



Monthly Aerial Report – February 2014

Summary:

February 2014 was a very busy month for the Tsavo Trust (TT) and its Super Cub aircraft, 5Y ACE. A total of 5,233 miles were flown during 71 hours, averaging 74 miles per hour of reconnaissance flight (18 flights) over the Tsavo Conservation Area (TCA). The TT pilot and aircraft took part in the Tsavo-Mkomazi Total Aerial Count between February 3rd and 10th that takes place every 3 years. This is the 3rd time that the TT's pilot has supported the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) in this important exercise.

Several of Tsavo's iconic "Tuskers" were observed and information recorded.

Here is an aerial photograph of the now famous bull "Tusker" coded as SA1.



Due to the greater number of hours flown and thus more coverage of parts of the TCA during the aerial census, more elephant carcasses were observed than normal, mainly recent ones (less than 1 year). A total of 7 recent carcasses and 1 fresh carcass were seen. A further 3 fresh carcasses were reported outside the Park on the Taita Ranches/Kasigau. 2 tusks were also recovered jointly by KWS/TT from an old carcass (just bones) having died naturally.

Large Elephant Monitoring Project:

6 very large individual bull elephant (SA1, DA1, IT1, WS1, SA2, IL1) and 1 exceptional cow (F_DI1) were observed in February and relevant details recorded in the TT database. 1 newly identified “Tusker” was observed (IL1).

Photo showing exceptional large cow “Tusker” coded as F_DI1, 22nd February 2014.

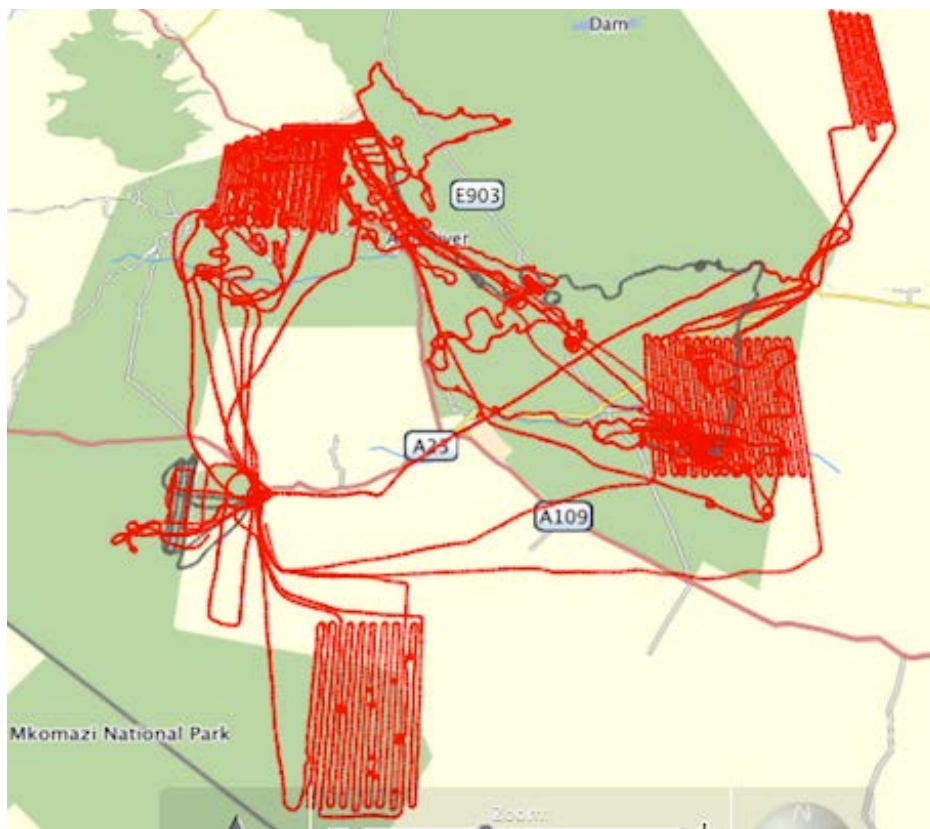


Main areas covered within the TCA in January include:

Tsavo East NP – 7 flights that covered census block TE26, block GA55, Galana River, Athi River, Voi River, Aruba, Satao, Yatta Central, Hand Grenade Valley, Masobo, Kiasa, Macho Kombo, Tharakana, Sangayaya, Emusaya, Durusikale, Garasamuke, Bachuma, Maungu, Lugards, Tambanguji, Dika, Ndara, Dakota and Murondo (TENP Southern boundary), Dereah Ranch, 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), Dakadima, Dakadakotha, Sala, the Tsavo Triangle, Kyulu, Mombasa Highway, and parts of Taita Ranches (Rukinga, Taita Ranch).

