



## **Monthly Aerial Report – December 2013**

In December 2013, the Tsavo Trust's (TT) Super Cub aircraft, 5Y ACE, flew a total of 2,847 miles over 38 hours of flight averaging 75 miles per hour. It is this slow speed that is so important during aerial reconnaissance flights as it means the observers are able to visually recognize what is taking place below and ensure these observations are current. When searching for illegal activities a slow flying Super Cub is the ideal platform to carry out such operations and is a key tool for Protected Area management. The TT carries out regular aerial operations over the Tsavo Conservation Area (TCA) in full collaboration with the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS).

Much of Tsavo enjoyed excellent rainfall during December. Numbers of elephant carcasses observed seemed to be up as well as other illegal activities within the Protected Areas such as livestock encroachment, charcoal burning and logging. This is often the case during the rainy season as many parts of Tsavo become inaccessible, thereby making it very difficult to protect with ground units. Aerial reconnaissance becomes even more vital at these times.

***Much of Tsavo enjoyed excellent rains in December;  
here the Voi River is seen in flood on 10<sup>th</sup> December.***



### ***Large Elephant Monitoring Project:***

7 very large individual bull elephant and 2 exceptional cow elephants were observed in December and relevant details recorded in the TT database. 1 newly identified “Tusker” was observed (SA2) as well as another known bull (DA1) that has not been seen for 6 months. It was a productive month as far as observations regarding the TT’s Large Elephant Monitoring Project. This project would not be possible without the ongoing and continued support from KWS and Save The Elephants (STE) as conservation partners, along with numerous other supporters.

***Photo of a new big “Tusker” observed on 15<sup>th</sup> December in Tsavo, coded as SA2.***



### ***Main areas covered within the TCA in November include:***

**Tsavo East NP** – 8 flights that covered Galana River, Athi River, Voi River, Aruba, Satao, Yatta Central, Sangayaya, Emusaya, Durusikale, Huri, Bachuma, Maungu, Lugards, Tambanguji, Dika, Ndara, Dakota and Murondo (TENP Southern boundary), Derea Ranch, Satao Rocks (Taita ranch), Sala Hill, Dabaduke, Kulalu Ranch/TENP boundary, east Manyani, Ashaka, Mudanda, Irima, Voi, Waduruma, Balguda, Mbololo lugga, TE IPZ, Ngiluni, parts of Galana Ranch (Lalli Hills, Danisa, Tank E, Maili Saba), and the Tsavo Triangle.

**Tsavo West NP** – 3 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, Kamboyo, Lake Jipe, Toloa, Salaita, Murka, Kishushe Ranch 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 with the Park. All flight paths are logged and recorded in the TT database records and all reces and observation details are relayed to KWS accordingly.

### ***Illegal Activities:***

Several anti-poaching and interruption of illegal activity successes took place in December as a result of joint KWS/TT efforts stemming from aerial reconnaissance flights, including:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Incident</b>
3/12/13	Following finding over 5,000 cows plus 8 live cattle bomas from the air, KWS mounted ground operations that later arrested several men (over 10)
9/12/13	Joint KWS/TT Ops arrest 3 Somali cattle herders, but in the process find 4 recently poached elephant in the same area
10/12/13	4 men arrested for charcoal burning inside the Park. Many live kilns were observed from the air and ground teams directed
10/12/13	Following the finding of a freshly poached elephant carcass from the air, KWS ground team arrested 1 man believed to be connected to this incident

### ***Elephant Carcasses Observed:***

A total of 13 elephant carcasses were observed, 2 fresh and 11 recent.

### ***Poachers' hides/blinds/platforms/camps:***

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

<b>Date</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Fresh Hide/Blind/platform</b>	<b>Recent Hide/Blind/platform</b>	<b>Fresh Poacher camp</b>
16/12/13	1	1	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Nil</b>	<b>Nil</b>

***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 and historical elephant poaching incidents both on the Ranches and within the Parks clearly prove this fact – see observations and actions taken on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013).

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 (see observations and actions taken on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2013) 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. Over 35 live charcoal kilns were observed within the protected area in December and many of the “hot spot” charcoaling areas were not covered by air – namely Gazi and Chyulu areas.

***Live charcoal kiln, Tsavo, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013.***



***Other notable remarks/observations in October include:***

1. In line with the TT’s large “Tusker” project, 9 individuals were observed (a record in 1 month so far).
2. Continued aerial support to KWS with regards to rhino security both in Tsavo East National Park (TENP) and Tsavo West National Park (TWNP) with coverage of the rhino holding areas.
3. 1 critically endangered Grevy’s Zebra seen near Bachuma in TENP on 20<sup>th</sup> Dec.
4. Predators observed from the air (excluding spotted hyena which are often observed) and other unusual wildlife sightings: a total of 9 lionesses and 1 lion (all TENP), 2 leopard (both in TENP) on 15<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Dec., 1 Aardwolf on 9<sup>th</sup> Dec. near Bachuma, TENP, 1 Honey Badger on 15<sup>th</sup> Dec., Voi River TENP.

5. 4 collared elephant observed (3 bulls and 1 cow) with relevant information relayed to KWS Research Departments, TCA.
6. During an aerial routine flight on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2013, over 1,500 elephant were observed in scattered groups in one specific area of TENP. With the recent rains, water holes are full and lush green vegetation everywhere, ideal conditions for elephants to come together to breed.

*Herd of elephant in TENP enjoying a waterhole, December 2013.*



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