



## **Game Report April 2008**

Little rain fell in April in the form of a few large rain storms towards the end of the month. Cool early mornings with temperatures of around 19 degrees C have given way to warm days with temperatures of up to 30 degrees C at midday. The combination of rain and sunshine has brought on a burst of growth and the grasses are long and lush with a profusion of beautiful wild flowers. *Cynium Tubolosum* or the "Tissue Paper Flower", covers the grass verges and the forest margins; nearby we have seen many *Abutilon Mauritanium*, which is yellow with a flower similar to that of a Hibiscus, *Pavonia's* and Hibiscuses themselves. In the gullies the beautiful blue *Ipomoea Cairica* is blossoming and we have been treated to the magnificent sight of the flowers of the yellow and red Flame Lily (the aptly named *Glorosia Superba*). Out on the grasslands and especially up on Paradise Plain the beautiful red *Klennia Alysinnica* is blooming.

Three herds of Impala are now resident in the woodlands of the Marsh area together with good numbers of *Defassa* Waterbuck. A herd of sixteen giraffe are resident in the forests around the camps and are often seen browsing on the trees. Large breeding herds of elephant (counting up to fifty members in one herd) are in the Bila Shaka grass lands and the Musiara Marsh with many young calves, the youngest of which is just a week old! The abundance of soft grass is keeping the elephant herds well fed. During the rainy season their diet changes as the growth of fresh grass provides them with a wealth of necessary minerals. This also gives the precious trees of the riverine forests and the acacia woodlands a much needed respite.

With the arrival of the rains, the resident Bila Shaka / Marsh Pride male lions have had to patrol the boundaries of their territory continuously scent-marking the area as each rain storm washes the previous scent marks off. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of April we were entertaining some Tour Operators and they received a dramatic demonstration of this. We were driving back from Governors' Camp to Little Governors' Camp and came across the two Bila Shaka males lying across the middle of the road. One of the males got up, nonchalantly strolled past the vehicle and when he reached the back tyre he swung round, lifted his tail and liberally scent-sprayed the vehicle and its occupants! Quite an introduction to the Masai Mara! The rest of the pride is doing well. We have seen them feeding regularly on a hippo carcass and topi kills, and the females have been bringing their five cubs out into the grasslands to explore. Towards the end of the month the dark-maned lion Pavarotti was seen with an injury. We are unsure whether he received this fighting with the other two pride males over females in oestrus or with another lion, but I am happy to report that his wounds are healing although he is still limping a little.

The Ridge Pride of five lionesses and three sub adult males has also been doing well. Towards the end of the month they were seen on the carcass of a dead hippo semi-submerged in a muddy pool and they could only devour the top of the hippo.

A couple of days later the rest of the hippo was consumed by around fifteen spotted hyena. We have also witnessed the males of the Ridge Pride digging hapless warthogs out of their bolt holes in the lower plains area.

We continue to have lovely sightings of the resident cheetahs. A lone male has been seen hunting on the plains and grasslands flats near the entrance to Little Governors' Camp. Honey's three adult male cubs continue to hunt up on the ridges and down in the gullies, and the female with her two thirteen month old cubs are doing well out on the grasslands. There is also a heavily pregnant female out on the plains looking for cover and a safe secure place to have her cubs, so we expect her to give birth anytime now.

The leopards resident to our area are also thriving, and many guests have been fortunate to see Pole Pole and her son Kijana. They continue to share the territory in the woodland area between Il Moran and Little Governors', and a new large male has also been seen in the same riverine forest between these camps. There is also another resident male who's territory includes the forest further down-river between Governors' Camp and Private Camp. We are privileged to have so many of the beautiful elusive cats on our "doorstep". This is truly "Big Cat" country.



**Flame Lilies in the Mara & one of the young ridge pride males feeding on a hippo carcass**

This month has been all about the birds, which have been extraordinary. The Musiara Marsh is such an important area for many bird species and this month they have all been out in force. Tens of thousands of European Barn Swallows on their migration to Europe have been roosting in the swamp every evening, and at dusk we have witnessed huge clouds of them diving and swooping over the grasslands adjacent to the swamp hunting grass-hoppers, crickets and small insects.

The first rains brought on a growth of grass which has now matured and produced seed, so there are many seed eaters coming to feed and breed. The abundance of nutritious food heralds the mating season as the chances of conception are increased, and we have been privileged to witness Red Collared Widow-birds, Fan Tailed Widow-birds, Pin Tailed Whydah's and Yellow Mantled Widow-birds all transformed from their dull plumage into magnificent breeding plumage.

With the growth of the long grass the Weaver birds have been out harvesting grass to build their new nests. If the hen doesn't like the new nest she dismantles it and makes the male rebuild it until she is happy with it and agrees to be his mate. The Widow-birds have been doing the same and the females have also been inspecting the male's long breeding plumage tails to identify a good mate.

The abundance of insects, frogs, tad poles and fish has meant that there are lots of storks (Yellow Billed and Saddle Billed), Grey Herons, Fish Eagles and Sacred Ibis' feasting in the swamp .

A solitary European Roller has been seen several times in the gully before Paradise Plains. This roller is a migrant from Europe and Asia, and visits this area between October and April before beginning his long migration north. This small bird has a magnificent bright blue head, throat, belly and wings.

The insects have also been busy. The ants and termites have been reproducing. The king and queen mate, then the queen lays the eggs, some of which are reproductive's, some soldiers, and some are workers for the colony. The reproductives have wings and when they are ready they fly out of the nest, find a partner and then dig down into the ground to start their own colony. During the rainy season the ground is softer and for this reason the ants fly out during a rainstorm and then dig down into the soft earth. This whole reproductive cycle provides a feast for the birds, and we have seen lots of Sooty Chats parked on termite mounds all over our area waiting for these ant and termite reproductives to emerge.

In the evenings back in camp Fireflies have lit up the night.

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



**Musiara Ltd, PO Box 48217, Nairobi 00100, KenyaTel +(254) 20 2734000; Fax +(254) 20 2734023 / 4**

**website: [www.governorscamp.com](http://www.governorscamp.com)**

---