



December Game Report, Masai Mara

December brought cooler mornings (averaging 15°C) and hot days (averaging 36 °C) out on the plains. A little rain fell keeping the savannah grass green and the wildflowers in bloom including *Gloriosa Superba*, *Scadoxus Multiflorus*, *Crossandra Nilotica* and *Clerodendron Myricoides*, and the sweet scented *Gardenia Ternifolia*. In the woodlands many of the *Warburgia Ugandensis* (African green heart) trees and *Tectlea Simplicifolia* are in fruit. Much to the delight of feasting monkeys, baboons and families of elephant.

Elephant families with tiny calves have been feeding on the *Warburgia* fruits in the forest and on the soft grasses of the marsh. There are also many bulls in musth and a few have been seen mating.

The young plains game born a couple of months ago are growing, thriving and frolicking in the grasslands. Topi dominate the high plains with crèches of up to 12 young calves with their mothers grazing nearby. Around the riverine woodlands close to camp giraffe families with young calves have been feeding. Large herds of impala females with young fawns were very close to the camps with bachelor herds nearby and warthogs with two month old piglets have been grazing on the fringes of the marsh. Warthog sows were seen with 3-5 piglets and often with another young adult female (born last year) who helps with the raising of the young.

We were delighted to see a small herd of breeding eland in the marsh together with a few good sized bulls. bush buck males and females have been grazing on the edges of the woodlands in the early morning and evening and on the east side of the marsh the short grass has exposed small units of female Bohors Reedbuck. In the last 8-10 days there have been many zebra and wildebeest moving down from the Koiyaki conservation areas towards the Musiara Marsh driven by a lack of good grazing and competition with Masai cattle in these areas bordering the reserve.

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Two large troops of resident Olive Baboons have been foraging around the fringes of the forest and the marsh. Baboons are terrestrial primates and have a more omnivorous diet than their arboreal cousins with insects and some meat included in their diet. The males do not maintain life-long social ties with their kin

and so female kinship forms the core of the Olive (Anubis) Baboon society. The females do not emigrate from their natal groups and so female kin tend to have life-long associations. Within a troop, there is a dominance hierarchy of matriline. In general, an individual female occupies a place in the hierarchy immediately below her mother. Dominance relationships appear to develop from infancy, when maternal kin intervene in encounters with other baboons. On the morning of the 29th there was a show down of baboon activity with a tremendous noise and many males running around. The commotion caused many females to jump into the Mara River and swim across. In the confusion one infant fell into the rapids of the river and was swept fifty meters downstream before it was retrieved by its panic stricken mother.

On the 23rd one female Black Rhino was seen on the west side of Rhino Ridge and also earlier on in the month a female probably the same one was seen near the Musiara airstrip.

The Bila Shaka/Marsh pride of three males, four breeding females and their nine cubs of varying ages have been near our airstrip and on the edges of the marsh. They have been feeding off the resident buffalo, zebra, topi and eland. One of the males was mating with one of the females and another male is in poor shape. He appears to have broken his lower jaw and has trouble eating, his left lower canine is broken and he is scarred on his face.

The paradise/Ridge pride of 4 males and females are continuing to thrive and were seen towards the end of the month crossing the Mara River into the reserve.

The female cheetah Shakira has been regularly hunting Thomson Gazelle fawns and hares up on the ridges and down on the plains and her three cubs (now five months old) are healthy and growing stronger. The three nomadic cheetah males have been out on the plains hunting Thompson Gazelles. A coalition of males like these three will travel great distances in search of prey and the possibility of females in estrus.

The female cheetah Malaika now only has one cub (nearly two months old), on the 19th we noticed that one cub was missing we suspect that the cub may have been taken by a resident leopard as leopard are partial to killing and eating other felines.

The female cheetah Alama made a great recovery and now has the strength to hold and suffocate larger prey species and is feeding off Thomson Gazelles and their fawns. Tragically two days ago she also lost two of her cubs, we think once again to a leopard.

Speaking of leopard, we have had lots of fabulous sightings of leopard again this month. Kijana the young male has been seen regularly on the edge of the marsh. A female and cub has been seen on the banks of the Talek River and a large male has been in the forest near Il Moran, venturing close to camp in the evenings.

We hope to share the magic of our corner of the Mara with you sometime soon

Governors' Camp Collection
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