



Game Report July 2008

July brought some localised rain to the Mara which helped keep the dust down and bring good grazing to areas of the plains. We experienced cool early morning temperatures as low as 12°C, but by midday temperatures reached around 30°C.

The big news to announce this month is that the first herds of the wildebeest migration have started to arrive. The 15th of July marked the start of the River crossings, and towards the end of the month our clients and driver-guides were seeing crossings on an almost daily basis. The large Nile crocodiles of the Mara River have been feeding well, snatching many wildebeest in the first few days of crossings. As we write this, numbers of wildebeest are gathering on the west bank of the river and we estimate it will be a large crossing. At lunchtime today (31st July) an estimated 2000 crossed the river. This year's river crossings have brought the usual blend of suspense, drama and a few surprises. On the 18th July our clients had an extremely unusual sighting of a large male hippo eating a young wildebeest at the Paradise crossing point. This behaviour is very unusual as hippos are herbivores who crop grass using the horny layer on their lips and then process it with their molars. They do possess large canines but these are normally used purely as weapons of defence.

The large breeding herd of buffalo with many young calves continues to graze the plains around the Marsh. Giraffe along with many young in crèches of varying age groups are within the Marsh and riverine woodlands, moving out into the conservation areas occasionally to browse in the Acacia woodlands. The woodland fringing the marsh is also home to herds of impala with young fawns. We continue to see families of elephant with many young calves feeding on the soft, lush, nutrient rich grasses of the Marsh. The elephant families often move out to the grass and woodlands to feed, with some even crossing the river. They have also frequented the camps at night feeding in the forest and leaving signs of their presence for us to find in the morning.



This month's wonderful photos are courtesy of Richard Denyer, who stayed at Little Governors' Camp. Thank you Richard!

Large numbers of topi are resident out on the plains along with Cokes hartebeest in smaller herd groups. The elusive male and female bushbuck can be seen on the woodland verges close to the river, appearing in the evenings and early mornings much to the delight of all who are lucky enough to see them.

Three black rhinos, a cow, her calf and a male (known as “Jackman”) were seen out on the Paradise Plains on 23rd July. They have also been frequenting the areas near the river bed, crossing in the croton thickets at Paradise on a few occasions. We have had lovely sightings of silver-backed jackals with their pups in and around termite mounds where they raise their young. They can have from 3-5 pups and the male plays a large role in the raising of his offspring. Just beyond the Marsh there is a couple with three three-month-old cubs in a termite mound. Towards the end of the month the mother was seen with the remains of a Thomson gazelle fawn which she had caught herself. Serval cats have been seen more frequently in the last month especially in the long grasses, and clients returning to camp after their balloon safaris have had many wonderful sightings of these beautiful cats. On the 22nd July a female with two kittens (estimated at three months old) were seen crossing a dry river bed. On the 16th some of our clients were fortunate enough to see a caracal near the rocky escarpment north of the marsh, Caracals are very shy cats and are not often seen. They are Africa’s version of a lynx, the heaviest of the small cats, tawny in colour with long tufted ears, and prey on young impala fawns.

The Bila Shaka/Marsh Lion Pride consisting of three males (one of which is a one dark manded lion called ‘Pavarotti’) and six females, now has a total of nine cubs of varying ages. They have been seen feeding off zebra and wildebeest. Four females and two male lion all from the pride were frequently seen on the fringes of the reserve where they were hunting wildebeest every other day. The pride, strengthened by the leadership coalition of three strong males, continues to grow. Two young lionesses have four tiny cubs (2 - 3 weeks old) hidden in long grass outside of the Marsh. We expect them to be introduced into the Bila Shaka pride soon, as these young females are probably the daughters of the lionesses in the pride.

The Ridge/Paradise Pride also has young members. Two of the breeding females have three cubs which we estimate to be around three months old. These lionesses are often seen towards the wildebeest river-crossing sites - a prime spot for hunting as the wildebeest migration begins to arrive.

The five young males ousted from the Bila Shaka pride and the old Bila Shaka male have been occupying the ridges overlooking the plains and we have seen them hunting zebra and wildebeest.

We have had lovely sightings of cheetah this month; a lone female has been seen hunting on the fringes of the marsh and out on the plains there are three other females. The shorter grass areas provide perfect grazing for Grants and Thompson gazelles - a cheetah’s favourite prey - and guests have had grandstand views of these three hunting out on the plains.

The leopard sightings have been extraordinary this month. The two handsome adults, “Pole Pole” and “Kijana”, have been seen regularly around the Marsh and on the fringes of the forest,

often languishing in the branches of a favourite old dead tree. Towards the middle of the month Fred, the assistant Head Driver at Little Governors', and his guests had a wonderful sighting. He was driving along the edge of the Marsh when they spotted a leopard moving in the long grass. They stopped and quietly observed this large male, then moments later were delighted to see a second leopard appear. This was a smaller female and the two greeted one another, and proceeded to mate. A herd of buffalo grazing nearby unwittingly moved closer to the amorous couple, then noticed the leopards and stampeded them. The leopards hastily retreated to safer ground and restarted their courtship. But the unlucky couple were disturbed once again, this time by a troop of foraging baboons. Baboons can pose a dangerous threat to leopards and when the leopards became aware of the baboons, one leopard slunk down and disappeared in the long grass whilst the other was chased up the tree by the baboons. It was getting late and as dusk fell Fred had to head back to camp with his clients. We all spent a nervous night wondering what would happen to the leopard stuck up the tree with a troop of aggressive baboons below. But the next morning we are happy to report there was no sign of any of them.

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



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