Tsavo West NP – 11 flights that covered census block TW17, block TW41, TW Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ), Ngulia/Rhino Valley, Ngulia Rhino Sanctuary, Ndawe hill, Mombasa Highway between Mtito Andei and Tsavo River bridge, TW Triangle, Tsavo River, Athi River, TW Maji ya Chumvi lugga, Mtito Lugga, Kyulu area, Ngulia East/West/South and North, Kinyek, Mungai Hill, Kamboyo, Kishushe, Kangechwa, Taita Sanctuary, Lualenyi and Kanjaro east.

Map showing flight paths for February 2014 including the census blocks covered: TW17, TW41, TE26 and GA55. 3,035 miles were covered in 41 hours during the TCA census.



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.

Tsavo-Mkomazi Total Aerial Count:

Following an invitation by KWS to the TT to partake in the Tsavo-Mkomazi Total Aerial Count, TT Super Cub aircraft 5Y ACE flew 41 hours and 3,035 miles covering 4 counting blocks, training flights and transit. The count took place between 3rd and 10th February 2014, based out of Taita Hills Lodge on the edge of Tsavo West National Park (TWNP). Several aircraft and personnel from other supporting organisations took part to support KWS during this important joint exercise. The count area totals a massive 48,000-kilometer square mass, home to Kenya's largest single elephant population. During the first 2 days, training exercises and aircraft streamer calibrations took place with counting crews so that a more accurate and professional count could ensue. Most blocks covered 900 kilometers squared and were counted in 1 kilometer transects (see map below). This meant that during the counting days many hours are flown, especially in the slower aircrafts. The TT crew covered the following blocks:

Block TW17 (TWNP, East Kanjaro, 8.5 hours, 635 miles covered on 6/2/2014).

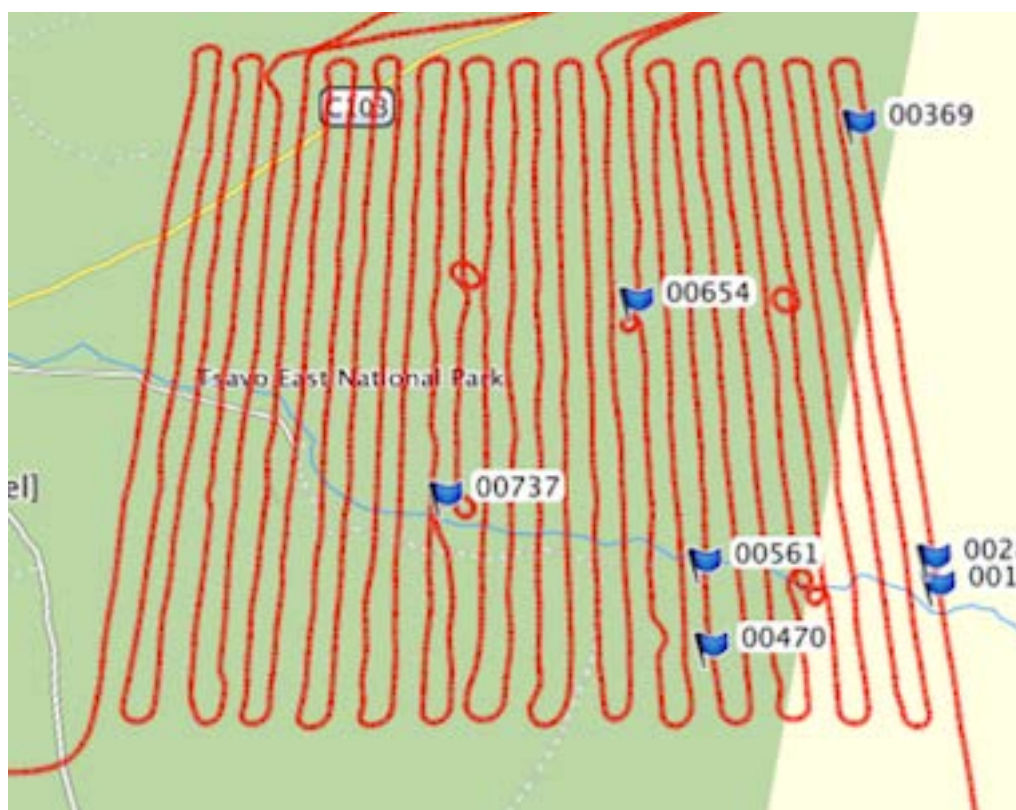
Block TE26 (TENP, Voi River, Satao, Dika, 10.5 hours, 820 miles covered on 7/2/2014).

