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December Game Report Masai Mara

We have received some wonderful rain in the Mara this month, a total of 158mm. Christmas eve brought us 43mm, raining most of the day and making game drives very interesting. November and December are the "short rains" in Kenya, arriving soon after the migration has returned to the Serengeti, quenching the parched, short grass plains.

The grassland is now a rich emerald green carpet, perfect for all the grazing animals, but a little more difficult for the predators as their tawny colours stand out.

Tissue paper flowers (*Cycinium tubulosum*) and *Crossandra* sp litter the plains with a profusion of white, apricot and reds. A few of the lilies are flowering as well the Pyjama Lilly (*Crinum macowanii*), Fireball Lilly (*Scadoxus multiflorus*) and Kenya's national flower the Flame Lilly (*Gloriosa superba*).



Photos Courtesy of Michael Poliza and Dave Rogers

The **plains game** are fat and happy and all with young. Impalas snorting, pronging and chasing each other, Gazelles sprinting for no reason other than that life is good. Large herds of Topis have moved into the Paradise plains area and onto the freshly renovated termite mounds where they have a view and are able to display. The large breeding herds of **buffalo** have been moving on mass, but covering less ground now that the grass is at their optimal level. The old bulls still maintain their peaceful retired existence on the edge of the forest line.

Giraffe have spent most of the month browsing around the camps and moving through the forest at leisure in fairly large herds.

Elephant have been fairly sparse with a few smaller families and the odd bull moving through the plains.

Most are in search of new growth on the trees in the surrounding areas, but are likely to return as the sedge and grass in the marsh area is shooting up and will be lush and nutritious.

The **Hyena** are scavenging more now that the **Wildebeest** have gone and are returning to old kills in search of a meal. Their numbers are high and have to provide for last season's cubs still.

Aardwolf and **Bat-eared fox** have been sighted eating on dung beetles which have come out in vast numbers with the rain and clearing up what the migration left behind.

The Musiara marsh has filled up nicely, urging the catfish out of hibernation from below the surface and all varieties of frogs to emerge, mate and spawn.

The water birds, Herons in particular (Great-white, Rufous-bellied, Black-headed and Grey) have taken advantage of this glut of food and patiently wait amongst the reeds. Open-billed storks too pick up the crustaceans. The smaller, younger crocodiles have also moved over to the marsh where they will be out of harms way and away from the higher faster flowing Mara River.



Photos courtesy of Daryl Black

The Marsh pride of **lions** have become seasoned beef-eaters, as the Maasai have been grazing their cattle in the area with in and near their territory due to the drought in surrounding areas. This the Maasai accept as collateral damage in return for grass. In the new-year the Maasai moved on as their grazing lands have improved and with that the Marsh pride have had to work a little harder to feed their new family.

They now have 8 new cubs about 2 ½ months old, tragically one of the lionesses lost one. The older cubs are now just over 2 years old and very accepting of the next generation. The males with growing manes keeping a little more distance.

They are now 23 in number.

The Paradise pride flourish too. With the 6 older cubs, we now have an additional 5 two month old cubs. They are all doing very well with the exception of the older cubs with a bout of mange.

Notch the patriarch has not been seen much this month, with the younger males spending more time with the females and cubs.

We have the introduction of 2 new lions and 2 lionesses and 2 cubs in the area between the Paradise and Marsh prides. We do not know too much about this small pride yet, but spend their time between Rhino ridge and a stretch of the Mara river.

The 3 Cheetah boys are still in the area and very active, hunting and killing every 2 to 3 days.

We have an unfamiliar female who at the beginning of the month had brought with her two 6 week old cubs. One has unfortunately died, but the other is still strong and healthy. Shakira is over on the Trans-Mara side of the Mara river and still with her 3 cubs, whilst the river is high she will remain there.

We have had some great sightings of Leopard just along the forest line, a male and a female. Across the way from Ilmoran Camp in a copse of trees we had a lovely female who had stashed her kill up in the leafy cover of a tall tree and stayed up there for 4 days whilst she finished off a young Waterbuck. Olive and her 2 cubs are still along 'maji chafu' near the Talek River, she is still being seen regularly as she is so relaxed.

A very large male and a female leopard have been seen along the Mara River opposite Serena.

Serval cats are sighted more regularly as the grass is short and green, unlike April – August when they have a lot more cover to hide in.

An amazing month of game viewing and a great way to end the year.



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