



Monthly Aerial Report – September 2013

In September 2013, the Tsavo Trust's (TT) Super Cub aircraft, 5Y ACE, flew a total of 2,410 miles over 33 hours of flight covering many parts of the Tsavo Conservation Area (TCA). The average speed of reconnaissance was 73 miles per hour. On 24th September 6.5 hours were flown, most of which was in relation to an elephant poaching incident involving armed Somali poachers. As reported in the media, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) rangers had made armed contact with the poachers and Tsavo Trust aerial backup was called in – one KWS ranger was lightly wounded as was one poacher.

In line with the TT's Large Elephant Monitoring Project in conjunction with KWS and Save The Elephants (STE), 5 individual very large "tuskers" were observed and recorded in the TT database. Without this regular aerial reconnaissance there is no other means to keep a check on these very special and unique animals. At the same time a security presence is maintained.

This impressive and iconic Tsavo elephant coded as SA1 was observed several times during September and various details recorded at each sighting.



Main areas covered within the TCA in August include:

Tsavo East NP – 7 flights that covered Galana River, Athi River, Voi River, Aruba, Satao, Yatta Central, Macho Kombo, Ithumba, Tiva River, Tundani, Tharakana, Mukoka, Kasala, Sangayaya, Emusaya, Durusikale, Bachuma, Maungu, Lugards, Tambanguji, Dika, Dakota (TENP Southern boundary), Sala Hill, Kulalu Ranch/TENP boundary, east Manyani, Mudanda, Irima, Voi, Waduruma, Mbololo lugga, TE IPZ, Ngiluni, parts of Galana Ranch (Lalli Hills, Danisa, Kisiki cha Mzungu, Bombi, Tank E, Maili Saba), Kasigau and the Tsavo Triangle.

Tsavo West NP – 4 flights that covered 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, TW Maji ya Chumvi lugga, Mtito Lugga, Kyulu area, Ngulia East/West/South and North, Kinyek, Mungai Hill, Lake Jipe, Murka, Ziwani River (East), South end of Chyulu Hills Nat. Park and Athi River.

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. On all flights the Tsavo Triangle is covered during to and fro transit to other areas due to the TT airstrip location on the Triangle's northern border. All flight paths are logged and recorded in the TT database records and all reces and observation details are relayed to KWS accordingly.

Aerial reconnaissance is a vital tool in anti-poaching operations and monitoring work, especially over an area that is largely roadless and inaccessible, as is the case across most of the TCA.



Illegal Activities:

Elephant poaching:

There were several incidents of elephant poaching recorded during September 2013. Tsavo Trust does not publicly publish details of any poaching-related observations, which may hinder KWS follow-up operations. Such information is shared only with KWS.

Fresh elephant carcass found on 23rd September 2013.



Poacher's hides/blinds/platforms/camps:

3 poachers' shooting blinds were located from the air. In one blind (hideout) alone, joint KWS/TT ground follow up recovered 55 snares (for medium and small game), 1 axe for ivory removal, arrows, dried lesser kudu meat, various cooking equipment, several water cans, 3 pairs shoes, clothes and more.

Bushmeat:

The illegal bushmeat trade, both subsistence and commercial, is a very real and current threat to the TCA. The photo below shows a poacher's hideout equipped with (among other things) wire for making snares. This hideout was photographed during a joint KWS-Tsavo Trust follow-up operation after it was spotted from the air.

The Mombasa Highway divides TENP and TWNP and offers an easily available transport access route for poached bush meat to enter the many outlets (towns and villages) along the highway where it is commercially sold. 1 Dikdik carcass is sold for just 50 Kenya Shillings (US\$ 0.60).

Photo taken inside a poacher's camp (found from the air) on 21st September 2013.



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 and historical elephant poaching incidents within the Parks clearly prove this fact). Illegal livestock encroachment in the Parks still remains a major threat to the Protected Areas. The hardest hit areas include the southern and southeastern parts of TWNP around Lake Jipe and the Ziwani River but also TENP and the areas around Ndiandaza along the flood plain of the Tiva River and around Emusaya, Huri and Koitu. Livestock encroachment coming from towns and villages along the Mombasa Highway is also a persistent problem. Worryingly Somali herders herd much of this livestock.

Charcoal burning and logging is also persistent in many locations along boundaries that have small-scale farmlands abutting the Park.

Other notable remarks/observations in September include:

1. Several of the large “Tuskers” were observed in September and all locations and information recorded in the TT database that covers the TT “Large Elephant Monitoring Project”.
2. Recovery of 2 elephant tusks, from an old carcass of natural death (21/9/13). Total recovered for the year is 22 tusks.
3. Assistance to KWS in aerial reconnaissance of rhino holding areas in both TENP and TWNP.

4. 13 critically endangered Hirola (Hunters Hartebeest) on 29/9/13 near Satao.
5. Predators (excluding spotted hyena which are regularly seen) and other unusual wildlife sightings: 45 wild dog in TWNP south side of Ngulia Mountain on 24/9/13, a total of 5 lioness and 2 lion, 1 cheetah. All these sightings are GPS'd and references given to relevant KWS Research Departments accordingly for their records.

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