Block TW41 (TWNP, Kamboyo, Ndawe, Mungai, Triangle, 9 hours and 664 miles on 7/2/2014.)

Block GA55 (Galana Ranch, Dakadima, Dakadakotha, Sala, 6 hours and 451 miles on 9/2/2014.)

Training & transit flights (7 hours and 465 miles)

Map below shows 1 kilometer transects flight path flown by TT aircraft over census block TE26 on 7th February 2014 covering 900 kilometers squared during 10.5 hours of flight.



Illegal Activities and successes:

Much of February's activities were taken up during the Tsavo-Mkomazi Aerial Census and so anti-poaching and interruption of illegal activity was not as high as normal although joint KWS/TT regular aerial reconnaissance was maintained throughout. Some successes took place in February as a result of joint KWS/TT efforts stemming from aerial reconnaissance flights.

Date	Incident
9/2/14	2 freshly used poachers camps observed from the air in census block TE26. Coordinates passed to KWS and ground action followed.
18/2/14	Following finding 3 live charcoal kilns in the Park, KWS and DSWT ground team destroyed the kilns and laid ambush.
19/2/14	Following finding 2 elephant tusks from the air, joint KWS/TT ground follow up recovered 2 tusks.
28/2/14	2 recently used poachers shooting blinds and 2 recently used poachers shooting platforms observed from the air over a waterhole.

Elephant Carcasses Observed:

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

Date	No.	Fresh Carcass	Recent Carcass	Cause of Death
5/2/14	5	-	5	All believed to have been poached, all approx. 3 – 4 months
8/2/14	1	Fresh	-	Natural, both tusks recovered by KWS
18/2/14	1	-	1	Unconfirmed but believed natural, approx. 6 months
20/2/14	1	-	1	Unconfirmed due to decomposition, approx.
19/2/14	1	-	Old	Natural, 2 tusks recovered jointly KWS/TT
February Total	9	1	8	5 poached, 1 natural, 2 unconfirmed, 1 old

There are reports of some elephant (3) having been poached by Somali herders in the Taita Ranches in February but TT has not observed these.

Photo below shows a fresh elephant carcass, having died naturally in the Galana River (ivory recovered by KWS), with several feasting crocodiles, TENP, 8th February 2014.



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
9/2/14	2	-	-	2
9/2/14	2	-	-	2 (charcoal camps)
28/2/14	4	-	4	-
Total	2	Nil	4	4

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 Ziواني 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. **It is encouraging to note that as a result of joint KWS/TT efforts during January 2014 in the areas of TENP just east of Maungu, illegal charcoaling has greatly reduced as a result of this pressure.**

Other notable remarks/observations in include:

1. In line with the TT's large "Tusker" project, 6 known individual bulls and 1 cow were observed, including 1 new bull.
2. Continued aerial support to KWS with regards to rhino security both in TENP and TWNP with coverage of the rhino holding areas.
3. 2 tusks recovered jointly KWS/TT on 19/2/14, TWNP. Total for the year so far is 6 tusks.
4. 14 critically endangered Hirola seen west of Satao, TENP on 9/2/14.
5. 1 collared elephant observed with relevant information relayed to KWS Research Departments, TCA on 9/2/14.
6. During a routine reconnaissance flight on 22/2/14 over 1,000 elephant were observed in many different herds in TENP.

With thanks to Kenya Wildlife Service, Save The Elephants, Stuart Herd, International Elephant Foundation, Wines of the World Ltd, Africa Spirits Ltd, Mike Kirkland/Torben Rune, Satao Camp (Tsavo East), Southern Cross Safaris (Mombasa), Tusk Trust, OnSafari Kenya Ltd, Pembroke House School, The Banda School, Luke Gent, Mark Muller and numerous individual supporters.

Report compiled by Richard Moller – Chief Conservation Officer, Tsavo Trust

All photographs ©Richard Moller / Tsavo Trust 2013