive results.

Illegal encroachment of livestock into protected areas

With the recent stiffening of penalties for illegal livestock found in the National Parks, there has been a positive noticeable change in most areas, with much less illegal cattle grazing being observed. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case in all areas, and illegal livestock encroachment into the Parks still remains a very real and significant threat to the protected areas.

On the Teita ranches, which have suffered many recent instances of elephant poaching, it is no coincidence that many of the livestock herders are of Somali origin armed with illegal firearms. Recent elephant poaching incidents mainly on the ranches bear testament to this.

Charcoal burning and logging also persist in many locations that have small scale farmlands abutting the Park boundary.

Postscript

In addition to the mega-herbivores, Tsavo is home to a wide variety of predators. The TSAVO TRUST aerial unit records predator sightings, with the exception of spotted hyena, which are very commonly seen. In May the following predators were sighted from the air: 2 caracals, 3 lion, 1 leopard and 1 striped hyena.



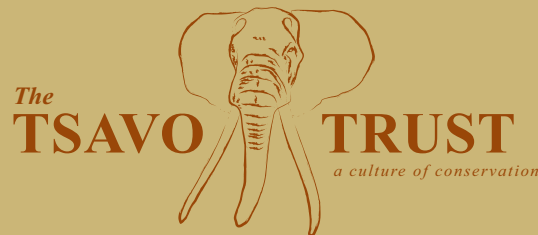
Tsavo lion feeding on a fresh elephant carcass (photo from March 2014)



Richard Moller
BIG TUSKER PROJECT Leader

Co-founder and Chief Conservation Officer of the TSAVO TRUST, Richard Moller is one of Kenya's most respected conservation project managers and an acknowledged expert in conservation management of endangered species, particularly black rhino and elephant.

Richard is a Kenya citizen, fulltime Tsavo resident and Honorary Warden with the Kenya Wildlife Service. A passionate conservationist and naturalist, he brings to TSAVO TRUST over 15 years of hands-on field experience in wildlife conservation, low level bush flying, aerial censuses, anti-poaching, wildlife capture and translocation, and the logistical and practical aspects of protected area management.



TSAVO TRUST works to improve the safety of wildlife and people in Kenya's expansive Greater Tsavo Ecosystem, the region's most important protected area and home to Kenya's largest population of elephants, currently endangered by ivory poaching and the global ramifications of wildlife crime.

We do this through the development of Community Wildlife Conservancies, multi-use conservation areas which address the human factors leading to the destruction of wildlife and the environment, as well as through direct wildlife conservation initiatives, including our **Big Tusker Project**.

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CONTACT

www.tsavotrust.org

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